PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 111

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FOURTH SESSION OF THE FORTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
THIRTY-SIXTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1986-87

COMPRISING PERIOD
23 FEBRUARY—6 MARCH 1987

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IN THE FOURTH SESSION OF THE FORTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND

THIRTY-SIXTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 111**

SEVENTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1986-87

House of Commons

Monday 23 February 1987

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRANSPORT

European Air Services

1. **Mr. Sayeed** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made, following discussions with his French counterpart, to encourage the further liberalisation of European air services.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Michael Spicer): I met M. Douffiagues on 4 February and exchanged ideas for significantly more liberal bilateral air service arrangements. At last week's informal Council of Ministers further progress was made. We made it clear again that we would only be party to an agreement which provided for proper competition between airlines.

Mr. Sayeed: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the robust action that he is taking, particularly in view of the substantial vested interest. Has progress been made on the introduction of cheaper off-peak fares?

Mr. Spicer: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. Yes, most of our European partners now seem to accept the principle that airlines should be able to introduce low off-peak fares. The British Government are determined that such fares should not be strangled by absurdly restrictive restraints such as the Saturday night or six-day concession.

Mr. Carter-Jones: Will the Minister take it from me that we wish him well in his endeavours, but that he needs an awful lot of luck to be successful?

Mr. Spicer: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind words of encouragement.

Mr. Ward: Is my hon. Friend aware of the difficulties concerning the city of Strasbourg, which is the centre for the Council of Europe and the European Parliament, and, in particular, the apparent attempt by the French to maintain a near monopoly there? Will he press for an improvement in communications with Strasbourg and more allowance for genuine competition?

Mr. Spicer: My hon. Friend is absolutely right in stressing the role of competition in providing better services to Strasbourg, and indeed, elsewhere in Europe. In view of what my hon. Friend said, my right hon. Friend will certainly press even stronger for more competition in air services with France and, indeed, with other European countries.

Mr. Snape: What has the Minister actually done, which was the point of the question? Whatever he has done, why were we deprived of knowing about it? He failed to hold a press conference at the end of his six-month presidency, which is surely unprecedented with Aviation Ministers.

Mr. Spicer: The hon. Gentleman has got it wrong again. Of course we held a press conference. The reason was to stress that we have almost total unanimity on access and capacity. The only matter on which we shall have further discussions is fares, and we are getting somewhere on that as well.

Channel Tunnel

2. **Mr. Favell** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has been given on the levels of employment in Scotland and the north of England which will result from the construction of the Channel tunnel.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. John Moore): Eurotunnel's contractors, Trans-Manche Link, have already placed orders worth £6·4 million for the first two tunnel-boring machines with James Howden & Co. in Glasgow, and £1·2 million for locomotives with Hunslett Engineering Co. in Yorkshire. Letters of intent placed with these two companies total a further £8·5 million. In all, orders for equipment and materials for Eurotunnel are likely to account for some 7,000 to 8,000 jobs, and orders for British Rail another 2,000 to 2,500 jobs, outside the south-east during the construction period.

Mr. Favell: Undoubtedly that is good news for the north, but what will be the effect on jobs in the north and in Scotland after the tunnel is opened?

Mr. Moore: I thank my hon. Friend for his first remark. Of course the effect will depend on the degree to which British manufacturing and commercial industry utilise the tremendous freight advantages in being able to move goods from the United Kingdom into Europe, where about 62 per cent. of our export trade goes. Clearly, for the first time, they will have that unique freight advantage, and I trust that they will benefit from it.

Mr. James Lamond: I also welcome the Minister's announcement, but will he bear in mind the reservations that have been expressed by many borough councils, for example in the north-west, including my own in Oldham, and their concern that the rail network should be strengthened sufficiently to make it economic to situate industry in that area and thus gain the advantage that will be forthcoming from the rail tunnel?

Mr. Moore: Of course, I shall take note of the hon. Gentleman's point. He rightly draws attention to the opportunities for companies connected with our goods railway system. However, I know from the hon. Gentleman's point that he will be conscious of the enormous importance to British Rail, and to the north-west and other areas north of Birmingham, of the Channel tunnel development.

Mr. Meadowcroft: Does the Secretary of State accept that many of us who are in favour of the tunnel on social and political grounds nevertheless have the same reservations about the problems for the north if the development is concentrated on the south-east? Does the right hon. Gentleman further accept that it is important for through running from the north on railway lines across London to be introduced at the same time as the tunnel is opened, rather than for the tunnel to commence operations without through-running trains?

Mr. Moore: I recognise the great importance of through trains. I recognise the hon. Gentleman's point. I am delighted that he reaffirms his party's support for the Channel tunnel. I hope that he will remember what I said in answer to the question, that the jobs in relation to equipment and materials — all the jobs to which I referred—will be outside the south-east. They will be in the north, where our heavy manufacturing and industrial base is.

Dr. Godman: With regard to Scotland's involvement, the Scottish Office is to assist financially with the study of the concept of the EuroWest Port. Is it the Secretary of State's intention also to provide some financial assistance for the idea of a EuroWest Port based on the Clyde?

Mr. Moore: I shall talk to my hon. Friends in the Scottish Office about that point, but we have made it clear time after time that, other than the commercial decisions by British Rail in regard to additional ancillary railway facilities as a consequence of the Channel tunnel, no Government money will be put up for the Channel tunnel. However, I shall certainly look at the hon. Gentleman's specific point about the Clyde.

British Airways

3. **Mr. David Marshall** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has about the total value of British Airways shares sold in foreign markets.

Mr. Moore: About £148 million worth of shares were sold in foreign markets, out of a total capitalisation of £900 million.

Mr. Marshall: As the Secretary of State obviously does not have a clue about the answer to the question that was asked, and in view of massive share trading as a result of the issue being considerably underpriced, how can the right hon. Gentleman guarantee that control of British Airways will not pass to foreigners or even to a predatory competitor foreign airline?

Mr. Moore: The hon. Gentleman's first statement was total and complete nonsense. The articles require all foreign interests in BA shares to be disclosed to the company. Obviously, a system is already in place. On the hon. Gentleman's second point, I wonder whether he remembers what *The Sunday Times* said on the day before we priced the issue. The writer said that

"at 125p, I would be luke-warm",

and in fact, BA would be worth buying only under 125p.

Mr. Watts: Does my right hon. Friend agree that many potential foreign investors were disappointed because of the tremendous interest of small investors in this country in British Airways, and that that is a tremendous vote of confidence in Lord King, his directors and all the people who work for British Airways, including many of my constituents, who have made it the most attractive airline investment opportunity anywhere in the world?

Mr. Moore: I am delighted at my hon. Friend's welcome. He is right. He may not recall the only Labour privatisation, if it can be called that, when in 1977 the Labour Government sold British Petroleum shares to the nation, but they did not offer them to the wider public —20 per cent. of them were placed in the United States and the rest went to United Kingdom institutions. My hon. Friends will all be looking forward to a debate on Labour's transport policy document, "Fresh Directions", to see whether the Labour party will confirm — [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am delighted. Clearly, one of Labour's Supply days will be used to debate that lovely document. We shall look forward to that occasion.

Mr. Robert Hughes: Is not the truth that the Secretary of State swithered and dithered over the British Airways flotation, that he could not make up his mind whether he wanted to encourage or discourage the small shareholder and that in the end he panicked and set the price too low, so that he gave away £300 million of public money? If he is relying on *The Sunday Times* for advice on how to run his Department, no wonder he gets it so abysmally wrong.

Mr. Moore: I do not think for one moment that the enormous success of the Government's privatisation

programme would at any stage be regarded by the public—no matter how it is regarded by the Labour party—as the result of panic. I believe that the reverse is the case. British Airways was one of the more successful privatisations. The 1·1 million shareholders will be very interested to know the Labour party's "Fresh Directions" attitude towards their share ownership. We look forward to hearing the Opposition's debate on that subject.

Mr. Hayward: Would it not be more to the point to concentrate on those shares that were not sold abroad because the demand in this country, especially from British Airways employees and the small shareholder, was at such a high level that shares were brought back from foreign markets into the British market?

Mr. Moore: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct to draw attention to the working of the clawback and the fact that 47 per cent. of shares were placed with the employees in the United Kingdom and in the wider individual share-owning market place. I know that my hon. Friend would be happy to remind British Airways employees of Labour's commitment in its new transport document to take back the shares at the issue price. When and how the Opposition do that will be of interest to the employees.

Coaches (Speed Governors)

4. **Mr. Heathcoat-Amory** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will report progress on the consultations about fitting of speed governors to coaches.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Peter Bottomley): The Department has been actively involved in the preparation of a British Standard for speed limiters. We expect to be able to consult interested parties on regulations based on a draft British Standard within the next two months.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Is my hon. Friend aware that the tachograph record is used on the continent as a way of making on-the-spot speed checks, which is simple and quick and avoids the need for additional equipment? Would that not be a better way of enforcing speed limits for buses and coaches than requiring operators to fit these expensive new fangled speed governors?

Mr. Bottomley: My hon. Friend will accept that if a speed limiter is in operation there cannot be an offence. It is also worth noting that speed limiters are already required in France. I am advised that by themselves tachographs are not sufficient evidence for a prosecution for speeding.

Mr. Janner: I recognise the importance of a limit being placed on the speeds of coaches and buses, but do not many of the worst accidents happen at fairly low speeds, well below those speeds which would be achieved through the fitting of governors? Is the Minister aware that in my constituency a child was killed about 10 days ago on a road used by buses, coaches and cars, but where there was an insufficient layby area for coaches to pull in to collect and deliver children? Will he consider all aspects of that matter, including those points highlighted by the Anstey lane disaster?

Mr. Bottomley: The hon. and learned Gentleman has made a very important point, that 80 per cent. of injuries and deaths on the roads occur in built-up areas where the maximum speed limits applicable in countryside areas do not apply. When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State publishes the new "Highway Code", he will draw attention to the simple rules that will eliminate virtually all injuries and deaths on our roads. I hope that those responsible for children will ensure that children are under control, and that when they reach the age of discretion they are properly trained. I know that bus and coach drivers will do all that they can to ensure that they do not kill or injure children.

Mr. Adley: In contradistinction to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory), will my hon. Friend press ahead on that matter as fast as he can? Will he confirm the Government's commitment? Does he share the view expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Mrs. Chalker) that the driving of some coaches on our motorways is little less than intimidation? Will he confirm that, in addition to governors, seat belts, flammability, and other design features are receiving the Department's attention?

Mr. Bottomley: Yes, Sir.

Cycling (Safety)

5. **Mr. Dormand** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will convene and attend a meeting of representatives of cycling organisations to discuss safety and related matters; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I am looking forward to opening the Conference on International Innovations for Safer Cycling, organised by Southampton city council and the Southampton Cycling Campaign on 23 May as one of the main events of National Bike Week 1987. The Department will be playing a full part in this event.

Mr. Dormand: I welcome that announcement from the Minister who I know has a genuine interest in cycling. However, as 350 cyclists are killed and more than 6,000 seriously injured every year, is there not now an urgent need to reconsider what must be done in such a serious situation? I am not blaming any particular section of road traffic, but will the Minister consider three aspects of the problem? First, will he attempt to increase the awareness of motorists about cycling? Secondly, will he improve facilites for cyclists at turning places and crossing points? Finally, and this is important, will he institute a major campaign among school children about cycling and safety?

Mr. Bottomley: I pay tribute to the work done for cycling by the hon. Gentleman, not only among Members of Parliament, but throughout the country. He rightly emphasises three aspects. I will do what I can on training, but will require much help from schools, local authorities and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents. The hon. Gentleman will be aware of the advisory leaflets produced by the Department, which have been well received in cycling circles. As for awareness, I hope that when the new "Highway Code" is issued on 4 March the hon. Gentleman will welcome many of the changes, most of which are addressed not to cyclists but to others road users who cause so much danger to cyclists.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: My hon. Friend will be aware that the headquarters of the Cyclists Touring Club is in my constituency—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I want to hear about the Cyclists Touring Club.

Mrs. Bottomley: Before attending any meeting, will my hon. Friend read the club's 1987 manifesto, which was prepared for this European Year of the Environment? What has he done during the past year to publicise the fact that motorists and cyclists are fellow and responsible road users?

Mr. Bottomley: I recall an Adjournment debate introduced by my hon. Friend, which was answered by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the former Minister of State, Department of Transport, following which we made 18 changes to the "Highway Code" which provide greater protection for cyclists. I shall consider the CTC '87 manifesto. During the past year, I thought that I earned one brownie point by visiting CTC headquarters with my hon. Friend on a tandem, and I thought that I deserved a second brownie point for not telling the press.

Light Dues

6. **Mr. Stott** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is his estimate of the cost to the shipping and ports industries as a consequence of the 14 per cent. increase in light dues he announced on 5 February.

8. **Dr. Godman** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received following the announcement of an increase in light dues.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Well over 80 per cent. of light dues are paid by foreign registered ships. The proposed increase will result in an additional charge to United Kingdom registered shipping of about £500,000 a year. Light dues impose no direct costs on the port industry. I have received several representations for and against the new charges.

Mr. Stott: The Minister's reply was extremely complacent. Are he and the Secretary of State aware of the immense damage that the measure is likely to cause to United Kingdom ports and shipping? The British Ports Association estimates that light dues could increase container costs by 50 per cent., add £20,000 to the costs of each ship entering United Kingdom ports, and cost one ship owner £1 million per annum.

The Minister must be aware that Britain alone in Europe charges shipowners this levy for entering and embarking from United Kingdom ports. The levy is directed at the industry and is one that the industry can ill afford to bear. The Minister should consult the Chancellor of the Exchequer and ask him, if he has money to give away in this year's Budget, to give it to ports and shipping — an important part of British industry — instead of levying this 14 per cent. increase on them, which will cause great damage.

Mr. Spicer: The increases are necessary to cover costs. Before the hon. Gentleman gets completely carried away, he should remember that since 1981-82 light dues have decreased by 18 per cent. in real terms, even taking into account the new rates. He should further remind himself and some of his hon. Friends that light dues were at their peak in real terms in 1975, after Labour had increased them three times in 19 months by 10 per cent., 12 per cent. and 41 per cent. respectively.

Mr. Godman: What types of fishing vessels are likely to pay dues in the future? Would it not make much more sense to rescind than to extend light dues to fishing vessels?

Mr. Spicer: We are considering proposals to extend light dues to some fishing vessels. It follows the inclusion earlier this year of the cost of operating the United Kingdom navigator transmitters in the general lighthouse fund. I cannot discuss the details, because they have not been finalised.

Mr. Squire: Although I do not endorse the hyperbole of the hon. Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott), will my hon. Friend recognise that there is genuine anxiety in the shipping industry about the effect of light dues? Will he undertake to listen most carefully and sympathetically to any representations that that industry makes to him?

Mr. Spicer: Of course there are anxieties about increases, even if the charges are coming down in real terms. We shall see whether any restructuring between different types of vessels and what they pay should be undertaken.

Mr. Wallace: What steps has the Department of Transport taken to set up user consultative committees to extend consultation to people who do not necessarily pay light dues? Will the Minister confirm that light dues are not charged by any of our EEC partners, with the exception of Greece and the Republic of Ireland? Does he agree that if a vessel has a choice between Rotterdam and a British port, Rotterdam is likely to be more attractive because increased light dues will now have to be paid in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Spicer: We consult all elements of the industry. The cost differential between average ports on the Continent and in Britain is explained by light dues only to the tune of one seventh.

London Underground

7. **Sir John Biggs-Davison** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if, when he next meets the chairman of London Regional Transport, he will raise with him the level of services on the London Underground; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister of State, Department of Transport (Mr. David Mitchell): Yes, Sir. While I am not complacent, I congratulate him on increasing by 3 per cent. in 1986-87 alone the mileage of trains run on the Underground, and on his plans for further increases this year.

Sir John Biggs-Davison: Is my hon. Friend aware that I am grateful for the interest that he and the chairman are taking in the suffering of my constituents on the Central line? Will sympathetic consideration be given to constructive suggestions which may be made by the Central line users action group and myself?

Mr. Mitchell: Following a lengthy discussion with my hon. Friend, who raised several matters on behalf of his constituents, I have written to the chairman of London Underground Ltd. about them and I shall be in touch with my hon. Friend. As for the line users' association, of course I shall be happy to convey its views as well.

Mr. Cartwright: When the Minister next meets the chairman of London Regional Transport, will he bear in mind the thousands of south-east London commuters who would love to have an Underground service about which to complain? How long will south-east London remain the forgotten corner of the city when it comes to the development of the Underground system?

Mr. Mitchell: London Underground Ltd. is concentrating on improving its existing network and services. The hon. Gentleman may be interested to know that the number of passengers has gone up by 50 per cent. since 1982 to an all-time record and that some £260 million of investment — the highest ever level — will be carried through this year. We should see those improvements through before we undertake a further extension of the system.

Mr. Dykes: Will my hon. Friend have a word with the management of LRT about the irritating failures of electronic time and destination warning signs, especially on the Northern line? They mostly show flashing correction messages rather than times and destinations.

Mr. Mitchell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing attention to that matter and I shall pass it on to the chairman and managing director.

Mr. Snape: Is the Minister satisfied with the level of service provided by LRT, bearing in mind the number of ticket machines that are switched off or are out of order and the lack of staff issuing or collecting tickets, especially late at night? If there is £20 million to spare in this newly nationalised industry, would it not be better to spend it on providing much needed improvements for passengers who travel on the system than to hand it back to the Government?

Mr. Mitchell: Ratepayers are well satisfied at finding less than half the sum which the GLC would have required in subsidy to mop up the industry. Neither I nor the management are complacent. There are plans for automatic ticketing to be introduced.

M6-M61 (M65 Link)

9. **Mr. Pike** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give the projected date for commencement of construction work on the M65 link to the M6-M61.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Time will be needed for design work and the normal statutory procedures, including a public inquiry. Construction could then start in the early 1990s.

Mr. Pike: Does the Minister accept that his answer is not acceptable to the people of north-east Lancashire? This motorway has the overwhelming support of the people in that part of Lancashire, and we have been arguing the case for it for more than 20 years. We want the motorway to be started by 1990, and we want it to be up to motorway standards.

Mr. Bottomley: We will do the best that we can. The hon. Gentleman mentioned a 20-year delay. Part of that delay was due to the Labour party halving the money for new national roads between 1974 and 1979. Perhaps in the long-promised Supply day debate on "Fresh Directions" we may hear the Labour party's plans for road spending.

Mr. Favell: There may be problems in Burnley, but a lot of good work is going on in the north-west. However, what about the A6M? There will be overheating not just of engines but of a lot of people in Stockport if something is not done about that soon. When can we expect the public inquiry?

Mr. Bottomley: I hope soon to be able to announce the date of the public inquiry. We are considering a large number of representations received since the inquiry into the Denton to Middleton section of the Manchester outer ring road ended in January last year.

Mr. Straw: Does the Minister not understand that the reason for the inordinate delay in the construction of this link is that the Government cancelled the link altogether in April 1980 and did not restore it until three years later? Is he aware that the result has been to produce major congestion, especially on the northern roads around my constituency and on the road between Blackburn and Preston? Bearing in mind the delays so far, can the Minister give any promise that the work to put this link on to the M61 will be speeded up?

Mr. Bottomley: We shall do what we can, but I cannot promise to speed things up. The hon. Gentleman referred to what happened in 1980. The reason why a number of schemes were suspended or shelved in 1980 was that the previous Government cut the money but did not cut the number of schemes. We must recognise the need for better roads without covering the countryside with concrete. We want the roads that are necessary for industrial employment and we look forward to Labour party support as we continue to provide such roads. If the Opposition want to offer an alternative agenda, they should put a few sums to it.

Business Aviation

11. **Mr. Aspinwall** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what facilities exist for business aviation in the south-east area, particularly around London.

Mr. Spicer: I have recently made visits to seven specialist business aviation airfields in the London area and am confident that the available facilities are well placed to compete in serving a thriving business aviation industry.

Mr. Aspinwall: Is the Minister satisfied that customs and immigration facilities are adequate at business aviation airfields?

Mr. Spicer: These matters are primarily for my right hon. Friends the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Home Secretary. I can confirm that the industry has a unique business user concession providing on-call customs and immigration cover at about 40 small airfields throughout the United Kingdom. These are for United Kingdom and EEC nationals travelling for business purposes. The scheme is under continuous review and improvement, and a further enhancement should be made shortly.

Mr. Soames: Is my hon. Friend aware that that is perhaps an unhappy answer to a situation that he knows very well is extremely unsatisfactory? Is he aware that no really satisfactory customs and excise facilities exist at Gatwick airport for business aircraft arriving and leaving? Will he take what steps he can to urge his right hon. Friends to ensure that this important service is not neglected?

Mr. Spicer: I know that the industry would like to have 24-hour cover at all airports for business purposes, but that would be extremely expensive. I shall, of course, make sure that my right hon. Friends hear what my hon. Friend has said, but I cannot make any promises.

London Regional Transport (Fares)

12. **Mr. Greenway** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what was the latest fares increase on London Regional Transport undertakings; what was the increase in 1981; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Moore: London Regional Transport fares increased in real terms by an average of 0·5 per cent. on 11 January. Fares have again been held broadly at their real level following the last fares change under the GLC-controlled London Transport in 1983.

Mr. Greenway: Through my right hon. Friend, may I congratulate London Regional Transport on that very low increase in fares, which is so much below the level of inflation? May I also invite my right hon. Friend to compare it with the GLC's 100 per cent. increase in London Transport fares in 1982 at the same time as it increased rates by 100 per cent.? Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is to the eternal satisfaction of Londoners that London Regional Transport has been put in charge?

Mr. Moore: My hon. Friend is quite right. He had experience of the impact of GLC policies on his constituents when they wished to travel. My hon. Friend will be interested to know that Labour's transport policy document "Fresh Directions" offers a GLC-type transport policy if ever we have the misfortune to have the Labour party in government again.

Mr. Chapman: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that keeping fares broadly in line with inflation, and not ahead of it, has resulted in more people using LRT services, particularly on the Underground, and that that has made it possible for management to provide more services? Surely that is a good thing. Will he confirm that it has also led to an increase in the capital investment programme?

Mr. Moore: My hon. Friend is absolutely right in all the points that he makes. About 30 per cent. more passenger journeys are now being made than in 1983. In fact, there is a record level of travelling on the Underground. That is a clear indication of the success of these policies.

Bus Deregulation

13. **Mr. Beith** asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to receive the first report of the research he has commissioned into the effects of bus deregulations in rural areas; and if he proposes to publish the report.

Mr. David Mitchell: I hope to publish first reports of the studies of selected areas in the summer. All the evidence available so far indicates that the level of rural bus services has been broadly maintained.

Mr. Beith: In view of that reply, does the Minister not realise that the main bus operator in Northumberland reduced services by 25,000 miles a week in the aftermath of deregulation and that very few of those services were taken up by other operators? Must the public wait for the publication of all this research before some of the gaps are filled, and must people give up jobs because they are unable to get to work in the meantime?

Mr. Mitchell: Most counties have made such savings by going over to competitive tendering for the provision of socially necessary services and they have adequate resources to provide all the services that are necessary in rural areas.

Mr. Speller: Is my hon. Friend aware that, contrary to what was said by the hon. Member for Berwick upon Tweed (Mr. Beith), in the west country and in north Devon in particular the deregulation of rural buses has resulted in the appearance of buses where none had been seen for more than a decade and that that has been entirely welcomed by my constituents?

Mr. Mitchell: I am aware that that is so not just in Devon but in many other parts of the country.

Mr. Heffer: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the Crosville bus company, which is responsible for both rural and city bus services on Merseyside, has been purchasing bad second-hand buses from Birmingham which its employees have refused to drive? Is he aware that those workers have been sacked and are now unemployed purely as a result of the Government's deregulation policy?

Mr. Mitchell: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising that point. It should perhaps be more widely known that Crosville, having won a large number of contracts that would have provided additional employment at the Love Lane depot, took in 10 second-hand buses which in the previous few weeks had been used on the roads and had been driven in the Birmingham area by Transport and General Workers Union drivers, but that when that opportunity was obtained for Liverpool the men refused to drive the buses. The hon. Gentleman may care to ponder why buses which were perfectly satisfactory when driven on the roads of Birmingham by TGWU drivers should be unacceptable in Liverpool.

Mr. Robert Hughes: Surely the real evidence shows that there has been a severe disruption of bus services in the rural areas. Will the Minister define what he means by "broadly maintained", and will he now name the selected areas in respect of which the studies will be published?

Mr. Mitchell: The selected areas in England for the special studies are west Wiltshire, Blackburn, the Medway towns and Nottingham. In Scotland they are parts of the Highland region, north-east Fife, the Dumfries and Galloway regions, parts of Strathclyde and part of Edinburgh. In Wales they are west Glamorgan, parts of Powys and parts of Clwyd. All the evidence so far shows that with minor variations there is broadly the same level of service as before, but with an increasing provision of minibus sevices, which are highly popular.

Midlands, Regional Airport

14. **Mr. Roger King** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the total level of investment in regional airports in the midlands since 1979.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Capital investment at airports in the midlands since 1979 has totalled more than £80 million. That compares with total capital investment of less than £16 million at all regional airports under the Labour Administration.

Mr. King: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Does he agree that, despite the Opposition's allegation that we never invest any money in our infrastructure, this

substantial investment must mean an increase in traffic at those airports? Has my hon. Friend any idea of the present amount of traffic?

Mr. Spicer: I am happy to tell my hon. Friend that the investment is, as he says, generating valuable new business for the region. At Birmingham airport about 180 direct scheduled services are operated each week to 17 foreign destinations. In 1986 alone, passenger traffic increased by more than 25 per cent. At East Midlands airport about 34 scheduled services a week serve five overseas destinations, and in 1986 traffic rose by 20 per cent.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Official Secrets Act

50. **Mr. Janner** asked the Attorney-General what recent discussions he has had with the Director of Public Prosecutions regarding investigations of suspected infringements of section 2 of the Official Secrets Act; and if he will make a statement.

The Solicitor-General (Sir Patrick Mayhew): The Attorney-General has frequent meetings with the Director at which current investigations and pending prosecutions under section 2 are discussed when appropriate.

Mr. Janner: Will the Solicitor-General tell the House how many investigations and prosecutions are current at the present time under this awful, intolerable section? Will he also say which is correct—the Prime Minister's letter to me saying that the Government have, in effect, no intention of amending the section or attempting to do so, or the leading article that appeared on the front page of *The Sunday Times* a week ago, which reported that Ministers had said that the section was to be amended or repealed?

The Solicitor-General: A total of eight prosecutions or matters are at present under active consideration under section 2 of the Official Secrets Act. The hon. and learned Gentleman will recall that the Government have more than once acknowledged the inadequacies of the Act and sought to introduce amending legislation in the previous Parliament, but it did not find favour. Clearly, whether further legislation is introduced is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that although the Official Secrets Act may need amending the growing number of people who are willing to betray their country is a much more important problem?

The Solicitor-General: My hon. Friend acknowledges, as do the vast majority of hon. Members of this House, that any community needs legislation which effectively protects its secrets. The difficulty is to get legislation which actively, accurately and appropriately balances conflicting interests.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Before getting to the question, may I ask the Solicitor-General if he will convey our best wishes to the Attorney-General during his convalescence? We hope to see him back here shortly. *[Interruption.]* That is not the question. Mild mannered I may be, but not that mild mannered.

On the more contentious matters, will the Solicitor-General give the House an assurance that the matters referred to in Granada television's "World in Action" programme last week about that despicable organisation the Economic League are being investigated, especially the possibility that the league's officials have contravened the Official Secrets Act? Will the Solicitor-General also give us an assurance that there is no political impediment to a prosecution?

The Solicitor-General: The hon. Gentleman's opening remarks were characteristic of his generosity and were most gratefully received.

On the second part of the hon. Gentleman's question, the procedures for drawing evidence to the attention of the prosecuting authorities are well understood. As has been made clear by my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General, matters of political partisanship are never taken into consideration.

BBC Scotland (Police Raid)

51. **Mr. Dalyell** asked the Attorney-General on what date, and at what time, he first became aware of the police search of the British Broadcasting Corporation offices at Queen Margaret Drive, Glasgow, as part of inquiries initiated at his request into alleged breaches of the Official Secrets Acts in relation to a secret defence project.

The Solicitor-General: On the morning of Sunday 1 February.

Mr. Dalyell: Has it dawned on the Government that the raid on the BBC in Glasgow was an illegal act? Why do Ministers think that they know better than Professor Robert Black, professor of Scots law at the University of Edinburgh, who has argued convincingly that since a justice of the peace did not sign a warrant it was an illegal act? Why do they think that they know better than Professor Tony Bradley, professor of constitutional law at Edinburgh university and editor of *Public Law*, who says that the feelings of the victims—in this case, the Foreign Office—had to be taken into account?

The Solicitor-General: Reluctant though I am to play so tempting a question away into the heather, that is not a matter for the Attorney-General.

Sir John Biggs-Davison: Might not those who appear to believe in the divine right of investigative journalists reflect on what would have been thought, said and done if pre-war journalists had betrayed the secret of radar?

The Solicitor-General: My hon. Friend makes an extremely important point. It is all very well for us to pay careful attention—and we need to—to the rights of a free press and freedom of speech, but the need for the United Kingdom to protect its essential security interests tends to receive less vocal support and recognition.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Does the Solicitor-General regard it as satisfactory that the law governing the obtaining of search warrants is different in England and in Scotland, thus enabling the authorities to indulge in the sort of gamesmanship of which we heard in relation to the Glasgow search?

The Solicitor-General: The hon. and learned Gentleman invites me to stray into matters which are the responsibility of my Scottish colleagues, but it would be wrong for me to do so. It is right that the Act of Union should be respected and that the Scots should continue to be able to have a law of their own.

Sentencing Policy

52. **Mr. Greenway** asked the Attorney-General what representations he has received about the use of his proposed powers under clause 29 of the Criminal Justice Bill to refer cases to the Court of Appeal for a review of their implications for future sentencing policy; and if he will make a statement.

57. **Mr. Peter Bruinvels** asked the Attorney-General what representations he has received in favour of a right of appeal for the Crown in rape cases, where he is of the opinion that *(a)* a judge has been lenient in his sentence or *(b)* has not complied with the Lord Chief Justice's guidelines on the subject.

The Solicitor-General: I have not received any specific representations about the use of the proposed powers under clause 29 of the Criminal Justice Bill.

Mr. Greenway: Will my right hon. and learned Friend reflect on the victim's position in the recent Ealing vicarage case and in similar cases in which, because the rapist pleads guilty, the full details of the case are not brought out before the judge, the victim's evidence is not heard and the case is thus not open to full assessment by the judge? Does he share my concern that in that situation the judge cannot make a proper evaluation of the mind of the victim and that something needs to be done?

The Solicitor-General: This is an important point. It is sometimes said that in making a speech in mitigation the defence counsel may reflect adversely on the character of the victim. If anything is said that the prosecution knows to be misleading, the prosecuting counsel should intervene to correct it to avoid the court being misled. The judiciary will always seek to ensure that any judicial observations are squarely based on fact.

Mr. Bruinvels: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware of the completely inadequate sentences being given by certain judges? Is he aware that the average sentence for rape is three and a half years and the term actually served only 20 months? Does he agree also also that if all judges looked at the Regina v. Billam case, useful guidelines would be given. Does he agree that when clause 29 is reconsidered there is a possibility of directly amending any particular ludicrously light and lenient sentence and thus the opportunity to deter other potential rapists from committing such a heinous crime?

The Solicitor-General: To the extent that there is current public disquiet, it is important that clause 29 of the Criminal Justice Bill should be enacted, and I hope that it will be enacted. Without accepting the adjectives used by my hon. Friend, it is important — I believe that the House shares this view — that the guidelines that have been laid down by the Court of Appeal criminal division should be adhered to and applied by the judiciary.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Are there any aspects of the Kincora affair that could be brought to the attention of the Court of Appeal under the proposed powers of clause 29 of the Criminal Justice Bill? Is it not true that the file was given to the Prime Minister on 1 November 1984 by Mr. Wallace and Captain Holyroyd, setting out major allegations about the destabilisation of a Labour Government and the Government of the Irish Republic, but that no action was taken? Is it not about time that the Government made a statement so that Parliament can learn the truth? We want to know whether the findings in the report are true or false.

The Solicitor-General: I find it just as difficult as the hon. Gentleman must find it to see how clause 29 can relate to the Kincora affair. However, active consideration is being given to certain reports that have recently appeared about Mr. Holroyd and Mr. Wallace.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Sub-Saharan Africa

60. **Mr. Stuart Holland** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures he is taking to seek to prevent the re-emergence of famine in sub-Saharan Africa.

The Minister for Overseas Development (Mr. Chris Patten): We are working with the Governments of the affected countries, and other donors, including the international organisations, to help cope with the complex problems of famine. We seek to help increase indigenous food production, to prevent desertification, to develop food security and early warning systems, and to ensure that measures to avert famine can be taken swiftly.

We are also continuing to respond quickly to emergencies. In the past two weeks I have announced more than £3 million for help in Mozambique.

Mr. Holland: Is the Minister aware that his commitment to Mozambique amounts to only 20p per head of the population? As about 4 million people are threatened with starvation, and given the key strategic role of Mozambique for all the front-line states, why does the Minister not commit at least £10 per head for the famine population — or £40 million — through an income and foreign exchange support programme for Mozambique?

What steps has the Minister taken, with his right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, on joint international action to write off a major share of the $130 billion worth of debt in the remainder of sub-Saharan Africa—a debt which denies such countries a chance of fighting famine and saving lives?

Mr. Patten: As the hon. Gentleman should know, we have taken the lead in writing off official aid debts to the poorest countries. We have written off debts to the tune of about £264 million to the 13 poorest African countries. As for our assistance to Mozambique, the hon. Gentleman's views were not shared by Ministers in Mozambique a week ago.

Mr. Prentice: Given the massive scale of the crisis that has developed in sub-Saharan Africa in recent years, and its likely duration, is there not a strong case for a substantial increase in the aid programme for that region alone, rather than having to help that region at the expense of other poor areas?

Mr. Patten: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his support. I know how much he knows about the subject. We are hoping to be able to spend more in sub-Saharan Africa in the coming year. This year we are spending about £570 million in Africa on our bilateral programme alone.

Mr. Kirkwood: Will the Minister acknowledge that we are talking, not just about the quantity of money, but about the quality of investment? Will he also acknowledge

the importance of supporting subsistence agriculture? Will he assure the House that the percentage of United Kingdom bilateral aid in that direction will increase?

Mr. Patten: I certainly agree with the hon. Gentleman about the importance of agriculture and the quality of our programme. I am pleased to be able to say that our bilateral project aid for the renewable natural resources sector rose by 50 per cent. in the five years to 1985 and now stands at £65 million.

Mr. Dorrell: Does my hon. Friend agree that the worst way of dealing with sub-Saharan Africa is through a programme of indiscriminate debt write-off and undermining the adjustment programme supported by the IMF, as in the policy advanced by the Opposition last week? Would not such a policy be rightly interpreted as a charter for irresponsible Third world Governments, which all observers agree contribute to the lack of development in the Third world? Is it not essential to face the fact that development in the Third world, like economic activity anywhere else, involves difficult and tough choices?

Mr. Patten: My hon. Friend is entirely right. There was a marked difference in tone between the action programme agreed by the African countries at the end of the United Nations special session last year and the document produced by the Labour party last week. However, if David Blunkett is to be believed, that document was entirely academic.

Mr. Deakins: Will the geographical redistribution of the British aid effort in the next few years benefit sub-Saharan Africa? In particular, will the countries in the region get an increasing share of whatever that aid budget may be?

Mr. Patten: That will certainly be my intention over the next year.

Mr. Sackville: Does my hon. Friend agree that any benefit accruing from overseas aid to Mozambique, Zimbabwe and other African nations will be obliterated by the devastation that will follow a policy of universal sanctions against South Africa?

Mr. Patten: Yes, Sir.

Women's Health

61. **Mr. Simon Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what impact he estimates the appointment of a women's health specialist at his Department will have on project work on women and development.

Mr. Chris Patten: We believe that the appointment of a new nursing and health services adviser, with particular interest in women's health matters, should further strengthen our capacity to improve the health and wellbeing of women.

Mr. Hughes: Bearing in mind the Minister's comments when he opened the Overseas Development Administration conference on 2 December, does the appointment of a women's health adviser signify a change of policy within his Department? Can we look forward to much-needed women's educational, economic and agricultural advisers in the near future?

Mr. Patten: No, the appointment does not represent a change of policy. It represents the reaffirmation of an existing, sensible policy.

Mr. Squire: Does my hon. Friend accept that all development policies, by definition, affect women? Will his Department continue to consider the impact of such policies on women, without forming separate women's units within the Department?

Mr. Patten: I totally agree with my hon. Friend. I am against tokenism.

Mr. Madden: Did the Minister see the article by Mr. Davie in *The Observer* yesterday? If so, what were his reactions, particularly to the suggestion that more positive help should be given to men and women in the Third world to resolve their problems rather than Western agencies imposing solutions upon them?

Mr. Patten: I did not read that meaning into the article, but I was impressed by the article, as I am with most of Mr. Davie's articles. I took from the article the important role of non-governmental organisations in the development effort. I am delighted to say that we have spent a considerable extra amount on the joint funding scheme with non-governmental organisations and we intend to increase further the amount that we spend on that scheme in the coming years.

Medically Qualified Personnel

62. **Sir David Price** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many medically qualified personnel are responsible to him in relation to his overseas development responsibilities; and what rank is the most senior of such personnel.

Mr. Chris Patten: The ODA has two full-time medical advisers on its permanent staff, both of medical officer rank, and a part-time nutrition adviser. One medical adviser post is currently vacant, but will be filled on 2 March. The ODA can also turn for advice to 13 medically qualified lecturers and senior lecturers whom it supports at the Liverpool and London schools of tropical medicine, the University of Edinburgh and the University of London. In addition, the ODA supports more than 80 medically qualified personnel working for Governments or public authorities overseas.

Sir David Price: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the best ways in which this country can help the Third world is through medical advice? From the Minister's reply, it is clear that the Department is inadequately staffed with medical practitioners. Should not the Department have at least somebody of under-secretary rank, or preferably deputy-secretary rank? In view of the current problem of AIDS in Africa, we shall soon have to give a great deal of advice. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is a great deal more important to give sound medical advice than to throw a lot of money into the Third world? Will his Department do a bit better?

Mr. Patten: I do not agree with everything that my hon. Friend has said, but I agree about the importance of our health and population programmes. At present we are spending about £38 million on those programmes. I believe that in those programmes more emphasis should be placed on primary health care. We should, of course, work through multilateral as well as bilateral programmes

and we look forward to giving more support to the World Health Organisation and the work that it is proposing to carry out in relation to AIDS.

Women

63. **Mr. Meadowcroft** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his Department's policy towards the role of women in development.

Mr. Chris Patten: Our policy was set out in the booklet "Women in Development", copies of which are available in the Library.

Mr. Meadowcroft: Is the Minister aware that the Government's attitude seems rather complacent in view of continuing reports that the position of women in development issues is becoming worse, not better? Is he aware that a report to be published on Thursday by War on Want sets out the evidence for this? Will he read it carefully and respond positively to its findings?

Mr. Patten: I hope that I shall respond positively, but I do not always agree with everything that War on Want says; nor, I think, does the Labour party. I am not complacent. I want to see more women being trained under our own programme. Only about 15 per cent. of places currently go to women. We are talking about how to improve that figure with aid-recipient Governments.

Mr. Gow: What explanation can my hon. Friend offer for the new-found interest of the Liberal party in women?

Mr. Patten: After the events of last week, I think that I should be careful about referring to the role of women in politics.

Leyland Trucks—DAF

3.31 pm

Mr. Michael Fallon (Darlington): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the financial terms of the proposed Leyland Trucks—DAF joint venture".

I raise this issue at the earliest opportunity since the full details of the proposal became clear and since the publication of the Industry Act order on Thursday night. The matter is specific because it relates only to the joint venture. It is important because it involves several thousand people, 2,000 of whom are to lose their jobs in the industry. It is urgent because, unless the House has an opportunity to debate the joint venture, the proposal will be formalised within the next few days.

The joint venture proposal is one of the largest privatisation measures of this Parliament. Whatever one's views on privatisation, it should not be accepted that the proposal should be implemented without Parliament's endorsement, other than the brief statement which was made last week. If that endorsement is not made, by Executive decision a Dutch company will be given, free of charge and free of debt, substantial public assets and a 23 per cent. share of the United Kingdom market. It will have a virtual monopoly of component supply within that market.

Had that been done by Bill or by order, questions could have been asked about the detail of the proposal, the structure of the board of the joint venture and the obligations on the principals concerned in competitive purchasing. I submit that it would be entirely wrong for such proposals to be enacted without further debate in the House and without Parliament's approval.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon) asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he thinks should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the proposed financial terms of the Leyland Trucks-DAF joint venture".

I have listened with care to what the hon. Gentleman has said, but I regret that I do not consider that the matter which he has raised meets all the criteria under Standing Order No. 20. I cannot, therefore, submit his application to the House.

Personal Statement

Mr. Richard Hickmet (Glanford and Scunthorpe): I wish, Mr. Speaker, to withdraw my remarks critical of you which I made last Friday outside the House. I realise now how seriously I have offended you and the House. I wish most sincerely to apologise to you, Mr. Speaker, and to the House for my remarks, which I withdraw unreservedly.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Hickmet) for his withdrawal. I accept fully what he has said.

Points of Order

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): On a point of order Mr. Speaker. On Friday I sought to table the following early-day motion——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should not read out the motion. I have been informed about it. If the hon. Gentleman is dissatisfied in any way with the advice that he was given by the Table Office—I have not seen the motion, as it was not submitted to me—he should ask the Table Office to refer the matter to me. If he will do that, I shall examine it.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Conservative Members unreservedly accept your ruling on the question——

Mr. Speaker: Order. There is nothing more to be said on that matter.

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. There is nothing more to be said on that matter. I have accepted the apology that has been proffered.

Mr. Forth: It is on a different point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wonder whether you could help the House by making it clear what the position is henceforth with regard to the naming of any hon. Member in any early-day motion. Is it now clear, and is it now your policy and that of the Table Office, that from this point on no early-day motion will be accepted that names in any way whatsoever or attributes to any hon. Member any views, opinions or political positions? Is that now the position?

Mr. Speaker: That is certainly not the position. The normal rules apply as before. The only way in which the conduct of an hon. Member may be criticised is by way of early-day motion. What I hope that the House will accept is that hon. Members will refrain from making imputations of dishonour or disloyal conduct against each other, which we would not allow across the Chamber at Question Time and which I certainly would not wish to see as early-day motions on the Order Paper.

Mr. Forth: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it, then, clear that the attribution of views to an hon. Member is quite permissible and that the association of an hon. Member, where he has taken a position publicly in an early-day motion, is quite acceptable and will be accepted by the Table Office?

Mr. Speaker: I think that the whole House understands exactly what the position is. We have an obligation in the House to uphold the high standards that we have inherited. I hope we shall always do so.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The matter I wish to raise with you came to my notice only while travelling down this morning, in one of the daily journals—*[Interruption.]* I realise that the main reading of Conservative Members is *Beano*, but I was reading one of the quality newspapers in the train this morning. Since it arrived after 12 o'clock I could not raise this matter with you as one of the things that has to be brought to your attention by 12 o'clock. Could you advise the House as to what we can do about a very grave matter indeed? It is now quite clear that the President of the United States intended to kill President Gaddafi——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Among my many responsibilities, that is not one. That was certainly known before 12 o'clock.

Mr. Faulds *rose*——

Mr. Greenway: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Faulds *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must resume his seat.

Mr. Faulds: I did not know about it until 12 o'clock.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I cannot help that.

Mr. Faulds: Since the Prime Minister——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is setting a very bad example.

Mr. Faulds: She gets away with murder. (See column 161, "Parliamentary Conduct".)

Mr. Greenway I am most grateful for your advice, Mr. Speaker. I return to the question of the Table Office and the tabling of early-day motions. Having once done that, may I ask you, because I am unclear——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am not prepared to allow the hon. Gentleman to read out an early-day motion which is not on the Order Paper. That early-day motion was not brought to me for my attention. If the hon. Gentleman wished it to be drawn to my attention he should have said so. I have now said that if he wants to have it drawn to my attention I shall ensure that it is sent to me. I have no knowledge of what it is.

Sir Kenneth Lewis (Stamford and Spalding): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I ask whether you can assure the House that the rule which you have applied in connection with recent early-day motions, which is accepted by everybody, will also apply to early-day motions tabled by some people at some time in the past, applying to people outside the House who have even less chance to justify themselves than those who are Members of the House?

Mr. Speaker: I am glad to have this opportunity to reaffirm that hon. Members should use with the greatest care their undoubted rights of free speech in naming people outside the House who have no opportunity to reply. Hon. Members should always exercise that right and privilege with the greatest consideration and responsibility.

Mr. Greenway: Further to that point or order, Mr. Speaker. I shall not read out my motion, but I must ask you why an early-day motion submitted by me was altered without reference to you.

Mr. Speaker: I understand that the hon. Member was given certain advice by the Table Office and that he accepted it.

Mr. Greenway *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Speaker: If the hon. Member did not accept that advice, he should have asked for me to be informed. I was not so informed.

Mr. Faulds: Further to the point or order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am not prepared to take it.

Mr. Faulds: The Prime Minister——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask the hon. Member to resume his seat.

Sizewell Nuclear Power Station

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Portillo.]*

Mr. Speaker: There is great demand to take part in the debate. If the ten-minute limit on speeches between 6 pm and 8 pm or between 7 pm and 9 pm applied today, I would have operated it. I ask hon. Members to be as brief as possible so that as many hon. Members as possible can be called.

3.40 pm

The Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Peter Walker): I welcome the fact that Parliament will today debate the report produced by Sir Frank Layfield following his inquiry. It is, after all, a debate for which we have had to wait four years since my predecessor made it clear that he appreciated the strength of a case for a debate in Parliament before a decision was taken. I have studied his views on that and very much agree with him. I have therefore decided that, without this becoming a precedent, it would be a good idea for Parliament to have the opportunity to express its views before I make a decision on the report.

I have the responsibility to take a decision on the Central Electricity Generating Board's application to build Sizewell B and today, before making this decision, I shall listen with care to the views expressed in the House. I shall comply with your request, Mr. Speaker, that speeches should be kept to 10 minutes because, although I have the CEGB's application before me. I am unable to express any views on the inspector's report until I make a decision and, for that reason, my role in the debate will be one which I have not previously experienced in my 25 years in the House and one to which I am totally unaccustomed —that of listening and providing no views of my own.

I should, however, like to express my gratitude and appreciation for the work that has been done by the inspector and his staff. The inquiry opened in January 1983 and continued until March 1985, having heard 340 days of evidence. Sir Frank Layfield presided over the longest and most exhaustive planning inquiry in our history and he was assisted by a small secretariat and four skilled assessors. In fact, he and his staff dedicated several years of their lives to a painstaking analysis of the arguments for and against the building of a pressurised water reactor at Sizewell. It took from March 1985 until December 1986 to write the bulk of the report. The report summarised the vast quantity of evidence and it certainly illustrates the depth of this inquiry. Sir Frank Layfield prepared a summary of the report, which hon. Members and the public have found most useful.

I should like also to express one other appreciation. Irrespective of the views which any of us may have of the recommendations or observations in the report, I think that we can agree that Sir Frank has succeeded remarkably in producing a well-written report which made the task of those who had to read the entire report far less of a burden than it would otherwise have been.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): For the purposes of the debate and on a point of fact in relation to the Department of Energy, can the right hon. Gentleman say whether the lowest oil and coal prices which the Layfield committee assumed were likely between 1990 and the year 2000 are higher than those which his Department thinks likely,

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

given the recent fall in oil prices? This is a question about departmental judgment and the answer would help any hon. Members who are called in the debate.

Mr. Walker: I have no intention of commenting or making observations upon that or any other part of the report. I am advised that I should not do so.

Whatever decisions the Government make as to the forms of energy that we shall seek to develop, they are likely to have a profound effect for decades to come. The background to decision-taking on energy matters throughout the world is that this is the first century in which the world has been faced with energy problems. Nobody in the year 1900 would have predicted the quadrupling of the world's population, or the gigantic increase in industrialisation. Virtually all forecasts that have been made throughout this century have had one thing in common, and that is that they were wrong. In the main, they were wrong in underestimating the growth of population and industrialisation. None of us can predict with any certainty changes in population or industrialisation over the coming decades. The experience of this century and the nature of potential worldwide growth in the next century show that Britain and the European Community need to pursue energy policies in whatever form that can meet the potential needs of the future.

I am sure that within the debate there will be mention not only of the contribution that can be made by nuclear energy, if that course is pursued, but of the contribution that will come from other forms of energy, some of which, such as coal, oil and gas, we already possess, and others, such as the sun, the wind, the tides and geothermal energy, into which research has taken place both here and abroad on a considerable scale.

We also need to recognise the important ingredient of improved energy efficiency. In my judgment, an important contribution can be made to assist the balance between supply and demand. I know the interest and knowledge in the House on the diverse aspects of energy. My task today is to listen to the views expressed on both sides of the House during the debate. I hope that it is a debate of high quality in which constructive and creative views are expressed. I can only assure the House that, in coming to my decision, I shall take great care to note everything that is said in today's debate.

3.47 pm

Mr. Stanley Orme (Salford, East): After the Secretary of State's short contribution to the debate, the Government are about to make their most important decision about the future of electricity generation. For eight years, not a single power station has been ordered. On all assessments, the ordering of new capacity must now take place with some degree of urgency. It was with some wonder that in the past we heard from the Government that no decision would be taken on power station ordering until they reached a decision on the proposal to build a PWR at Sizewell. The CEGB itself has got it wrong. It did not anticipate the increased demand for generating capacity. In fact, it went to sleep during the four and a half years of the Layfield inquiry. Now we have had reports that the CEGB requires an urgent go-ahead for new coal-fired stations. To delay further is to create continuing uncertainty in the electricity generating industry, in power manufacturing and in the coal industry. Yet to decide to go ahead with the PWR would be to go into a technological and economic cul-de-sac.

I agree with what the Secretary of State said about the industry and the application of Sir Frank Layfield and his colleagues. But the report is out of date. The inquiry closed in March 1985. Therefore, in over 3,000 pages of the report, there is no reference to Chernobyl. Since March 1985, the prices of oil and coal have altered dramatically. The conclusions reached in the report are based in the main on "substantial elements of judgment." Even without taking latter events into account, my assessment of the report is that the balance of judgment should be not to proceed with the PWR.

Layfield's recommendation to go ahead with the PWR at Sizewell is based on two assumptions concerning estimates of future fossil fuel prices and probabilities of safety. Through no fault of his own, Sir Frank Layfield has been unable to take post-1985 events into account in reaching his verdict. However, the Secretary of State has a responsibility to judge the decision on whether to go ahead with Sizewell B, not merely in the light of the inquiry's findings, but having given due consideration to subsequent events. The economics of nuclear power compared with other forms of electricity generation have come under considerable scrutiny. In his report, Sir Frank Layfield commented:

> "The evidence showed that the CEGB had significantly over-estimated the likely future price of both heavy fuel oil and coal."

Sir Frank Layfield considered that an independent view of the cost benefits was so important that he introduced his own assessors, the Cambridge Energy Research Group. It was the group's submission on the then economics of nuclear power versus coal that convinced the inspector that nuclear power was a cheaper option. It is, therefore, of considerable significance that that same group has published an up-to-date assessment of the economic pros and cons. That report takes account of the major changes in fossil fuel prices since the end of the inquiry. The group has used the same formulas as an earlier Nuclear Energy Agency report, but, being a dispassionate observer, it has come to different conclusions. Mr. Evans and Mr. Bullen say in their report:

> "The results show that the once prevalent view that nuclear is cheaper than coal cannot now be used as a basis for rational decision making by utilities and Governments. This does not mean that coal represents the cheaper option, simply that the uncertainty is great and that under a broad range of assumptions nuclear power is unlikely to offer substantial economic benefits".

Mr. Michael Fallon (Darlington): The House should be clear on this point. The right hon. Gentleman says that he opposes the go-ahead for Sizewell. Will he make it clear what the position of a Labour Government will be if Sizewell has been given the go-ahead? Will Labour cancel it? What will happen to people in my constituency who work at Davy McKee, Whessoe, Darchem and Press Construction, which might be working on the project?

Mr. Orme: I shall deal with the hon. Gentleman's valid point.

The National Coal Board's own evidence on future coal prices was generally accepted by Sir Frank Layfield. He was convinced by the NCB at the time, and noted that

> "the NCB has used these projections as the basis for its own investment decision making".

Since that time the NCB has completely revised its views, and it presented its new projections to the Select Committee on Energy. Since the evidence was presented to the Sizewell inquiry, productivity in the coal industry has increased by 23 per cent. The Central Electricity Generating Board has negotiated a contract with British Coal that provides increasingly cheaper coal for our power stations. There can be no doubt that if the Layfield inquiry were taking place now, different and lower assumptions on oil and coal prices would be used. Assumptions on capital costs would also be different. Sir Frank Layfield accepted the CEGB's assertion that it had got capital costs under control, particularly in relation to Heysham B and Torness. We now know that that is not so. In Heysham B and Torness, as well as every other nuclear power station built in the United Kingdom, there have been substantial over-runs and capital cost increases.

Mr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): I know that my right hon. Friend may not want to say a great deal about Torness, but will he comment on the fact that there are serious difficulties at Torness in relation to safety, which is delaying the commissioning of Torness? Will he give the House an assurance that we oppose the commissioning of Torness and that a whole host of factors follows from those difficulties?

Mr. Orme: I shall be asking the Secretary of State for a statement on the fuelling of Torness and the problems that have arisen. I assure my hon. Friend that I shall pursue those points.

Mr. Dalyell: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Orme: No, I want to continue now.

By the CEGB's own admission, the capital costs have risen by 11 per cent. since it gave its figures to the inquiry and that is even before construction has commenced. The CEGB estimates that the cost to the country is now £1,550 million.

We are dealing with a pressurised water reactor involving imported technology. The design and technology involved in the PWR will not be exportable by Britain. Indeed, the PWR is rapidly becoming out of date technology and the American designers, Westinghouse, are working on an advanced PWR in conjunction with the Japanese.

In the United States, nuclear power is supposed to have been operating on a commercial basis since the early 1960s. However, it still receives a third of all federal subsidies. Last year, *Forbes Magazine*, the United States financial journal concluded:

"nuclear power is an option nobody in their right minds would now consider seriously."

In this country, we are considering buying an American technology which the Americans have rejected. Since 1973, the United States has been cancelling orders for nuclear power stations, including the Westinghouse PWR, not commissioning them. In fact, the United States has not ordered a new PWR in the past 10 years.

Modern coal-fired stations, however, provide an important export market for the United Kingdom. British design and construction of coal-fired stations leads the world market and a most modern advanced station is currently being built in India and is breaking both cost and lead time estimates. It is vital for our power manufacturing industry that the industry is able to use its newest designs, incorporating techniques for cleaner coal burn, in the home market to maintain and expand export potential. Further delays in placing those orders, be they bureaucratic blind alleys or lack of political will, continue to undermine the ability of the power manufacturers to maintain jobs and create wealth for this country.

A similar position exists with regard to the retrofitting of the flue gas desulphurisation in existing coal-fired power stations. Since the Secretary of State for the Environment announced six months ago that a programme of retrofitting was to take place, no action appears to have been taken. Perhaps the Secretary of State can tell us what progress is being made.

It is not simply the power engineering industry that is affected by such decisions. The PWR at Sizewell and the desires of the CEGB to extend that to a family of PWRs throughout the country will have an increasingly detrimental effect on the British mining industry. Britain's mining technology is exported throughout the world. The industry employs more than 80,000 men and women and between 30 per cent. and 50 per cent. of their production is sold abroad because they are able to develop their equipment in the home market. British Coal has operated positive purchasing policies to enable that to happen. Both need to be able to plan ahead. To do that, they need to know that there is an expanding future market for British coal.

The arguments about the jobs potential of Sizewell B are deliberately misleading. We know that coal-fired power stations require more personnel to operate them. We have been told by leading power manufacturers—and I have met many representatives of these manufacturers in recent weeks—by NEI, Babcocks and GEC, that more employment is generated in the construction of coal-fired stations. To increase nuclear power in this country is to displace many thousands of jobs in the mining industry.

The cost to the nation, let alone the social cost to mining communities and others, of further cuts in that industry must be offset against the cost of nuclear power.

Contrary to the Government's propaganda, nuclear power looks increasingly more expensive. That was highlighted by the reports received by many of us this morning from the Council for the Protection of Rural England and the Town and Country Planning Association, among others. How, in those circumstances, can we expect the promised cheaper electricity?

We have been told to look to France as an example of the fulfilment of that promise. The French electricity supply industry is the only one in Western Europe and the United States to have consistently made a trading loss. The 2 billion francs borrowed for its nuclear power programme has made France one of the heaviest borrowers of foreign exchange in the Western world. But has it provided cheaper electricity for consumers? Between 1975 and 1984, electricity prices in Britain doubled; in France, they trebled.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): Does my right hon. Friend agree that Electricité de France is the largest corporate borrower in the world and is largely responsible for the fact that France is the third biggest borrower in the world? That has never been mentioned by the scores of hon. Members who, during the past three years, have been trumpeting cheap French nuclear power.

Mr. Orme: My hon. Friend has underlined graphically the points that I have just made. In France, prices to

[Mr. Orme]

industry are kept artificially low, but prices to domestic consumers are the third highest in Europe and 17 per cent. higher than the average in the United Kingdom. Let us not follow that example.

The inquiry report dismisses other sources of energy, including combined heat and power and the Severn barrage, as not having reached the stage where they can be considered as alternatives. It is vital to the long-term future of our energy resources that the Government give a higher priority to the development of those schemes. As well as stepping up research into all forms of renewable energy resources, a start should be made to the CHP lead city scheme and to the Severn barrage. I welcome the steps that the Government have taken recently to put more money into the Severn barrage, but we need much more investment in the alternatives.

We have always argued that energy policy should not be based solely on narrow economic criteria. The Government have always argued that that is a sound basis for deciding the future of our energy resources. It would be extraordinary if they did not apply the same stringent balance sheet approach to the nuclear industry as they have consistently applied to mining, steel and shipbuilding.

During the past 30 years, nuclear energy has received a total Government investment more than 40 per cent. greater than that given to coal. But coal and other energy industries must shoulder the burden of their own research and development. Only the nuclear industry has a separate account for part of its research and development, yet, despite the Government's investment, it proposes to import nuclear technology. The construction of the PWR would not only have no economic benefits, it would have serious side effects on jobs in other sectors of British manufacturing, especially in coal mining. On the Government's narrow criteria, the case for Sizewell B is not proven.

But the decision on Sizewell B cannot be based only on those criteria. Having considered the economic case, a judgment must be made on whether the risks involved in an extension of nuclear power outweigh the benefits. Layfield is on less secure ground here, even in his now out-of-date report. At one stage, he comments:

"there is no such thing as absolute safety. Experience has shown that accidents will happen."

As the world knows, accidents can and do happen. Layfield was unable to take into account the ramifications of the Chernobyl incident in the Soviet Union. I must put these points to the Secretary of State, because the public are asking questions to which we demand an answer. Has he raised that omission with Sir Frank Layfield? Did he at any time seek a reopening of the inquiry? Has Sir Frank Layfield corresponded with him on this issue and, if so, will he make that correspondence available? It is extraordinary that Sir Frank Layfield should spend four and a half years on a report, yet a major disaster in the Soviet Union is not taken into account by the inquiry. At the very least, the inquiry should have been recalled to deal with that.

I accept that safety in the British nuclear industry is as good as any in the world. Undoubtedly, engineering expertise can minimise the risk, but no superiority of design can write out human error. Sir Frank concluded:

"the evidence on human factors shows that the effect of human error on safety is potentially large. There are no reliable methods yet for quantifying human error. Research and development work is in progress and some such methods should be devised for use in the future."

Is it not vital that "some such methods" are devised before a judgment is made and that they are not left to some time in the future? The evidence of the Three Mile Island incident, which was studied by the inquiry, only goes to prove that the potential for human error cannot be ignored or shunted aside, but must play a considerable part in reaching a decision.

That is not the only area of safety considerations that the report leaves open-ended or up in the air. No preconstruction safety report has yet been submitted to the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate, despite the fact that the Select Committee on Energy recommended — it was accepted by the Government — that the site licence should be given by the NII before the inquiry. The NII still cannot grant that licence. Layfield recommends that the preconstruction safety report be published. Can the Secretary of State give us any idea — if not today, certainly soon—whether that will be the case, when we might expect it and whether he will make a decision in the absence of such a publication and licence? The House is entitled to that information.

Sir Eldon Griffiths (Bury St. Edmunds): Those of us who live in the vicinity of Sizewell and have wrestled with the matter would like the right hon. Gentleman's advice on this issue. Since the French pressurised water reactors on the Channel coast could present us with a problem of nuclear safety, how would it reduce the risks of nuclear accident in this country if the Labour party abolished PWR here?

Mr. Orme: Our point is that the PWR has not been constructed in Britain, so if we did not proceed, at least it is an element of safety. Unfortunately, we can do nothing about the French development, but at least we would be drawing to the attention of the world the fact that such a development is unnecessary. In an energy-rich nation such as Britain, it is certainly unnecessary.

Sir Frank Layfield seems to be prepared to leave the decisions on safety to the CEGB and the NII. He places "great importance on the NII's role in monitoring the development and implementation of the quality assurance programme for Sizewell B."

But, on the inspectorate's own admission, the business of assessing the safety of new nuclear projects is well behind schedule because it is understaffed. Giving evidence to the Select Committee on Energy in January, Mr. Eddie Ryder, Her Majesty's chief inspector of nuclear installations, said:

"Our priority is the safety of operating installations. For those being designed or under construction we face a choice of reducing our standards or delaying the work. We chose to keep up the standards and delay the new projects."

The question that we must ask the Secretary of State and the Government is why the inspectorate is understaffed at a time such as this when there is public concern.

What steps are the Government taking, prior to making their decision on Sizewell, to ensure that the NII can fulfil its crucial role of monitoring the safety of existing plants?

Layfield makes important recommendations with regard to operator training and safety, military security and increased research into the effects of radiation on the public and workers. He recommends:

"fuel loading shall not start until at least one year after a simulator for Sizewell B has been installed and is ready for use by training operators."

Such training is obviously necessary, and the fact that it must be done for 12 months will affect the cost. The danger is clear if Layfield accords training such priority. Later, he recommends:

"the Secretary of State for Defence should consider whether there are practicable means of reducing the number of breaches of the Provost Marshal's ban on military flights within a defined air space around the Sizewell site."

Layfield urges:

"the NII should satisfy itself that the possibility of both generators being out of synchronism with each other and with the grid would not give rise to an intolerable risk".

None of those precautions is necessary for a coal-fired power station.

When assessing the evidence of radiological risks to the public and workers at the plant, Sir Frank Layfield recommends further co-ordinated and analysed studies to be made. The inadequate OPCS report, which was put in the Library last week, is an even more convincing reason for the research to be undertaken as a matter of urgency. My hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) will deal with that if he catches your eye, Mr. Speaker.

These and the many other recommendations made by the Sizewell B inquiry report must be accepted and acted upon if the Government make the ill-judged decision to proceed.

Would it not be better, safer and more economically sound not to have to pursue these drastic measures? The Government need not pursue them if the political concentration was not to further weaken the markets for coal. All this was before the Chernobyl disaster. How much more stringent would Sir Frank's safety recommendations be if he could take evidence on the effects of that disaster? The Chernobyl accident took place 1,600 miles away and almost 12 months ago, but our farming communities are still suffering the after effects. The world has realised that nuclear power is rightly called an unforgiving technology. To ignore the risks is to ignore the effects on present generations and generations to come.

Sir Frank concluded that Sizewell B should be built only:

"providing that there is expected to be economic benefit sufficient to justify the risks incurred."

Nobody believes any longer that that remains the case. The economics have changed and the probabilities of safety have changed. Public acceptability has certainly changed. In a caveat to his recommendations, Sir Frank Layfield stated:

"consent should not be given for building Sizewell B unless the risk is confidently expected to be at or below a broadly set level of tolerability. The level of tolerability should so far as practicable reflect the public's views".

Out latest estimate of the public's view is that two thirds oppose any increase in nuclear power. The public do not believe that the risks are worth taking.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): As the right hon. Gentleman is now talking about nuclear power in general, I wonder whether he could enlighten the House on a related and important matter. What would be the stance of his party, if it came into government, on existing contracts for reprocessing at Sellafield and on future contracts? The House needs an answer to that question.

Mr. Orme: The Labour party has published its policy, which is clear for all to see. We are debating Sizewell B and I am restricting my remarks to that. My party's policy is absolutely clear.

Mr. Forman: Let us hear it, then.

Mr. Orme: The hon. Gentleman can read it. If he does not have a copy, I shall send him one.

On all the criteria—on economic grounds, on safety grounds—the case against Sizewell B is the strongest. For the Government to go ahead would be to fly in the face of all rational assessments of our future needs. We urge the Government to reject the recommendations of the Layfield report. If they decide to go ahead, we shall reverse that decision. To end delays, we will strengthen our electricity generating capacity by giving the go-ahead for a programme of modern, clean coal-fired stations. That is the case that I put before the House on behalf of the Labour party.

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It is a bit churlish to criticise the Secretary of State, because he said that he would listen to the House. My point of order concerns the treatment of the House. Is it not ludicrous to be asked to have rational and informed debate without the latest predictions about 1990 to 2000, which exist in the Department of Energy, and which are substantially different from the projections which Layfield had? I am not blaming the Layfield committee in any way——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That cannot be a point of order for the Chair. I know that the hon. Gentleman is anxious to take part in the debate, and those are just the type of arguments which he should raise if he is called.

4.16 pm

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, the Layfield report is a painstaking and thorough document. There have been criticisms that its terms of reference were too wide. I do not agree. It is helpful and valuable to have such a comprehensive and detailed report which is such a massively studious and expert document. It provides a good start for the House to hold a debate on this important issue.

The arguments that the right hon. Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) advanced have been made informally outside the House and are quite familiar. They are that the Layfield report is outdated, although the right hon. Gentleman acknowledges its thoroughness. He made two groups of charges on that score. One relates to the outcome of Chernobyl and the lessons that we should draw from it, and the other relates to the changed economics, the evolution of oil and coal prices since March 1985, and whether they do not undermine the Layfield arguments in some way.

I should also like to explore a third set of considerations —conservation and other forms of investment and the inevitable inflexibility of huge 10-year investment, during which time many things can change. Before we give this gigantic project an affirmative or negative view, we must understand the advantages and dangers of that inflexibility.

Chernobyl was a major disaster and of extreme concern to the entire human race. It must be understood, however, what we were looking at and what the Russians were dealing with. We were lucky in that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State had the opportunity of a close examination of the Chernobyl affair and, unusually, the Soviet authorities decided to be extremely explicit and set out the nature of the problem and what went wrong.

[Mr. David Howell]

The first point for the House to understand and for the right hon. Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) to accept, which I am sure he will, is that in the case of Chernobyl we are looking not at pressurised water reactors but at an entirely different generation of pressure tube reactors, which grew from military developments and were rejected by all Western countries four decades ago. In the Western world there is no civil nuclear reactor in any way related to the technology which the Soviet military authorities used and later handed to their civil engineers to build pressure tube reactors.

As the House now knows, the feature of pressure tube reactors is that they are unstable below 700 MW. The theory of the Soviet authorities was that instructions to human beings were sufficient to ensure that the reactors were never run below 700 MW. That theory with its reliance on human error has never been applied at any point in Magnox or AGR or any other design in the West. In other words, we build nothing like the Chernobyl reactor.

I do not minimise the horror of what happened at Chernobyl, but those who see a comparison between the design of Chernobyl and the design of existing, let alone future nuclear reactors of the kind proposed for Sizewell and possibly elsewhere, are making a comparison between two completely unlike and separate technologies, systems of engineering and scientific patterns of development. That is my view of Chernobyl. It justifies us being concerned about Chernobyl, but it should not lead us to believe that it invalidates the argument for Sizewell.

Mr. Alexander Eadie (Midlothian): I am trying to follow the right hon. Gentleman's argument. He says that the Russian reactor is a different type and that there is no comparable reactor in the United Kingdom. Surely the right hon. Gentleman must agree that one factor emerges —that civil nuclear power is an unforgiving technology. Sizewell B has not yet been built and his argument about it requires a little bit of elaboration. On the one hand we have an unforgiving technology and on the other we have a proposed nuclear reactor which has not yet been built.

Mr. Howell: I do not think that this debate will allow time for the elaboration that all these complex issues require. The technology at Chernobyl grew from a pressure tube military technology of 40 years ago that was abandoned by the Americans, the British and the whole of the West more than four decades ago. The comparison does not stand.

The second major charge laid by the right hon. Member for Salford, East and by many people is not a matter of party politics but one that we must try to examine dispassionately. It is the matter of economics. With the building of more nuclear stations are we heading towards cheaper electricity or will it become more expensive? If that were the case we would be foolish to ask taxpayers to do what business men would not do—invest over 10 years in an enormous project for a lower payback than might be obtained from other kinds of investment.

The first question to be addressed is how much weight we put on the variations in fossil fuel prices. At the time the Layfield committee was set up or even since it concluded the oil price first dropped through the floor and then came roaring up again. No one has the slightest clue about how oil prices will shape over the next five or ten years. The oil companies have always been spectacularly wrong. In 1979 they predicted that by now we would have $50 or $60 oil barrels, but we have no such thing. The estimates are heroic but nearly always wildly out or thwarted by events.

To a lesser extent the same is potentially true of coal. In the free market in Rotterdam coal is changing hands for about $30. I think that the CEGB is paying up to twice that to the British coal industry and that price could go higher or lower. With great respect to the right hon. Member for Salford, East one cannot base a technology and commitments that will last 10, 20, 30 or even 40 years on very temporary and largely unpredictable trends in fossil fuel prices.

The reason why I feel confident to recommend that the right hon. Gentleman should ignore those trends is that in a sense his case is in a plate in front of him. There will be more coal-fired power stations. Everyone knows that more coal-fired stations will be built in Britain and all round the world. As long as British coal is competitive with imported coal, is of high quality — which it is — and is mined efficiently—which in most cases it is—there will be an excellent future for the British coal industry, our mining communities and for our deep-mined coal technologists.

When the right hon. Gentleman puts up the case for coal he is not putting down the case for nuclear power. All he is saying, and most people will agree with him, is that we will continue to have a substantial coal-fired electricity generating capacity. The question that he and all of us have to address is how heavily in the 1990s and thereafter do we want to rely for our electricity supply on coal. Do we want the 80 per cent. reliance we have had in the past or have we not learned some bitter lessons from that? Regardless of party, most people would say that we have indeed learned some bitter lessons and that prudence dictates a more balanced electricity generating capacity in future.

We need a certain proportion of nuclear power— possibly somewhat higher than we have now and perhaps nearer the German or Japanese levels, as well as a substantial, efficient coal generating capacity. Oil and natural gas will possibly be burnt in power stations and we may have the more diverse technologies which my right hon. Friend the Minister has mentioned. These will make for a better balanced future generating capacity. Coal has a place in it, but so has nuclear power.

If we are to expand our nuclear capacity somewhat, which is essential, how should we do it? The price tag for the pressurised water reactor is now £1,550 million. I am advised that a second one would not carry launch costs and would be substantially cheaper. I take the view that it could be very much cheaper still. I should not like anyone to attribute to me the view that I endorse all the costs that arise from the CEGB's operations. Britain still builds and operates power stations too expensively.

I am not entirely convinced that a gigantic, centralised organisation like the CEGB is the ideal format for electricity generation for the next 20 years. The Japanese electricity supply industry has 13 per cent. more staff but produces three times as much power for two and a half times as many customers. Perhaps we can get many more efficiencies and larger cost reductions from building the next nuclear power station than the £300 million that has been mentioned.

On the overall economics, it is not possible for the right hon. Gentleman to take the trends of the past two years

in either coal, oil or natural gas prices and build up a gigantic case for the next 10 or 20 years which says that the Layfield argument is wrong. If we are to have a balanced supply we need more nuclear power. Perhaps not the 40:1 ratio that Layfield recommends, but it is likely that nuclear power stations, if built and operated efficiently, will produce cheaper electricity. If that is true we would be crazy not to have an expanded nuclear element in our power supply.

Finally I should like to speak about the whole question of inflexibility. Is it right for us to go nowadays for giant investments that take 10 years to produce any payback, or should we look at small operations and investments of the kind that are employed in some of the American utilities? They are much quicker to build and because of that can be financed by the private market. There is much less risk involved if, while they are being built, the whole demand pattern changes. There is room for these developments, but they do not exclude further nuclear power. We shall see more 10-hour-a-day gas turbines being built in the United States. They can supplement the base load which has to be provided by nuclear power and coal and will continue to do so.

It is interesting to note how daily electricity demand in Britain has changed even in the past five years. There are now fewer sharp peaks and a greater opportunity, on top of the base load of fixed stations, to have smaller turbines coming into action for about 10 hours a day. I share with my right hon. Friend an enthusiasm for alternatives such as wind, wave and sun power, but they will be unable to provide the 8,000 to 17,000 additional MW about which we are talking for the next 15 years, although they can and should make a contribution.

Perhaps we should have another switching station. I was able to authorise one at Sellindge in 1981. When all the lines are working, that will bring in 2,000 MW a day of French electricity. I do not know what the price is to the French, but it is certainly much cheaper to us. The French have surpluses, and while we should not rely on them for ever, perhaps we should invest another £380 million for those 2,000 MW as that is considerably cheaper than building our own power stations.

When all those things have been done, we shall need very big stations to provide the base load, and I believe that such stations will have to be a mixture of coal and nuclear, whether the industry is publicly or privately owned.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Does the right hon. Gentleman believe that a privately owned and privately financed electricity industry would embark upon the Sizewell project without subsidy or guarantee?

Mr. Howell: I have studied the economics of the Kansai Electric Company in western Japan, which is building something very similar to the Sizewell plant, although with certain elaborations. It is doing so with private finance and without subsidy. Therefore, perhaps our private system could do so as well.

It has been argued that if our electricity supply industry was private it would never again build nuclear, but I do not think that that argument stands up, as many private utilities around the world—although not at present in America—are now doing so.

Nuclear power in the West has proved by its record that it is as safe as most forms of power generation. In fact, it is very much safer than many other forms of power generation. It is a sad fact that, tragically, deaths occur in our usually very safe mining industry. It is also a sad fact that hydro-electric dams come to bits and are destroyed. Someone told me the other day that 50 had collapsed in the last 50 years. Therefore, they are not very very safe either.

Of course there are risks. There is no such thing as total safety, but there is such a thing as efficient and total containment of any accidents that occur. I believe that our nuclear industry and nuclear engineers are fully able to deliver that level of safety.

Mr. Tony Speller (Devon, North): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Howell: I am just about to finish as I know that many other hon. Members wish to speak.

My conclusion is that while we should be cautious about the economics, it is right to go ahead and build the PWR at Sizewell now. That will give us a better balance, better economics and a safer supply of electricity to old and young, industry and the nation, for many years to come.

4.33 pm

Mr. David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): While agreeing with some of the observations of the right hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) in respect of some of the alternatives that the Department of Energy should be pursuing, I nevertheless flatly disagree with his conclusion. I want to look principally at the economic and safety arguments.

Sir Frank Layfield was asked to make his report on the three principal questions of national policy, the economic benefits of the PWR, and whether it was necessary and whether it was safe. At the time the CEGB argued that its justification for the reactor was largely on the grounds of anticipated cost savings rather than capacity requirements. The board has subsequently changed its position to the one that has just been argued by the right hon. Member for Guildford — that the PWR is required on the grounds of anticipated shortfall in capacity. It bases this change of view on an unexpected rise in electricity demand.

Therefore, in coming to his decision, the Secretary of State must first look at the record of the industry in forecasting demand. I have in front of me the table of forecasts which the CEGB has given to the public from 1967 to 1979 which cover the years 1973 to 1986. I shall not weary the House with all the detailed figures, but throughout that time the CEGB's record on forecasting has contained an average error of 26 per cent. These errors have always been over-estimates in demand. Frankly, errors of that scale make opinion polling look like an exact science in comparison. I do not believe that we can possibly rest our case on the industry's track record in forecasting demand.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) mentioned Torness. I took a particular interest in that inquiry because of my constituency interests in that project. In the public inquiry in 1974, the South of Scotland Electricity Board predicted a 6 per cent. growth in demand per annum. By 1980, it was possible to assess just how accurate that had been, and our own Select Committee pointed out that the real figure had been 1 per cent. In response to that Select Committee report, the

[Mr. David Steel]

SSEB revised its forward estimates to 1·75 per cent. growth per annum, yet in the six years since then the growth has been only 2·2 per cent. over the whole period.

As parliamentarians we are entitled to say that the industry's forecasting record is not one on which we can possibly base a case for making this investment decision now.

But even if we accept that, contrary to all previous experience, the board has got it right this time, I would still argue that constructing a PWR is a wholly inappropriate response. Load management and electricity-specific energy conservation would reduce demand more quickly than new capacity of any kind could be constructed and at less cost. I was cheered by the Secretary of State's reference to, and acknowledgment of, the scope for still further conservation measures. That is absolutely correct. There is now an abundance of evidence from the United States that this is by far the most attractive priority. More recently, the Norwegian electricity industry has found that it is cheaper to reduce demand than to build new capacity.

Here this House has responsibility, because in my view it is simply the rigidity of the CEGB's statutory basis and its institutional obsession with new power station construction that prevents it from taking full advantage of these opportunities. Were we to change the statutory requirements of the CEGB from providing electricity at the cheapest price to making the most economically effective use of its fuel and capital resources, that would go a long way towards allowing British electricity consumers, both industrial and domestic, access to the benefits that are already available in other countries.

In any case, if new capacity were to be required at relatively short notice, new nuclear capacity is surely the least attractive option. That is particularly true if, as the board is now proposing, that new nuclear option is of a design of which it has no previous experience, either in construction or operation.

I accept the point made by the right hon. Member for Guildford about the prudence in public policy of achieving a variety of supply. That is the basic weakness of the Labour party's case. It wants to take us back to a position in which we are over-dependent on coal production, despite the history of that sector.

Our first national priority should be to implement life extension programmes at some of our existing fossil fuel power stations. If we introduced a programme of rewiring generators, repiping boilers and reblading turbines, the life of those existing stations could be extended, their efficiency and economic performance could be improved, and in our view a regular programme of much-needed employment could be directed to the British electricity supply industry. I am not talking about new stations but about revamping what we have already.

The second priority should be to implement a programme of combined heat and power generation. We should insist that the CEGB implements the provisions of the Energy Act 1983 and allows more privately generated electricity to be supplied to the grid. Nothing so much displays the contempt of the board for the interests of the consumers or the wishes of Parliament as its failure to take advantage of the opportunities that we created by that legislation, or for that matter its current decision to sell off the sites that could be available for combined heat and power. I understand that at present there are 64 disused sites, of which 19 have been demolished and 33 are up for sale. Surely, as a matter of national policy we should be arguing that combined heat and power must have a far greater part in our programme.

The right hon. Member for Guildford paid lip service to this, but we are in danger of under-estimating the potential of new energy sources, such as the tidal barrages. As with other major projects, I accept that there must be environmental impact assessments. These are going on at the moment, especially on the Severn and the Mersey. Their capacity for producing power at low cost, although not admittedly in great volume, could be immense. More important, barrage schemes could and should by now have provided considerable new technology with export potential for this country.

It is only after all those measures have been taken that any new centralised generating capacity of any sort should be considered and authorised as a sensible forward investment. Neither I nor the alliance adopt, a flat earth policy to the nuclear industry. We accept that it is possible that in future an energy gap may come up. That is why we continue to support the industry's research and development. We believe that in the immediate future there is no need for further commercial expansion of nuclear power production. Therefore, we would not proceed with this proposal.

The Layfield report's dismissal of the conservation and combined heat and power arguments is rather cursory. Sir Frank Layfield seems to have wholly misunderstood the attempts that have been made to compare public investment in conservation with that in new supply, regarding the former as some sort of public subsidy. He also assumes that there is no competition for capital and that money is available for any worthwhile investment. It is instructive for the House to note the recent report of the Comptroller and Auditor-General in which he said that energy management schemes in the National Health Service with a payback period of only two years were being stalled for lack of resources. That seems a short-sighted saving within the Health Service.

It is now widely accepted that the Layfield assessments of costs and benefits have been superseded by events since the ending of the inquiry. Although I accept the view of the right hon. Member for Guildford that the changes, for example in coal prices, may be temporary, nevertheless we must look at the balance sheet that was put in the suggested costings in the report as against what has happened since. Changes in the forecast of future coal prices and the rise in the real capital cost of the PWR have transformed a potential net benefit of £500 million over the life of the plant into a potential net loss of about the same range or even up to £1,300 million.

The Central Electricity Generating Board has already agreed that the capital cost has increased by 11 per cent. in a year. That alone, on the Layfield report's calculations, will reduce the economic benefits of the PWR to near zero.

The assumed world coal price in the year 2000 was $75 a tonne, yet British Coal, quite apart from forecasting a world coal price of around $40 a tonne, is also stating its intention not to produce coal at any price above about $60 a tonne. Its plans schedule any pit operating at above that price level for closure. To have one section of our energy industry operating on that assumption while another operates on a much higher long-term price level cannot be right. Surely some judgment must be made by the Department of Energy.

The report's assumptions acknowledges that there is a one in four chance that the PWR would lose money. I would argue, that on those revised figures, the balance now tips precisely against the PWR when compared with any of the other alternatives, including electricity.

The overwhelming probability is that, even if the PWR were built on time—that is a feat that has not yet been managed for any British reactor—and even if its capital costs do not increase further, contrary to almost any previous experience anywhere else in the world, and its availability over its lifetime is as promised, it will still prove to be a burden and not a benefit to the electricity consumer.

The obvious course that the Government should adopt if they really believe in the economics of the PWR, is to do what they have done with the Channel tunnel and other major developments and that is to say, "All right. Let us invite private participation in the enterprise." The Government put great faith in the market place and the PWR. If the Government had the courage of their convictions, they would let one be the test of the other. [*Interruption.*] That is not Liberal policy. The Government will not do that either. But if the Government had the courage of their convictions, that is the logic of the case that they would put.

The Layfield report and its conclusions have been rather misrepresented. He says:

"I was not able to base my conclusions on a final safety case for Sizewell B, as none was submitted."

Since the primary purpose of the whole inquiry was to assess the safety arguments and reassure the public, that is a rather startling omission. There were repeated ministerial promises and promises by the nuclear installations inspectorate that the final safety case would be available before the inquiry was completed. Of course, that was not available, and it is still not available.

The question that I hoped that the Secretary of State might have mentioned, although perhaps he will when he replies, is: when will the departmental decision be taken in relation to the forthcoming nuclear installations inspectorate report? I am assuming that no decision will be taken until after that report is received. Yet, we have already been told, and the Select Committee was told only last month, that the nuclear installations inspectorate, as the official Opposition spokesman, the right hon. Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme), mentioned, has not been fully staffed at any point in the past five years and that it failed to complete the 20-year safety reviews of the magnox power stations on time. Indeed, two of the 24-year-old stations have still not been completed, and the inspectorate has failed to provide the Sizewell inquiry with the assessment of the safety case.

That is an important matter and not one that we can simply shrug aside. It is just as well that we are debating this on the Adjournment and not as a formal motion. I do not see how we could because the House would not be in a position to come to a conclusion until that report was available.

The quotation in the report that particularly worries me is:

"the quantitative assessment of risk from Sizewell B has a high degree of uncertainty".

The report also states that the safety criterion

"has not been fully justified".

Here I come to the Chernobyl question. Since Chernobyl there have been studies in the Oak Ridge laboratories in the United States which suggest that we might expect a major accident on the scale of Three Mile Island or Chernobyl once in seven years in western Europe, or once in 15 years in eastern Europe.

What disturbed me most about the Chernobyl episode at the time that the facts and figures came out was that the Soviet scientists and, indeed, Soviet Ministers, had given the figure to the Soviet public at the time of the construction of Chernobyl of the possibility of an accident once in 10,000 years. That was precisely the same figure that was used by the Americans in the case of Three Mile Island. Therefore, despite the complete difference between the two, that I wholly accept, the basic risk figures for those relative populations, with different technologies, were precisely the same basis.

Mr. David Howell: It is not only different technologies. At Three Mile Island no one died. Therefore, there is also a total difference, in circumstance which the right hon. Gentleman should bear in mind.

Mr. Steel: I accept that, but I am talking about risk factors which are a matter of legitimate public concern. The same figure, once in 10,000 years, was given in the Soviet Union and in the United States for entirely different technologies. I have just quoted to the House the latest assessments given by the laboratory in the United States.

We can all argue to what extent we allow risk to the population, but one thing cannot be disputed is that since the Chernobyl incident, the costs built into the project for insurance have multiplied. The estimate I received is of a tenfold increase. That increase has arisen since the Layfield costings were done. Therefore, it is an additional cost factor that must be updated and put into the accounts.

In these circumstances the principal conclusion to which Sir Frank Layfield came was worded somewhat obscurely, or ambiguously. He said:

"there should be good confidence that Sizewell B, if built, would be sufficienty safe to be tolerable, provided that there is expected to be economic benefit sufficient to justify the risks incurred."

I read that statement over and over again. It is a statement that is in danger of achieving circularity. If it has any meaning it is to suggest that if economic benefits are sufficiently large to justify the risks, the reactor should be sufficiently safe to be tolerable. In other words, some risks are acceptable only if the economic benefits are sufficiently large. If follows that if there are no economic benefits, as I believe, the risks are not tolerable. Since it is now clear that the purported economic benefits will not materialise, had Sir Frank Layfield been aware of the subsequent factors, it is at least arguable that he would have been compelled by his logic to find against the PWR on safety grounds alone.

There have been several questions to the Secretary of State, one only last week from my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), about the Government's review of emergency and safety procedures in the light of Chernobyl. The Secretary of State answered all those questions by saying that he was still in a quasi-judicial capacity; so could not give the House the information sought. That is a little disturbing, because pre-Chernobyl the United Kingdom's emergency plans provided logistic arrangements to evacuate a maximum radius around nuclear power stations of one and a half miles. In the United States the plans cover a radius of 10 miles. However, in the Soviet Union evacuation of the

[Mr. Steel]

civilian population had to take place up to 90 miles from the power station. It is important that we know at some time, if it is not possible now, what the Government's revised planning is and what its cost implications are. That, too, is post-Layfield and must be included in the figures.

My colleagues in Somerset county council told me that when they put forward their new emergency plans for Hinkley Point, the CEGB refused to co-operate in extending the area covered by the plans. At some point the Government must make clear their view on that position, and the extra costs involved.

The report has gone some way towards clarifying the public debate about PWR generation. Our alliance parties are certainly not convinced of the case for it on either economic or safety grounds. The disposal of nuclear waste and emergency procedures are far from clear. Therefore, we see no case for ordering Sizewell B nor for proceeding with similar reactors at Druridge bay or Hinkley Point. Given that opposition, my conclusion and advice to the Secretary of State is that it would be highly irresponsible to proceed with Sizewell B in advance of a general election.

4.52 pm

Sir John Osborn (Sheffield, Hallam): The Sizewell B inquiry has taken an inordinate length of time, but it has achieved two purposes. First, it has dealt with the installation of a PWR, redesigned by the CEGB with safety in mind. It has taken in the lessons of Three Mile Island and the experience of the operation of PWRs in other countries. Secondly, the inquiry has dealt with the suitability of Sizewell B as a site for the first reactor of this type in Britain.

As a member of a Council of Europe committee that has visited installations in France and elsewhere, I have been given the impression that our procedures tend to make us the laughing stock in other countries. Nevertheless, given that we have these procedures, I congratulate Sir Frank Layfield on completing a tremendous, almost impossible, task and on the way in which he has presented his findings. However, I genuinely wonder whether public inquiries of this type are the best way to tackle such difficult, complex technological and environmental issues. I hope that the Government will look into that. I read with interest Sir Frank Layfield's comments on the successor station to Sizewell B.

I spoke in the debate on Chernobyl. At that time the cost of energy to industry and energy strategy seemed vital issues. Indeed, they have been my study and interest. I am well aware that, in the late 1960s and early 1970s when I was a member of the Science and Technology Select Committee under the chairmanship of the late Mr. Airey Neave, it advocated the development of the steam-generated, heavy-water reactor. At that time I was among those who felt that others were too far ahead of this country in the development of the PWR reactor and that Britain should pursue another type. Since then—15 to 20 years ago—the PWR has proved itself.

The public debate on the Chernobyl accident went wider than this country and I have come across it in the Council of Europe. Perhaps the fear is the fear of not knowing what radioactivity is. The challenge suggested at a meeting in Berne was to let laymen know how it is measured. Such terms as sieverts and curies mean little to him. The measurement of radioactivity in simple terms so that the man in the street can understand it is a challenge.

My approach to the Chernobyl debate was international. In 1955 I was with the Westinghouse team, admittedly for odd industrial reasons, selling the PWR. That was at the first Atoms for Peace conference in Geneva. Since then a large number of PWRs have been brought into operation throughout the world and 75 per cent. of France's electricity is generated by the PWR. I am certain that the hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie) remembers replying to a Western European Union debate for me when I was the rapporteur on the subject of Europe's capacity for building reactors. The trouble is that Britain did not move with the rest of Europe at that time.

There are 318 PWRs in the world. In France there are 43 in operation and 14 more under construction. All this nonsense—to other countries—about Sizewell justifies some of the comment that I have had from those who have led the way. There is the syndrome that nuclear energy, whether nuclear-fired electricity generation or low-level or high-level nuclear waste disposal, is fine but not in one's back garden. I very much hope the Secretaries of State for Energy and the Environment will arrange financial incentives, perhaps for local communities, so that rates are low where people are affected by this problem.

I have been worried about the impact of energy costs in Britain. The National Economic Development Office has been involved and there have been representations from many industries led by Lord Gregson. If energy prices in general and electricity prices in particular are available to our competitive industries at lower prices, because of the reduced cost of production, our industries will be at a disadvantage.

It must be appreciated that the French will have surplus electricity generating capacity which they can produce and sell well below Britain's prices. It alarms me that at present this country wishes to attract melting and smelting from other countries, including the United Kingdom, to France on those grounds. That is an entirely different story from that put forward by the right hon. Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme).

Mr. Hardy: The hon. Gentleman has made a serious point for our area. Does he accept that the British Government should not sit idly by and see British industrial capacity wiped out because French nuclear electricity prices are so low that we cannot compete? Moreover, they are low simply because the receipts of Electricité de France do not match the loan charges which it must meet.

Sir John Osborn: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, which was exactly the same as his intervention in the debate on the Second Reading Coal Industry Bill. As the hon. Gentleman knows, I am concerned about the steel industry of the United Kingdom and, specifically, Sheffield. After the announcement of redundancies at United Engineering Steels at Stocksbridge last month I wrote to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and the chairman of the Trade and Industry Select Committee asking them to ensure that Britain does not operate at an unfair disadvantage to other countries. I hope that both of them will take up that matter, and I will send the Secretary of State for Energy copies of the correspondence.

Lord Marshall and others, including successive chairmen of the British Steel Corporation, have said that electric arc steel melting, for instance, let alone other forms of steel melting, have become progressively less competitive because of the high cost of electricity. My theory is that the special steels industry has been too dependent on coal-fired electricity from high cost deep-mined coal, particularly in Yorkshire, and that that has been the real reason for the closures in Sheffield.

Last week Parliament had the privilege of hearing a presentation by Gavin Laird who spoke of the need for a thriving manufacturing sector, for expanding the market for our goods and for advocating new technology. He also reminded us that today Britain is importing more manufactured goods than it exports. Finally, he stressed the importance of new industries and our nuclear industry.

I have been asked what would have been the consequence if Sir Frank Layfield had recommended that the pressure water reactor, such as envisaged at Sizewell B, should not go ahead. What would have happened if a Secretary of State for Energy had then supported that recommendation? One thing is certain—Great Britain would have to close down a new technology industry which could give opportunities for employment and jobs, and export opportunities at a time when so many industries have had to face contractions. It would mean that the cost of electricity for industrial, let alone domestic users, would rise.

Last year the right hon. Member for Salford, East proposed a motion at Cambridge that

"This House should halt the nuclear power programme."

I opposed that motion, for some of the reasons that I have outlined. One thing is certain — if there had been a Labour Minister, regardless of the Layfield report, I doubt whether any new nuclear power stations would be built in this country now. I doubt whether existing power stations would be kept in operation, regardless of the consequences.

Not going ahead with a nuclear power programme would affect the lives of our children and grandchildren. It would reduce the availability, and raise the price, of electrical energy, which is of vital importance to our factories.

Nuclear energy as a practical concept is barely 50 years old. I read quantum physics at Cambridge 45 years ago and I have always supported the concept that the development of a nuclear power programme would last at least 100 years. In 50 years time the finite resources of oil, gas and cheap coal, particularly in Britain, will be less plentiful.

The Secretary of State, in a speech entitled "Energy for the next generation: the impending challenge", given in June last year, stressed that the availability of energy was the very foundation of the world economy. He said that we must ask ourselves about the abandonment of a nuclear programme. All wise people must ask that question. I have confidence in a Secretary of State who is prepared to say that, and I welcome the fact that the next phase in the development of a tidal project on the Severn is now being financed and considered.

The Secretary of State also reminded us that the provision of nuclear energy for mankind has its challenges and dangers. One of the characteristics of Britain and its people is that they are very good at knowing why something should not be done, whatever that may be, and then allowing our competitors, particularly from Japan and the United States, to jump ahead of them.

Each energy option for the future produces its own environmental hazards and safety problems. Acid rain from conventional coal-fired stations is an example. Nuclear-fired power stations creat a different challenge.

The CEGB has stated what it will be doing next. It has in mind, for the turn of the century, three to five pressure water reactors and two to four coal-fired power stations, probably on the south coast and possibly using British coal. Seven sites are available for nuclear power development.

I come from the main mining area of Britain — Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire—and I am concerned that the price of £42 a tonne, which the CEGB pays for coal, is uncompetitive against world prices. World prices have fallen by 55 per cent. since 1981 whereas British prices have come down by only 10 per cent. British Coal will have to drop its price by over 50 per cent. to be competitive. That is the reality on the other side of the argument and the House must face it.

I support the Secretary of State's resolution over the last year, and his approach to the question of the availability of energy, particularly electrical energy since the Chernobyl disaster. I accept that he has to make a decision and to listen to a debate in the other place as well. I welcome in principle the Layfield recommendations and I hope that the Secretary of State will endorse them, although I know that he cannot do that today.

This nation must take the next steps to ensure more competitive electrical energy for the future. The country should look to the next century and to the provision of energy for our children and future generations. Britain must have energy, at prices which are competitive with those available elsewhere in the world and we must bear in mind the unreliability of liquid and gaseous fossil fuels and perhaps the finite nature of solid fossil fuels.

5.6 pm

Mr. Jack Thompson (Wansbeck): This is probably one of the most important energy debates in the history of the House—certainly in the last 40 or 50 years. The inquiry was established because of the lack of public confidence in the nuclear industry and the need for the Government and the CEGB to restore and encourage confidence in the industry. That exercise has not succeeded. The inquiry was based upon a local planning issue and the proposal to build a power generating plant in rural Suffolk, but superimposed upon that was the question of the PWR development, a comparatively new concept for the generation of electricity in the United Kingdom.

The use of PWRs has caused more consternation worldwide than any other form of power generation. The Layfield report notes that when the first power station was built in Britain there was not the same interest or protest that there is today. That is understandable. In the 1930s we did not understand about developing nuclear power stations or about the problems that might arise. Thirty years later, in the 1950s, people take a completely different view of the problems caused by electrical generation using nuclear methods. People are more aware. Even before Chernobyl people were more concious of the problems. People's awareness of the environment, the safety aspects and the costs involved in nuclear power stations has been enhanced.

[Mr. Jack Thompson]

It is difficult for hon. Members to fully understand the implications of the inquiry, which runs to eight volumes. I should be surprised if any hon. Member has read all of them.

We must consider what practical steps can be taken in the interests of the population. More confidence would have been engendered by the inquiry if those who objected to the proposals had had the same opportunity as the CEGB to present their case.

Right from the beginning of the inquiry the CEGB—backed by considerable sums of consumers' and taxpayers' money—was able to present its case. The inquiry is said to have cost the board more than £5 million. Smaller organisations—most of them voluntary—could not raise such contributions and a number had to withdraw from making or developing their presentations because they ran out of cash. That contributed, right from the start, to destroying public confidence in the inquiry. That complaint ran throughout the inquiry and was referred to specifically by Sir Frank in the main documents and in volume two, parts 9.41 to 9.42.

Right hon. and hon. Members have concentrated on the safety aspects of the PWRs and the report placed great emphasis on that aspect. I believe that the more detailed comments in volumes two and three suggest Sir Frank's rather lukewarm response to the CEGB's policies. I wish to draw the attention of the House to one fact that has disturbed me greatly—the strained relationship, which is obvious when one reads the main report, between the CEGB and the nuclear installations inspectorate.

From the public's point of view the value of the NII is its independence. I was disturbed to learn—there is only the slightest hint—of some link between the NII, the Secretary of State for Energy and the Health and Safety Commission. The NII is responsible to the commission, which is, in turn, responsible to the Secretary of State. I find that somewhat disturbing as I always thought of the NII as independent.

Volume two of the report is possibly one of the most important volumes. I am sure that most of us will have read the summary of the conclusions, but when one studies the main documents one discovers that some elaborations within the main documents are not touched upon in the summary. That is no criticism of Sir Frank because, obviously, one has to condense things when making a summary. In chapter 8, Sir Frank states:

"The CEGB's statutory responsibility for the safety of US nuclear stations and the NII's responsibility for nuclear site licensing form a sensible foundation for a system designed to ensure nuclear safety."

That is a logical and sensible argument, but:

"the evolution of the licensing process from those foundations has been unsatisfactory: there has been little or no Parliamentary or Governmental guidance on the basis for safety assessment nor on how the licensing process should be carried out."

That is a condemnation of this House and the Government rather than anyone else.

Sir Frank states:

"The lack of a clear division of responsibilities between the NII and the CEGB in relation to the licensing process is an important reason why Sizewell B has been delayed."

That is a sad reflection, not only on the way in which we have handled the inquiry, but on the development of the nuclear industry. Parts 9.26 to 9.29 of chapter 8 refer to the relationship between the CEGB and the NII. I find that most disturbing because, in common with all British people, I am dependent on the NII to do its job properly ad efficiently—it appears to be under-resourced to carry out that job—on my behalf. If the relationships between the CEGB and the NII are as bad as suggested in the report, I begin to lose confidence in the entire report.

Last week, the chairman of the CEGB referred to the development of future power stations beyond Sizewell. In a meeting held in the House last week the chairman suggested that the CEGB will still go ahead with Hinkley Point—that is definite—although the advice from Sir Frank was that such power stations should be considered one at a time—Sizewell first, then future power stations. The chairman went further than that, because he stated that the programme is not concerned with the development of one nuclear power station at Sizewell, but a series of anything from three to five stations.

One of those stations is proposed to be developed in my county, in the constituency next to mine, but close to my constituency boundary. It is within the constituency boundaries of the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and he and I have similar views about the proposal. It is the only greenfield site that is being considered as a proposed power station—the only one listed as such in the CEGB programme—and it is located on an attractive coastal area of the county.

The CEGB has not yet had a response from the Secretary of State about Sizewell, but it is so confident that that station will be built that it has already paid considerable sums of money to buy the land, complete general borings and make a significant investment in the design programme of the proposed station in my county. That displays a super-confidence in terms of the response that CEGB expects from the Secretary of State.

The board claim that the development in my county is necessary to improve the generating resources in the north of England. The location of the proposed station is three miles north of a private power station, which itself is four miles north of a CEGB coal-fired station. In essence, if the board gets its way, there will be three power stations in a line. The other two power stations that I have mentioned are also in my constituency.

The proposed site is on the landward side of a major coalfield that produces about 2 million tonnes of coal a year. The board's dogmatic and occasionally secretive approach to the policy has generated almost total opposition to what appears to be an environmental and economic folly. It is determined to ignore any positive arguments presented by anyone in the area—residents, the county council, district and borough councillors, political bodies of all shades, including Conservatives—and will not recognise the validity of the positive proposal to investigate the possibility of redeveloping and extending the existing CEGB facilities at the Cambois site near Blyth. That site houses a coal-fired station that consists of two units currently coming towards the end of their working lives. It would be logical to refurbish that site and possibly build another station close to it. The CEGB already owns the land and the county council is prepared to sell more land to the board if it is needed. That site, if redeveloped, could consume the coal that is present in large quantities under the North sea close at hand.

That proposition has been rejected out of hand by the board. It will not listen to the argument, nor will it present a counter-argument. We look forward to a change in

attitude on the part of the CEGB and hope that it will listen to a little bit of logic. We may get a chance to witness that change once the dust has settled after Sizewell.

I am delighted that the Labour party has made a commitment to reject the Sizewell inquiry. As a consequence, the inquiry into the development of the station in my area will be rejected. I am sure that the public will respond to our proposal and we shall not see the power station built in my constituency or one built at Sizewell.

5.19 pm

Sir Eldon Griffiths (Bury St. Edmunds): One of the most difficult tasks of any hon. Member is to strike a balance between what may be in the national interest and what many of his constituents perceive to be against their local interests. The Sizewell debate requires every hon. Member for Suffolk to wrestle with his conscience over the problem. For two of my colleagues, my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, who is in his place, and my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Central (Mr. Lord), who has studied the issue with the greatest keenness, the dilemma is especially acute. Their positions within the Government make it impossible for them at this stage to inform their constituents of their views on a contentious local issue.

I have had the advantage of discussions with my right hon. Friend and my hon. Friend and I know that they would agree with me if I start at local level and say that we were all concerned to read Sir Frank Layfield's comments in section F of his report. At paragraph 2.207 Sir Frank states:

"If Sizewell B were built, local people would have to accept serious drawbacks without any corresponding benefits."

In an earlier passage, when discussing the site being within the Suffolk heritage coast, he states:

"The development of Sizewell B would be a massive intrusion into the area."

When dealing with the access road, Sir Frank concluded at paragraph 2.187:

"the CEGB's evidence in support of its case . . . was weak."

At paragraph 2.201—this is my final quotation on local matters—Sir Frank says:

"The new station would be a totally inappropriate intrusion into the Suffolk countryside . . . The detrimental visual effect . . . on the local landscape would be so great that unless the proposal is held to be justified in the national interest, consent should be refused."

Any Suffolk Member is bound to take seriously Sir Frank's observations on these matters. I have therefore to say that I would not agree to consent being given, unless I were convinced that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State would impose on the CEGB all the environmental and traffic conditions that are recommended by the Layfield report, together with an absolute requirement to leave no stone unturned to secure the safety of Sizewell inside as well as outside its reactors.

I turn now to the national interest. On behalf of what I conceive to be the majority of our people, I would resist all attempts to deny our country the advantages of nuclear power. I say that for five reasons.

First, nuclear energy is virtually guaranteed to be available for the foreseeable future while fossil fuels are not. The precise economics of Sizewell B remains to be determined and I do not envy my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State his task as he wrestles with the Layfield report's comments on that issue. In the long term, however, it makes no sense to believe that extracting coal from the bowels of the earth or oil from the North sea is a more cost-effective way of meeting our energy needs for the next century than tapping the energy that is available from uranium, and before long, possibly, from hydrogen. Coal and oil are limited fossil resources. Once they are depleted there will be no more. By contrast, nuclear power taps a virtually undepletable resource. There is no foreseeable limit to its availability.

Secondly, I believe that nuclear power is environmentally less offensive than the burning of oil or coal. Having had some responsibility for pollution control as an Environment Minister, I know that the acid rain that British is accused, rightly or wrongly, of pouring onto the forests of Scandinavia does not originate from our nuclear power stations. It comes from the CEGB's coal and oil-fired plants. Neither does the carbonmonoxide or lead that can pollute the air arise from nuclear energy. They are by-products of fossil fuels. Nuclear power is the cleanest energy available to us on a large scale. It makes no contribution to the so-called glasshouse effect that the burning of coal and oil fuels are thought to be creating.

Thirdly, I should not be a party to handicapping British industry and British homes with higher fuel costs, while our competitors can look forward to the comparatively lower costs that they may expect from the PWR reactors that are already in place or being built in virtually all of our main competitor industrial countries. There are about 500 nuclear reactors in operation or being built outside Britain. I have visited some of them and no doubt other hon. Members have done so too. About 308 of these reactors are PWRs. The French obtain 65 per cent. of their energy from PWRs, while the West Germans obtain 32 per cent., the Spanish 24 per cent., the Belgians 60 per cent., and the Swiss 40 per cent. Japan has recently embarked on a gigantic £420 billion programme to expand its nuclear powered production. The Soviet Union, post-Chernobyl, is also building scores of new reactors, despite its abundant supplies of coal and oil.

The high comparative costs of our fossil-based power in Britain could be one of the reasons why our goods, in recent years, have been priced out of some export markets. To that extent, our high-cost power has contributed to a loss of jobs. Our relatively high energy prices also represent a severe burden on the old and the poor. When we face the next perishing cold wave and Opposition Members demand that the Government take action to assist the old and the cold, let no one doubt at that time that the CEGB will be able to meet our extra demands for power only if it keeps on stream the nuclear reactors that now supply 21 per cent. of its base load electricity. I hope that hon. Members will recall, too, that on such occasions we import power from France. Virtually all that power is generated by French PWRs, located on the Channel coast. Decommissioning our nuclear power stations could deal a serious blow to British jobs and to many of our elderly people, who would be deprived of the guaranteed supplies of heat and light that they need if they are to stay alive.

The fourth reason why I shall oppose any attempt to deny our people the advantages of nuclear power arises out of a concern, which I understand the Labour party shares, for the well-being of Third world countries. I shall take one example. If over the next 30 years India, in which I declare an interest as chairman of the Indo-British association, were to expand industrially to the level that

[Sir Eldon Griffiths]

Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong have achieved already, the increase in the Indian people's demand for energy will be equal to the whole of OPEC's present oil production.

For the poor and hungry of Afro-Asia, electricity is the key to progress. It alone will enable them to power their irrigation pumps, to provide light for their children to read by, and to warm their elderly people. That is why the Governments of India, China, Pakistan and the rest will not follow the lead of the Labour party in turning their backs on nuclear power. They know that to abandon nuclear power would be to condemn more than half of the world's population to misery and poverty in the century that lies ahead.

Finally, but perhaps most importantly, there is the question of safety. That is paramount. I therefore repeat, I believe on behalf of my hon. Friends from Suffolk as well as myself, that none of us would support the building of Sizewell B unless it is subjected to the most scrupulous and foolproof safety requirements. All else is secondary to that consideration.

But are we really to suppose, following the fears that were sparked by Chernobyl or for that matter Three Mile Island, that our British engineers would be so careless or so criminally negligent as to build into Sizewell B the same design faults as the Russians built into Chernobyl? Are we to suppose that the staff of our nuclear industry, whose safety record is second to none, would ignore the lessons that have been learned by American, Japanese, French and German experience?

No one should imagine that the rejection of Sizewell B, let alone the dismantling of all our nuclear power stations, would somehow magically remove our people from any nuclear risk. The French PWRs, from which we now import electricity into our national grid, are closer to south-east England and the people of Suffolk than many of our big power stations in the north. So if, as God forbid, there were to be a French nuclear accident, most of south-east England is just as much at risk from radioactivity from France, as it would be at risk from fallout from Sizewell. That is why the suggestion of nuclear-free zones is absurd. Like it or not, we are part of a wider European environment in which nuclear power has come to stay. The only question is whether we throw away the benefits of such power while still having to put up with the risks.

I end, as I began, in Suffolk. I ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State if not now then in the near future, to give the people who will be asked to put up with the undoubted inconvenience of Sizewell, in the event of its being built, two specific assurances.

The first is that during construction, the wholly inadequate B1122 road will be replaced by a new and better route and that this should be in use before any heavy construction commences. My right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal gave evidence on that point at the inquiry and his views should be taken with the utmost seriousness. Secondly, I ask for this assurance. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will know that many of the local authorities in Suffolk have had to accept, as have their people, the inconveniences of the Sizewell power stations without any of the contributions to the rates that ought to be paid in these circumstances. Therefore, I say, in the words of my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal:

"Justice demands that the locality be properly helped to deal with the pressures imposed by construction."

Suffolk county council, the district council and, above all, the town council of Leiston must clearly benefit in rate revenue from any new power station. There is already a real sense of grievance that Sizewell A is the only business in Leiston which can contribute not one penny to the town rates yet it uses the local facilities perhaps more than any other.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister who is to reply will say that those points will be firmly made to the CEGB and to our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment before any decision to give consent arises.

5.34 pm

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): I appeared as a witness before the Layfield commission of inquiry three and a half years ago against the PWR and I believe that the case against now is much stronger than it was then. I find it strange that in the course of speeches in the debate so far, from those favouring the PWR there should have been so little reference to the shift in public opinion that has taken place not only here but in the United States, where no PWR has been ordered for such a long time.

This is an important debate in that it cuts across party lines but I suspect that most people reading it in *Hansard* or hearing it on the radio will assume that the Government's mind is already made up and that the short statement made by the Secretary of State was for legal reasons, that he did not wish to give a view before he had to give his adjudication on the public inquiry.

Having said that, it is an advisory debate in two senses. First, there is no motion and the House is not being allowed to vote on the matter——

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): We are.

Mr. Benn: We shall be voting on the Adjournment but not on a motion.

Secondly, it will be an election issue, however it is put. Many people will determine their view because their attitude to nuclear power will be uppermost in their mind. I do not think that the House or anybody else should be under any illusion about it; the proposal before us today is not only for Sizewell B, but to order other pressurised water reactors and, in addition, such a decision would confirm Britain's commitment to nuclear power.

Most hon. Members will be familiar with the old arguments for nuclear power which were that it was cheap, safe, and peaceful; that there was no alternative; that it was accepted worldwide; and that it was a technology in which Britain led the world. I want to put to the House arguments that will suggest that none of those initial arguments are really true. I say that having had longer experience as a Minister responsible for nuclear power than, I think, anybody else in western Europe. I spent four years as Minister of Technology and Minister of Power and four years as Secretary of State for Energy.

I entered into that task, just after the Dungeness B power station was ordered by my predecessor, Frank Cousins, with all the energy and enthusiasm at my command, believing, like many of my generation, that civil nuclear power was a classic example of "swords into ploughshares" and that, after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, to be able to use that hideous power for constructive purposes was advantageous.

I must confess that my experience over that period persuaded me, in my opinion all too slowly, that none of

the arguments was true, and before I left office I wrote to the then chairman of the Atomic Energy Authority, Sir John Hill, just after the Three Mile Island accident, telling him to stop work on the pressurised water reactor. I also raised with him the latest and most serious leak at Windscale.

I shall first turn to the question of economies. I am not dealing with comparative prices but I will in a moment. The cost of nuclear power has never been fully accounted for by the generating board. The research and development, very largely in the early years, and entirely later and throughout, has been paid for in the defence budget. The decommissioning costs have never been included. I shall quote one estimate by the French Atomic Energy Commission's decommissioning director, who said that 40 per cent. of the cost of building a new plant would be the cost of decommissioning an old one. Those figures have never been included when we talk about the economics of nuclear power. We have never had a full and candid account of the outages; that is to say periods when the nuclear power stations have been derated or closed down. When there is the question of comparison with coal, like is never compared with like. If one compares a base load coal station with a base load nuclear station, my Department—I am sure that the present Secretary of State would get even more advantageous figures—would say that there is nothing in it at all, in terms of cost. Comparison is always as between smaller, or peak load, coal stations and base load nuclear stations.

Then, of course, there is the argument that has been fully put forward, that with oil prices first going up and then down, and with currency values changing—one must never forget that they can make a profound difference to energy costs—it would be ludicrous to base a decision of this magnitude over this period of time on any forecast, however conscientiously done. To make this point, I shall look back at the outcome of the Windscale inquiry in which, as Ministers, I and my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney, (Mr. Shore) took part in April or May 1978. I shall look at what we said in recommending the thermal oxide reprocessing plant and at what has happened. Since I am criticising myself, I hope that the House will listen.

The capital costs of the head end and chemical plant increased by 60 per cent. in real terms, allowing for the change in prices, over the figure which I confidently presented to the House—from £520 million to £830 million. The total capital cost of THORP escalated from £1·2 billion to £1·65 billion by 1986, according to the same cost levels. The reprocessing charges which I mentioned then rose from £200,000 a tonne to £810,000 a tonne—a real price cost escalation of 100 per cent. It was assumed that the project would be of value to the electricity consumer but the reverse has happened, with the project costing probably £1 billion. As for construction time, we said the project would be completed in 1984, but it did not start until 1984 and will not be completed until 1992. As for waste management aspects, it has been clear that there are other ways of handling waste.

Mr. Steel *rose*——

Mr. Benn: I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will allow me to finish this point.

I have been—as has any Minister—the recipient of many conscientious forecasts presented by officials for my consideration. The right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Steel) gave some vivid examples of generating board forecasts, all of which I requested at the time. Of course, those forecasts were wildly wrong. All I would say in supplementing what the right hon. Gentleman said is that the forecasts were usually very much bigger than the reality, if the CEGB thought that it could get a PWR. But when it was told that it could not, it turned out that the board did not want as much capacity. For many years, the generating board has wanted the American reactor.

Mr. Steel: The right hon. Gentleman will recall that I moved the motion against the THORP when he was the Minister. Two additional points made at the time have been fulfilled. Uranium prices have fallen, not risen and the dry storage facility has become feasible.

Mr. Benn: I am not trying to justify what happened. I am merely saying that, even with the best will in the world—I was an enthusiastic supporter of that project and that technology—in the light of experience we must take account of the fact that the best forecasts are wrong.

I raise another point because of the bitter resentment that I feel. Throughout the whole period when I was the Minister no disclosure was ever made to me that the plutonium from these atoms for peace stations was going to America for weapon warheads. That information was denied not only to me as the responsible Minister who had a duty to convey to Parliament and the public what was happening but to the House after I left office. When I was interrogated by Lord Silsoe on behalf of the generating board during the Layfield inquiry, I was rigidly cross-examined and asked three times to withdraw what I then knew to be true, because Dr. Hesketh, who was fired from the generating board for disclosing this information, said that it had happened.

I quote from one passage stating what happened on day 333 of the inquiry when the counsel for the generating board replied to Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament evidence. It states:

"the basis of the Board's position was to rely on Government statements and assurances that none of its civil plutonium has been diverted to weapons purposes".

That was a lie, yet it was said in the House and told to the public. It is on that basis that people still sometimes speak of "peaceful purposes". I am not trying to identify the Minister responsible. I do not suppose that he was told any more than I was, yet, according to the United States Secretary of State of Energy,

"the United States is required to use for military purposes all the CEGB plutonium received under the defence agreement".

If democracy is to survive, people must be told the truth.

As for safety, nuclear power is a manifestly and inherently dangerous technology. It was born out of weapons and leaves a legacy for the future for which there is no parallel in any other technology. Yes, poisonous chemicals may seep into the ground and cause damage, but leaving high toxic waste—even if it were capable of being stored relatively safely—with a life running into hundreds of years gives rise to a totally different scale of problem from any that Parliament has ever considered. Of course, Chernobly is a reminder of what could happen.

It is not true to say that a nuclear accident could not happen here. That is like comparing one motor car with another driven by a person who was in a smash on a

[Mr. Benn]

motorway and saying, "It could not happen to a Rolls-Royce—it happened to someone with an old banger." I know from experience that such an accident could happen here. An accident happened many years ago at Kyshtym, but it was covered up by the UKAEA. American intelligence told the authority not to tell British Ministers that there had been a disaster in Russia because they did not want anti-nuclear feeling to feed on a Russian disaster. At the time of Chernobyl, that argument was not used. Two hundred tonnes of uranium were stolen without British Ministers being told.

There is one example which I must put on the record because I am so incensed by the attempts being made to mislead people into thinking that a nuclear accident could not happen here. In 1969, when I was Minister of Technology and Minister of Power, there was corrosion in the early power stations, the Magnox stations. I was so concerned that I asked the chairman of the generating board, then Sir Stanley Brown, to come with me to Bradwell, and I spent the day there. That was 31 December 1969 and I quote from what I wrote on that night about corrosion that might prevent the control rods from going into the reactor. I wrote:

"If, by any chance, there were any displacement of the graphite blocks in which the fuel elements run, or are situated, or even more serious, of the channels into which the control rods drop, you might lose control of the reactor. The position would then be that one of the fuel elements might melt and if there was, at the same time, a rupture in the heat exchanger circuit, you could get a tremendously overheated reactor with the fuel elements melting and a major nuclear accident that would kill many thousands of people in the area of Bradwell and would send a radioactive cloud that might kill people in London."

I deeply resent the suggestion of the pro-nuclear lobby that a nuclear accident could not happen. An accident did not occur at Bradwell. Indeed, because I was so concerned, I called in Sir Alec Merrison, and corresponded when I was in Opposition, with the present Secretary of State for Energy. They found an answer which I think has dealt with a problem. There are many other examples—Three Mile Island, Brown's Ferry, the Windscale leaks and the accidents at Hunterston and at Winfrith. It is very dishonest to tell the British people that it could not happen here.

We are facing in the nuclear business the most powerful lobby in Britain. I have been in Parliament for many years, including 11 as Minister, and I have never come across a lobby with such power as the nuclear lobby. That lobby has known for years what it wanted. I have mentioned Frank Cousins' decision to go for Dungeness B, which was an advanced gas-cooled reactor. At that time, the Ministry of Technology wanted the boiling water reactor, which was in the pressurised water reactor family.

In 1974, the brief given to incoming Labour Ministers was that they should get the PWR, which I think was then called the light water reactor. It was essentially the same reactor. The lobby waited and waited until it could get a Government who would agree to that plan. Lord Marshall, my adviser, told me that he had seen the Shah of Iran, who had offered to buy half the British nuclear industry if we would adopt the pressurised water reactor. In other words, if we ordered it, the Shah would also, and so on.

With Westinghouse, the Ministry of Defence — because of its military interests—and the lobby here, the Government and Parliament are facing a lobby in which American interests are very strong. The star wars contracts allow the Americans to vet our technology if it is exported. What will be the limitations on any possible export of technology deriving from a British purchase of the American reactor now?

I advise the House to reject the pressurised water reactor. I believe that, as the nation is self-sufficient in oil and gas, and will be for a long time, and as our coal will last for 300 years—although the Romans thought that it would run out in about 200 AD—with conservation not fully developed as a possibility and with the alternative sources of energy including the Severn barrage, in which I have had a long interest, we should recognise that nuclear power has realised none of the claims that were made for it. The public, not for the first time, are well ahead of the Government in recogising that fact for themselves. I hope to God that the next nuclear accident—and there will be one—does not happen in Britain. If it does, a heavy responsibility will rest upon all those who advocated it, as I did, and even more upon those who decide to prolong it, if the PWR at Sizewell B goes forward to construction and completion.

5.50 pm

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): The story of nuclear power in Britain is one of missed opportunities and many mistakes. I do not absolve any past Minister or Government from those mistakes. It must be clear by now that we are on a branch line with nuclear energy.

The first generation of nuclear power stations—the Magnox series—is performing reasonably well, but the successor stations—the advanced gas-cooled reactors—are a major disappointment. No amount of misguided patriotism can disguise that fact. It is a sad reflection on our decision making that we have struggled on with the wrong technology from year to year in the belief that somehow or somewhere somebody will get it right. With each new advanced gas-cooled reactor nearing completion, we are told, "No, it's late: it may not perform up to specifications but perhaps next time we will get it right."

The French started with the same gas-cooled reactors that we had, but in 1969 they faced up to the fact, against all their political instincts, that they should have chosen the American Westinghouse design of pressurised water reactors, and they have never looked back. We must do the same. For us to plough on with the advanced gas-cooled programme would be an exercise in futile pig-headedness.

Why do we need nuclear energy at all? I think that that was the question posed by the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn). My answer is simply that the world cannot do without it. The population of the world will at least double or even triple before it eventually stabilises. Demand for energy and power will continue to increase much more and much faster than that. The best analysis that I have seen shows that world demand for energy will more than double in the next 25 years. Most of the demand comes from the poorer developing parts of the world.

How will those countries cope? Are we telling them to cut down more trees, burn wood and dung and to use windmills or are we saying that they should compete against the richer countries for the diminishing reserves of fossil fuels, such as gas, coal and so on? That is a narrow and selfish view. It would be better to accept our wider responsibilities and leave the fossil fuels by and large to the

developing and poorer countries and that our country, and countries like it, should contribute through nuclear energy. Physics gives us the opportunity to close the energy gap. It is a sad reflection on the anti-technology bias in the country and on the Opposition Benches that they refuse to face up to those facts.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): The hon. Gentleman refers to anti-technology bias and yet he displays that same bias by refusing to acknowledge the developments in renewable alternative fuels. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that to impose a nucler energy source on Third-world countries will in fact impose a sort of technological imperialism?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory I am not imposing any technology on any country. The estimates that I have already mentioned take full account of the increase in renewable energy and conservation programmes. However, those estimates still come up with one answer. They show that there will be an energy gap by the end of the centry unless we find ways, other than burning fossil fuels, to contribute towards the world's energy needs. As this country has the means we must develop nuclear energy and leave the fossil fuels to the developing world.

I shall refer to one or two more specific arguments against the Sizewell B PWR proposal. It has been claimed in the debate that the recent fall in the world prices of coal somehow undermines the case for Sizewell B. The inspector, in his report, warns against using short-term fluctuations as a guide to the future. That point was well made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell).

More importantly, the inspector assumed in his report that any alternative coal-fired power station would be able to import its coal freely at world prices. I understand the need for that assumption in the report in assessing the economics of Sizewell B. I do not criticise the inspector on that ground, but in practice the assumption is unrealistic. Even under this Government, the CEGB has to pay up to 40 per cent. more for most of its coal than is obtainable on the world market. I am sure that the right hon. Member for Chesterfield will be in the forefront of Opposition Members who are against the import of foreign coal.

Therefore, under every conceivable scenario the inspector's assumption is unrealistic. If coal at the higher British prices were used, the case for coal would collapse completely. I hope that right hon. and hon. Members who follow me in this debate will touch on that point. I have read carefully the 100 or so pages of the inspector's analysis about future fossil fuel prices. Because he assumes, unrealistically, that the CEGB will be able to import cheap coal at world prices, I believe that he over-estimates the case for coal. He gives it too great a degree of benefit. I await comments from those Opposition Members who are most vociferous in preventing the closure of the gap between domestic and foreign coal prices.

Mr. Dalyell: I think that the Secretary of State, in his short and careful speech, should have produced the latest assumptions and forecasts, on which his Department was acting, for the years 1990 to 2000. The Department has those figures and the House of Commons should have a copy of them.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: When the hon. Gentleman makes his speech I am sure that he will pursue that point. However, it does not detract from my argument, which is that, even though coal prices abroad may temporarily drop, it does not mean that the inspector's evaluation of the case for coal is anything less than valid. Indeed, it may be too generous.

People who want a complete assurance about the safety of Sizewell B are asking for the impossible. There are risks attached to every human activity and every industry. The inspector's analysis is about as rigorous as anyone could want. If the same searching techniques were applied to other industries we might conclude that they were too dangerous to tolerate.

There have been criticisms during our debate of the inspector's attempt to evaluate the risk in economic terms. He has had to try to balance risks against economic benefit. How else do we allocate resources to try to save lives? If anything, we are in danger of spending millions of pounds to try to reduce what is already a small risk, whereas the same amount of money could be spent designing better and safer cars and aeroplanes. In that way we could save thousands of lives. But that is not a criticism. I fully accept that that is the price that we pay for public acceptance of nuclear energy.

I want to refer to waste.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): When we consider costings in relation to any likely danger in the nuclear industry, should we not take into account our indigenous fuel supplies? Our costings might be different from those used in Japan or France, which do not have such indigenous fuel supplies.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: No doubt the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) will pursue that point in his speech. His argument in no sense invalidates the inspector's analysis or my remarks. If the hon. Gentleman is saying that we must accept expensive coal and that that is the end of the argument, I must part company with him.

Of course people are concerned about waste. But I believe that a far more potent threat lies in the millions of tons of toxic industrial and chemical waste that we pump into the atmosphere and pour into landfill sites every year. The pollution of underground aquifers is the long-term threat to our water supplies. Unlike radioactive waste, which gradually decays, many chemicals and poisons do not break down but continue to be a threat for all time. Opposition to nuclear power on environmental grounds is misconceived. When properly managed and designed, nuclear power stations are less damaging to the environment than many other industries.

The CEGB has announced that it intends to apply for planning permission for Hinkley Point C in Somerset. Some allege that the Severn tidal barrage is the preferable option. I cannot comment on the advisability of such a barrage, as we still await a further study. However, it is certainly not clear to me that a barrage is to be preferred on environmental grounds. Criticisms about the potential threat to the coastline, wildlife and ecology must be taken on their individual merits.

If demand for electricity continues to grow at its present rate, we may well need both Hinkley C and the Severn barrage. Whether or not that is so I ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to heed the inspector's comments about the need to benefit the local community through the rating system. Somerset does very badly out of the existing system of local government finance, and its

[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory]

rate support grant is very unsatisfactory. I endorse the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Sir E. Griffiths) that both Somerset and Suffolk should be allowed to retain some of the additional rate income generated by either or both of these large projects.

The inspector's report is formidable and deserves to be taken most seriously. I am not convinced that the right way of mapping out the future of Britain's energy policy was chosen, but no one can doubt the intelligence and application brought to bear on the problem by Sir Frank Layfield. I am amazed that Opposition parties, including the Liberal party, should have closed minds about the report. They have rejected Sir Frank Layfield's conclusions out of hand before even reading it.

It is well known that the inspector recommends a PWR at Sizewell. I hope that in due course we shall have a series of PWRs. The siting of each one will, of course, be subject to the due planning process, but if we replicate the standard design, future stations will be cheaper than Sizewell B. That decisively tilts the economic argument in favour of the PWR. The inspector was able only to cost Sizewell, but Hinkley Point C and other successor stations would be at least £200 million cheaper on capital cost. If that means closing off the AGR option, I think that we should do so. We should not raise expectations that we shall fudge the question again by trying to operate two technologies at the same time. Above all, let us give our scientists, engineers and technicians a clear agenda so that, as a nation, we can face the future with a clean, safe and efficient source of energy and, in so doing, make our contribution to solving the world's energy problems.

6.5 pm

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): I should like to discuss the recommendations about safety in the Layfield report. If Chernobyl and Three Mile Island have taught us nothing else, they should have acted as a warning that technology does not exist in a vacuum, but functions in tandem with the human beings who design and operate it. We should bear in mind that 80 per cent. of all major nuclear accidents have involved human error. The designers of the complex systems involved in a nuclear power plant try to engineer out the possibility of humans doing stupid things that will ruin the plant, but experience has shown that that is not always possible.

Much has been said about the accident at Chernobyl in the USSR. I should like to comment on what was said by the leader of the delegation sent by the British trade union movement to Chernobyl. Mr. John Edmonds, the general secretary of the General, Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trades Union and a number of his colleagues went to Chernobyl to meet the operators of the plant and the engineers responsible for the tests that were carried out. It was clear from their discussions that the operators themselves had carried out to the letter every order that they had received from above—except one.

I remind the House that a large number of GMBATU members are involved in the nuclear industry, and could hardly be classified as belonging to the anti-nuclear lobby. It is therefore significant that GMBATU is now calling for a moratorium on the construction of further nuclear power installations until the full lessons of the dreadful accident at Chernobyl have been absorbed in this country.

There is a belief within the nuclear industry, which is dutifully trotted out by the industry's supporters, that it is possible to design a nuclear plant that can operate regardless of human error. We should recognise that that is a fallacy. Sir Frank Layfield accepted that human error was an important factor, and the NII said that it was a

"potentially significant contributor to the risk from Sizewell B."

Layfield admits that the effect of human error on safety is "potentially large". Those conclusions should not be ignored.

I believe that both the CEGB and the NII have ducked the question of human error. I hope, before any decision is made, that consideration is brought into play. We should ask whether the Sizewell B plant will be safe both for workers and for the public. No one who has read the Layfield report can truthfully answer yes to that question. The CEGB says that at the Sizewell plant, the first PWR ever built in this country, it will reduce the exposure of workers to radiation to a level lower than that to which they are exposed in any other country in the world operating PWRs, apart from Switzerland, which has only three PWRs. To his credit, Layfield was not impressed by the CEGB's argument on this issue. He regards the plans for operator exposure as "ambitious", which is a barrister's way of saying that he does not believe them. Layfield also concludes that

"the risks to workers at the station may be higher than risks to most other industries considered to have high standards of safety".

That is another way of saying that, if we build a PWR plant, it will be a backward step for the safety of the operators who work there.

One of the major weaknesses of nuclear power revealed by the Chernobyl disaster was the emergency planning around nuclear plants. Women and children were evacuated as far away as 90 km from Chernobyl. We seem to have a great deal of optimism. Our emergency evacuation zones extend, at most, to two and a quarter miles from plants. After Chernobyl, we should ask questions about emergency planning. After the Chernobyl disaster, the Government recognised that there was a need to review the emergency planning arrangements, but, despite a gap of 10 months, the interdepartmental working party has yet to give us the fruits of its deliberations, despite their being promised on many occasions. We have a right to hear the conclusions of its work and to establish whether any changes are required before any decision is taken on the Sizewell proposal.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Does my hon. Friend think that it is high time that the Government also made a detailed and considered assessment of the likely cancer effects of the Chernobyl fallout in Britain and Ireland, as has been done in other countries in Western Europe?

Mr. Barron: That is certainly true at this stage, in view of what has happened in agriculture in north Wales and Cumbria. Nothing conclusive will be produced for a long time about fallout from the plant. Some hon. Members have said that, if Sizewell does not go ahead, we still have facilities in France. Indeed, facilities in Russia could be a danger to public health in this country. It would be wrong to go ahead with this proposal until all the proper decisions have been taken.

When one considers that planning emergency exercises are carried out once a year at every plant, one becomes a

little worried. I have tabled a number of questions on this matter to the Minister in the past few months since the Chernobyl incident. Taking into account the number of shifts at each plant and the number of people on leave, who are sick and so on, we might find that operators are involved with annual emergency evacuation plans only once every six to 10 years. Bearing in mind what is happening in the nuclear industry, that is quite feasible. It is worrying. It smacks of our saying that we would regard a factory fire drill once every 10 years as acceptable to people who are in danger of fire. I do not believe that that is the case.

The Secretary of State spoke for just six minutes when he opened the debate. I wish he had examined further what was stated in the Layfield report. Perhaps we shall find that his mind has been made up. Indeed, I suspect that the Cabinet's mind has been made up. In fact—I could be more accurate—perhaps the Cabinet's mind was made up on 23 October 1979, when, at a Cabinet meeting at Downing street, presided over by the Prime Minister, decisions were taken in relation to PWRs. I have a document marked "Secret". It is the Cabinet ministerial minutes for that meeting. The right hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) is mentioned in the report as saying that the construction of such a reactor — meaning, obviously, the PWR — would be conditional only on safety clearances from the nuclear inspector.

Perhaps that is a good thing. I refer Conservative Members, who are nodding their heads, to chapter 108.12 in the conclusions of the Layfield report. It states:

"many matters were examined only briefly if at all, and much work remains to be done on aspects of the safety case which were examined in evidence. Furthermore, the design was incomplete and not yet susceptible of a final assessment of its safety."

I should have thought that the right hon. Member for Guildford would not have been pleased, in view of what he said at the Cabinet meeting in 1979, they were to go ahead.

The Cabinet minutes refer to the Prime Minister's comments in relation to the nuclear industry and how she saw the nuclear industry going in the future. After talking about achieving a sizeable nuclear programme that should also include prospects of PWR, she also mentioned that "satisfactory clearances" should be obtained before she would be happy with the situation. Nobody can be happy with Sizewell. As Frank Layfield and many other serious, responsible people admit, there have been grave omissions from the inquiry into the safety and, indeed, the basic design of the PWR that is presently proposed. On safety grounds, we should not go ahead with Sizewell.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) referred to the report from the Cambridge Energy Research Group, which did the initial costing of the Sizewell inquiry for the CEGB. The report, published this month, states:

"The report highlights the economic risks associated with pursuing the nuclear option, particularly with regard to capital cost overruns, exchange rate fluctuations"—

obviously, we all realise that we do not know what those will be over the next 12 months or the next 25 to 30 years—

"and upward pressure on discount rates."

That is, in relation to the cost of the PWR. At present, one could say that the latter case is likely to be 5 per cent. a year in terms of its total cost. Bearing in mind Conservative Members' designs for selling off publicly owned industries and so on, I do not think that, in all honesty, we could say that keeping the 5 per cent. level for now and the next 30 years would be attractive. I question whether 5 per cent. is the level at which we should look.

There is also the matter of capital cost overruns. The first magnox stations and the first AGRs that were built in this country had an average construction cost overrun of over two and a half years. The last three AGRs—Dungeness B, Heysham and Hartlepool — had a construction overrun cost of 10 years. The nuclear industry does not have a good record for providing planned electricity generation on time. It is farcical for anybody to stand firm, as Conservative Members do, and say how good Sizewell will be, and how we need it because we need electricity generation. If it is anything like its forerunners in the nuclear industry, there can be no guarantee that, in 10 years' or even 15 years' time, we shall generate electricity on the coast at Sizewell.

The right hon. Member for Guildford mentioned the report recently brought out by the Cambridge Energy Research Group. One of its conclusions directly relates to what the right hon. Member said. It states:

"Future coal prices are uncertain and we do not know what the price of coal will be during the 30 years life of the Sizewell station from 1995, any more than we did in the early 1980s when the Sizewell evidence was originally presented."

Of course that is true if the same parameters that were used to assess the cost of Sizewell in the early 1980s are used today. It cannot be wrong. Nobody can dismiss this month's report in relation to likely costs. The report goes on to state, that, as far as the one in 40 chance that Frank Layfield reported is concerned, an economic case could be made for coal against nuclear power. It is certainly a lot less than that.

Bringing in coal by the CEGB at world prices has two implications for the nation. One is a balance of payments implication, as any imports have. It might be too big for us to bear. It also has the other cost, which my right hon. Friend the Member for Salford, East mentioned—that is, the cost to the nation of further running down the industry. For example, I refer to the coal industry, the social costs and many other matters. Many of these can be put to the rundown coal industry in my constituency. The loss to the Exchequer through unemployment benefits, national insurance and income tax for my constituency alone is between £34 million and £36 million a year. Those are the costs that would have to be taken into consideration before we said that world coal should be brought in.

For about 10 of the past 16 weeks, British miners have broken the productivity record. A coal mine in which I used to work in my constituency has been consistently good for many years. It consistently breaks records every other week at present. There is nothing to say that, with the right investment at that colliery, that cannot go on for ever. It is wrong for anyone to jump to the conclusion, even on the present costs of British Coal, that those costs will no go down over the next five years.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: How does the hon. Gentleman answer the point that the Sizewell inspector dismisses the case for coal, even assuming that we would be able to import coal freely at world prices? Now that the hon. Gentleman has conceded that British coal would be more expensive, how can he say that the case for coal is stronger than outlined by the Sizewell inspector?

Mr. Barron: I thought that I had attempted to explain that. The same parameters were used in the early 1980s as

[Mr. Barron]

were used in the Cambridge Energy Research Group report. The same people who did the costing for the CEGB and the Layfield report have costed that report.

Mr. John Hannam (Exeter): On world prices.

Mr. Barron: Yes, on world prices. I thought that I had explained that.

We do not know what the position will be in five years' time for the coal industry, nor do we know what the position will be for the nuclear industry. We do not know what will happen in 10 or 15 years' time, and whether any PWRs will be generating electricity at that time. No one can say that. Of course, many questions have to be asked. Given that the same criteria are being used now as in the early 1980s, I cannot see how one can come to any conclusion other than that it looks better now for coal than it did then.

I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) will refer to the risks to the environment. The effects on the environment and so on will have to be costed, too. It is said that it would take 50 to 100 years to decommission such a power station. If it was costed in the same way as a coal-fired power station, which takes five years to decommission, the economics of the PWR at Sizewell would be impossible.

Questions have to be asked. I believe that it is better not to go for the PWR. This country should not go for nuclear generation in view of our indigenous fuel supplies. In the report to which I referred, it is asked:

"Do the results of the study confirm the view often held by senior planners in both government and utilities that nuclear power will inevitably offer significant economic advantages over coal? We believe the answer is 'no'."

That is what the report concluded. Those are the same people who gave evidence four years ago to the Layfield inquiry. To use the argument that is often used now that there is a 40:1 chance that nuclear power will be better is wrong.

The House would be wrong to accept the Sizewell proposals. It would be much better to have a programme of building coal-fired power stations as urgently as possible. We need such a programme. Eight years have elapsed since there has been an order for any type of power station. The industry, NEI and others are crying out for us to go ahead as soon as possible. It is my opinion that this Government, for their own reasons, have decided to hold back on coal-fired power stations while they squeeze out of this country by any means that they can a PWR at Sizewell that this country could well do without.

6.24 pm

Mr. Robert Harvey (Clwyd, South-West): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on the characteristic respect and modesty that he has shown in consulting the House before making a decision on Sizewell B.

There are so many Conservative Members who, like myself, so passionately reject the Labour party's unilateralist stance on nuclear weapons and so dislike the coalition of forces assembled behind the proposition that anything nuclear is bad that sometimes I think that we are all in danger of confusing the issue of nuclear weapons with that of nuclear power. For example, I am wholly committed to the retention by Britain of nuclear weapons for as long as our potential adversaries retain theirs. The nuclear balance has preserved peace in western Europe since 1945, and negotiation from nuclear strength may soon lead to the most far-reaching arms control agreement since the last war. But the issues are entirely different when it comes to the civilian use of nuclear power and there are many like myself who consider that it poses a greater potential threat than any posed by nuclear weapons.

In his exhaustive and admirable report on the proposed PWR at Sizewell B, Sir Frank Layfield has answered all the questions within his terms of reference. He has not gone outside those terms to answer the wider considerations. That is the task of the House. Those wider considerations will not go away. The main consideration is the debate on nuclear safety which, all over the world, has frozen the development of nuclear power. In the United States, the programme has long been at a standstill; in Italy and Brazil, likewise; in West Germany, it has slowed; in Austria, it has all but been abandoned. Only France and the Soviet Union are still pushing full ahead. It is true that the CEGB's record in Britain has been excellent, with not a single fatality resulting from a nuclear accident, but the safety doubts remain.

he first doubt concerns those working in and living around nuclear power stations. It is impossible to establish a direct link between radiation and the higher rate of leukaemia that appears to exist around power stations. That has not been finally confirmed, and we await the report on it, but the probability is high and it is a legitimate cause for public concern.

The second main area of concern is the potential danger to the public of a major accident. There are those who consider such accidents to be part of the inevitable price of progress. For example, how many people would have advised against the development of the jet aircraft if they had known in advance how many would die in air crashes over the years? But there is a difference. First, it is the task of Government not blindly to accept progress, but to help to direct progress where it can be of benefit to mankind. Secondly, those who fly in aeroplanes do so voluntarily; those affected by nuclear disasters have no choice. The nuclear industry's remarkable safety record so far is such that it is easy to minimise the danger. However, what is unique about the nuclear industry is that one accident could have such horrifying consequences.

The danger which, thankfully, failed to materialise at Three Mile Island in the United States came appallingly to life in the Chernobyl disaster, which was outside the terms of reference of the Layfield report. The awesome nature of that disaster has not sunk home to most people because it took place in an authoritarian and secretive nation. Suffice it to say that the official Soviet report showed that as much radiation was released at Chernobyl as in the atomic attacks at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the death toll of 31 to date seems likely to rise to 5,000 as a result of cancer caused by radiation exposure. Additional radiation effects were felt as far away as the hills of my constituency of Clwyd, South-West. One can react to Chernobyl by saying, "It couldn't happen here," and it is a good deal less likely to happen here because we have far higher safety standards and a more open society, but that is quite different from saying that it could not happen—and heaven help us if, on this overcrowded island, it does.

After Chernobyl, for any major country to proceed with an expansion of its nuclear programme, an overwhelming case has to be presented, either that it is the

most cost-effective form of energy generation today, without which we would be at the mercy of those of our competitors who have nuclear power, or that impending shortages of coal and oil mean that nuclear power would be hugely cost effective in the long term.

The Layfield report makes a recommendation that, on balance, a nuclear plant would be cheaper than a coal-fired plant, but even that judgment has been cast into doubt by the subsequent fall in the price of oil and coal. I recognise that the long-term judgment is more difficult. Certainly, oil prices could escalate again and as our North sea reserves dwindle, the Government must begin to think in terms of maintaining a strategic reserve or stock for this country well into the next century. However, other forms of energy may have become feasible by then—not the absurdly expensive and environmentally damaging forms such as wind generation, but the safe production of power through fission. If the economic case for Sizewell is overwhelming, the power station project should proceed, but an overwhelming economic case for Sizewell B has not been made in the Layfield report. The only countries sold on nuclear power at present are France and the Soviet Union. If we join the ranks of the doubters — the Americans, the Germans, the Italians and the Austrians —we may affect public opionion in France one day.

While not abandoning nuclear technology and the possibility of its improvement to a degree of safety that might one day allow it to proceed. I urge the Government to gradually phase out the existing nuclear power stations that show signs of age and to phase down the Sellafield reprocessing plant in parallel as the number of leaks and operational difficulties at that plant continue to mount. I also urge the Government not to proceed with Sizewell B in the near future. I believe that the lid of hell itself was briefly blown off in the Chernobyl disaster before being sealed by a massive concrete casing. The more nuclear power stations there are at the existing stage of technology, the more likely it is that that ghastly episode will some day be repeated somewhere else.

6.31 pm

Mr. D. E. Thomas (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I have the unexpected pleasure of agreeing with my neighbour the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Harvey) who has spoken sensitively and has reflected the feeling within the farming community and the community generally in North Wales, where there are two Magnox stations. The area is faced with the aging station at Trawsfynydd in Meirionnydd Nant Conwy and the decision as to whether there should be a second generation of nuclear power stations. I believe that most people in that part of Wales would agree with the sentiments and the sensitive speech of the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West. However, I suspect that the hon. Gentleman may not receive much response from the Government Front Bench.

I want to concentrate on the issues that affect my constituency and to highlight three of the issues raised by the Layfield report. The report raises more questions than it answers. As a process of public inquiry, which has been carefully judged and balanced the report provides a massive amount of evidence which, as it is reassessed in the period since publication, shows clearly that the balance of evidence is different from that judged by the inspector.

It is important that we get away from the notion that the report is a once-and-for-all determination of a programme for nuclear power stations. The Layfield report stresses that each fresh application must be considered on its merits. It is essential for those of us who are concerned in Somerset and South Wales, about the possible application for Hinkley Point C and the site at Druridge bay which was referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck (Mr. Thompson) and other sites in England and Wales which may be targeted by the CEGB for development, that each of those applications will be a fresh application in the context of the energy requirements at the time and particularly in the light of other emerging technologies. The House should firmly reject the notion that we are considering a final decision today.

I want to consider the aspects of radiological and environmental protection arising from the report and the interface of civil and military plutonium. I also want to consider the impact of power stations and energy policy on local communities.

Any assessment of the future development of the nuclear industry—as we are trying to assess tonight—must be based on our experiences of the way in which the industry operates. I am particularly concerned about the principle of the discharges from power stations — the principle of "as long as reasonably practicable" or ALARP as it is called — and its application to the Magnox station at Trawsfynydd. That station came on line in 1965. It is now more than 21 years old and still awaiting the report from the nuclear installations inspectorate which is reviewing Magnox stations.

I want to place on record my highest regard for the professional quality of the work of the staff at the station, most of whom are my constituents and at least some of whom are still my friends. They do as good a job as possible of running the plant up to a level of safety. Clearly those of us who live next to those power stations or who have public responsibility for them, must be concerned about the safety of the current generation of Magnox stations. We must assess the future of any further development on the basis of our understanding of that safety record.

It is my responsibility to raise questions about the safe environmental operation of the Trawsfynydd station. The figures to which I shall refer this evening are well documented and are publicly available from the CEGB, the Welsh Office, and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. It is clear from the figures of environmental discharge that the principle of "as low as reasonably practicable" has not applied to discharges from Trawsfynydd. Trawsfynydd is an inland station, cooled from an inland lake and it is quite exceptional in that respect within the United Kingdom nuclear plants. However, the figures of discharges between 1977 and 1981 show that cobalt-60 levels rose by 400 per cent. The caesium discharges over the period from 1982 onwards reveal a substantial increase. The figures of discharge revealed in the mud and silt in the lake up to 1982 and the figures for a further three-year period show an increase from a relatively low level of five and 12 bq/kg of fish up to 36 bq. There is a more serious increase in caesium 137, with levels of around 1,500 bq/kg to 3,000 bq/kg in mud which has increased suddenly over the past three years to a level of 8,000 bq/kg.

If the principle of "as low as reasonably practicable" has been applied, how can such massive increases in discharge have occurred? Monitoring by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and others has shown a

[Mr. D. E. Thomas]

massive increase in contamination in the lake. It is right that the board and the monitoring authorities should respond and give reasons for that contamination.

We can speculate whether fission products such as cobalt-60 have been flaking off from the tubing of the reactor as a result of thermal shock from rapid shutdown. We can speculate about the causes of such discharges. However, speculation is not good enough. We need to know the reasons for such increases. Any substantial increase in discharges from Magnox stations is unacceptable. That is why the local authority, Gwynedd county council, has recently set up an independent monitoring system and I am looking forward to the publication of all independent monitoring reports on the levels of discharge from the station.

If the board is serious in its commitment to openness and maintaining public confidence in the nuclear industry, it is important that the precise reasons for those discharges should be made plain.

That is not the only example of lack of information or secrecy in the industry. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) said earlier, we still have not had a clear statement from the Government or the nuclear industry on the precise relationship between civil and military plutonium. In paragraph 105.70 of the report, Sir Frank Layfield stresses the need for the reprocessing of spent fuel from Sizewell B or later stations to be carried out in buildings

"separate from those used for military reprocessing."

I assume from the Government's decision on co-processing that this is what will happen from now on at Sellafield, but we still have had no information about what has happened to military and civil plutonium in the past. Layfield recommends that a specific designation of civil or military plutonium should be applied to its origin and destination.

Nor have we been told what has happened to plutonium from Magnox stations. I have corresponded extensively on the subject with the Secretary of State and his predecessors. I have asked many parliamentary questions, but the Government's view is not clear. The Prime Minister tells me one thing and the Secretary of State tells me another. Apparently the official position is still as was set out by the previous Under-Secretary of State for Energy, who said on 4 February 1983:

"No plutonium produced in any of the CEGB's nuclear power stations has ever been used for military purposes."—[*Official Report*, 4 February 1983; Vol. 36, c. *206*.]

Is that still the Government's position? From information that has come to light since then and from independent calculations, it is clear that that cannot be true. Yet the Government stick to that line and the CEGB, in its public pronouncements, hides behind misleading answers that have been given to the House. If the Government accept the principles of Layfield as they apply to the future separation of civil and military plutonium, the entire record must be made clear to the House. Statements made by Ministers in the House have misled the public, and the Government are obliged to make the matter entirely clear.

The third aspect with which I wish to deal is the impact of nuclear power stations on the local community. It is clear to those who have read the report in detail, especially the sections dealing with the local impact, and it was clear from the speech of the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Sir E. Griffiths) that the building of a nuclear power station brings little benefit to a community. Indeed, the report shows that there is a disbenefit in terms of environmental impact and dislocation of the local economy. Yet the main argument of supporters of nuclear power in my constituency is that it is the only way to create jobs in a rural area. But we know the sort of employment that is generated. A boom and bust syndrome is created by high employment during construction, lower employment during operation and even lower employment during decommissioning. The only long-term employment created by nuclear power stations is in the security guards who must maintain the core for 100 years. That will be a job for generations to come.

The net effect of a major construction project on a rural community is a diseconomy of scale in terms of permanent employment. The report brings out that fact clearly.

The Government have an obligation to communities that have hosted nuclear plants and are now faced with decommissioning not to look for new major nuclear construction projects in those areas but to provide public funding large enough to create alternative jobs. The county council, Mid-Wales Development and the local authorities in my constituency are seriously considering alternative employment. The Government have an obligation to those of us who have lived with the first generation of nuclear power stations. If they are serious about their obligation to the community, they should commit themselves to providing alternative employment for those who have provided energy from the present generation of Magnox stations.

6.45 pm

Mrs. Anna McCurley (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): It is generally recognised that all forecasts about future demand for energy have been wildly under-estimated. With that in mind, I urge the Government to support the British nuclear energy programme to the hilt and to go ahead with Sizewell B.

The capacity of Sizewell B would in no way impede the contribution of other forms of energy, including fossil fuels, to the ever-growing demand. Indeed, I should be the first to suggest that alongside a decision to go ahead with Sizewell, the Government should think seriously about speedily commissioning two coal-fired power stations. Experts agree that there is a need for a balanced fuel policy. I admit to having a constituency interest in both camps, as many of my constituents are employed by Babcock Power and would assuredly be involved in the construction of Sizewell and probably in the construction of coal-fired power stations. As employment has been a problem in the industry, the decision to go ahead with Sizewell, for which contracts amounting to millions of pounds have already been signed and to which many hundreds of man hours would be committed, would stabilise Babcock's employment figures. More jobs would also be created if the Secretary of State ordered two coal-fired stations, but I hesitate to make the need for jobs in Renfrewshire the paramount consideration in a debate of this kind.

Safety is, of course, of the greatest importance. There was a practical and positive approach in the Layfield recommendations. Chernobyl has happened since that report and has perhaps altered our perceptions, but we must not over-emphasise it. Since Chernobyl, we have put

the perspective right on nuclear accidents. We now know what was previously the unknown. The Russians have admitted the design faults specific to the RBMK, where the onus of care was left not to technology but to the operators. The design and characteristics of the Sizewell PWR are completely different from those of the RBMK 1000, and safety standards here are much higher than they have been so far in the USSR. More important, until recently, the USSR did not have an independent nuclear inspectorate, although there are proposals to have one now.

I noted with interest that within weeks of the Chernobyl accident the Russians announced proposals to expand their nuclear power industry. That is probably because the extent of a nuclear accident is much better understood. For us in Britain, it is just as well to know the effects, as we live within a 350-mile radius of nuclear power stations operating in Europe. If Sizewell went ahead within 150 miles of London, we would have only 29·8 per cent. of operating capacity. The French make up the rest within 350 miles, including every United Kingdom station except Dounreay. We should have only 24·8 per cent. of capacity because the French, Dutch, Belgians and Germans have the rest, so we are under more threat from existing stations in Europe than we would be from Sizewell.

The radiation dose in the United Kingdom from Chernobyl amounted to 0·3 milliSieverts in Wales, Cumbria and my part of Scotland. That should be compared with background radiation of between 0·8 and 1·7 mSv per year in the United Kingdom, between 5 and 80 mSv a year in India and up to 125 mSv a year in Brazil. People are known to thrive in atmospheres with high background radiation. Perhaps I can put the figures in perspective by saying that the effect of the 0·3 mSv experienced in the United Kingdom from Chernobyl is equivalent to living in Aberdeen for four months. Some might say that there is a greater danger to health from living in Aberdeen. The dose can also be compared with drinking an extra bottle of wine or smoking one cigarette every 30 months. Such is the effect of radiation from Chernobyl in Britain. Moreover, the level at the Chernobyl site was never so high as the cases that I have cited.

We might compare that nuclear accident with the accident at Bhopal, where 2,000 people died. Another 100,000 at least are suffering severe after-effects, and the after-effects of Seveso are still not quantifiable. Bearing those accidents in mind, Chernobyl seems much less dramatic. We must keep that in mind. After all, if we had not had a balanced attitude to safety and innovation in the past, we should never have proceeded with coal mining or car driving. So long as we can guarantee that, with a PWR, there is no departure from operating procedures to carry out experiments such as were conducted in the USSR—I believe that that would not be possible here—so long as it is clearly understood that other United Kingdom and Western reactors are designed to much higher standards, and so long as there is close security, unlike Chernobyl, we can be reassured. Even if operators ignored their instructions, United Kingdom reactors would not go what is called "prompt-critical".

I am not a nuclear scientist or physicist, but I know that a positive void coefficient is not acceptable. That was considered on the SGHWR, and displacer tubes were fitted in the core to make the void coefficient significantly negative. Although the inspector's report in no way denies the possibility of accident, I believe that the probabilities are well dealt with. In this regard, we have to consider and understand the principle of acceptable level of risk.

The Government and the industry have a proud safety record. No other country devotes so much time and money to safety. In those circumstances, and provided that they prevail in the future, I urge the Government to go ahead with a positive decision.

6.53 pm

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): I hope that the hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mrs. McCurley) will forgive me if I do not follow her, but I do not wish to make a long speech, although it will be a little longer than the Secretary of State's graceful and proper introduction. He reminded the House that he had been here 25 years but that he had never before been in the situation in which this debate puts him.

I hope that the Secretary of State will think back to the day when he first entered the House. He need not even think back that far. He might think back only to the early 1970s when hon. Members could take parties around the House without difficulty and when access to all manner of public buildings and travel through airports was a great deal easier. People who wanted to see their Member of Parliament were able to do just that, and we took them around the Palace without their having to go through X-ray machines and metal detectors. We did not suffer what I experienced last week. I was taking respectable people around, who probably would not recognise a bomb or gun if they saw one, but they had to queue in the bitter cold morning outside the Norman porch to get in. That did not happen when the Secretary of State first entered the House. The difference is the result of serious and dreadful changes on our planet as terrorism and international crime proliferate. That gives rise to a serious reservation about the growth of nuclear power.

Conservative Members should understand that one result of the development of nuclear power in France has been a strengthening of the rather more positive—if that is the correct word — and vigorous policing that is practised there. People in France may be a little less enthusiastic about nuclear power than some Conservative Members seem to believe as a result of the way in which their protests might be dealt with. That is not a condition that any of us should wish to see here if we are to remain, as many hon. Members believe that we are, a free country and a bastion of liberty. The dangers of nuclear power assisting terrorism could be substantial. I believe that security would be maintained, but that we would be maintaining the growth of employment in the security industry, which is at present about the only growth industry in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Michael Morris (Northampton, South): Rubbish.

Mr. Hardy: It is all very well for the hon. Gentleman to shout "Rubbish", but I have heard more rubbish from Conservative Members on this subject in the past seven years than on any other. Some hon. Members might recall that there was a "Nuclear Forum" three or four years ago when Lord Marshall spoke of the advantages of cheap French nuclear power. I intervened on the Secretary of State and on the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Sir J. Osborn) to talk about that.

I hope that the Secretary of State will ensure that the Minister confirms what I am about to say. Electricité de

[Mr. Hardy]

France's debt has now reached $33 billion, or 220 billion French francs, because is has spent a great deal more than it needed to spend on PWRs, with the result that the French have such an obscene surplus of electicity that they are selling cheaply in France, although that is changing rapidly, and at a dumped price through Sellinge.

What are we paying for French electricity? Does the Secretary of State think that it is fair trade? Does he believe that it complies with GATT? Does it comply with the treaty of Rome? It is a tremendous subsidy. If we reflected it by exporting coal to France, I calculate that we would sell at £6·50 a tonne. That would be absurd, but it would be equally absurd for us to allow the French to export their unemployment to us on the present scale.

The French have done in nuclear power, perhaps more expensively, what they did with eggs, turkeys, and golden delicious apple production, but this is a very much more serious matter. I hope the Minister will be able to deal with the anxieties expressed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) and others about EDF's enormous deficit and confirm that the speeches that we have heard from Conservative Members and others for the past six years were not so well founded as was initially thought.

That is not the only thing that worries me. In January I chaired part of the nuclear hearing in Paris organised by the Council of Europe. It was quite obvious there that a number of people in Belgium, West Germany and Luxembourg were extremely unhappy about developments in France. They were worried that they, as close neighbours, had not been told all that they should have been told about the condition of the French nuclear industry. I was therefore especially worried when I saw that in 1979 at Gravelines the safety valves controlling cooling circuits showed the same faults as those which occurred at Three Mile Island.

I spend much of the year in Yorkshire, which is twice as far from the House as the Gravelines nuclear power station. The Government seem to be rather more concerned about the south-east of England than they are about areas such as mine, but are they concerned enough to ensure that all the faults which have occurred or might occur in French PWR reactors are properly notified to the United Kingdom? Gravelines, Chinon, Grenoble, Les Choux, Brenelis, St. Laurent, La Bugey and Cottenom are all French nuclear power stations where things have gone wrong, and we are a lot closer to them than we are to Chernobyl.

I do not want to get involved in scare talk and I am prepared to accept that it would be foolish to say for all time that there should never be any nuclear power. I think that the Secretary of State will agree that future generations will face the prospect of desolation if we do not hand on to them an adequate energy base, but there is no need for us to devote a huge part of our capital expenditure capacity to this particular form of power. Through a proper conservation programme we could save as much energy as the output of at least two of the five PWRs that the CEGB needs. We should ensure that we invest rather more quickly in the clean combustion of coal than we seem to be doing—and as an environmentalist I make no apology for insisting that it should be clean.

There is no need for us to surrender, as it were, the heritage of the nuclear research which has culminated in the AGR and which may in due course see the development of fusion, but at this stage there is no need for us to invest the amount of money which is currently in mind for PWR purposes. Last week some people made the preposterous claim that PWR reactors and nuclear power today had a clean bill of health. I hope that before the Secretary of State makes his decision he will not only take careful note of Sir Frank Layfield's reference to the need to study leukaemia in relation to Sizewell A but will look at the various references to the need for the studies and investigations recommended in the document about nuclear power and lukaemia.

I accept that, apart from the matter of liver cancer, the CEGB locations have been given a clean bill of health, but several of those stations are comparatively recent and proper weight should be attached to the situation in pre-1955 nuclear establishments. I do not want to labour the point because it would be wrong to indulge in sensational comment, but in those studies there are at least six references to the need for further investigation. If the scientists can produce a positive record of incidence and mortality from cancer, leukaemia and lymphoma, the House should insist that before any firm decision to have a family of pressurised water reactors the investigations mentioned in this document should be carried out.

I trust that the Secretary of State will pay heed not only to the arguments about energy, but to those about the need to maintain liberty in our societies and to ensure the health of future generations.

7.4 pm

Sir Trevor Skeet (Bedfordshire, North): I should say one thing in fairness to Electricité de France. At present EDF is not proceeding on the basis of capital contributions from the state, nor is it receiving any subsidies. The hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) mentioned leukaemia, which had not been mentioned before in the debate.

The United Kingdom has a population of over 50 million and our nuclear programme produces between 18 and 19 per cent. of our total electricity. France produces 76 per cent. of its total electricity by nuclear power and it has a population of 55 million. In Belgium, electricity generated by nuclear power is roughly 60 per cent. of the total, and the population is 9·8 million. In the United Kingdom we are disturbed by small cells of leukaemia appearing all over the country particularly in the vicinity of nuclear stations. Nobody in France or in Belgium is concerned about that, and those countries have substanial nuclear programmes and one has a bigger population.

I shall read a small extract from a report called "Cancer Incidence and Mortality in the Vicinity of Nuclear Installations, England and Wales, 1959-1980". The Opposition demanded that this should be brought to the House and it has now been brought here in draft form. That report says:

> "These values suggest the majority of positives occur by chance and that the presence of the nuclear installations is not a contributory factor."

That is on the first page of the report. Further on, the report says:

> "the results for control locations strongly suggest that the positive results for nuclear installations are predominantly due to data biases and to random fluctuations rather than to local environment."

When we hear anything about this subject we will be able to say authoritatively that there is nothing at all in it at this stage.

The Secretary of State is perfectly right to suggest that safety is the prime consideration. Several hon. Members have also said that. It is important to bear in mind what is in chapter 2 of the Layfield report. It says:

"the safety record of the CEGB is outstanding by any standards; . . . the CEGB and NII both possess a sufficiently high degree of engineering and managerial competence to ensure plant safety;".

Those are remarkable commendations from a report which took about four years to compile. That committee adduced erudite evidence, not merely from people from Britain but from abroad. Certain matters were reserved by the Layfield inquiry and were identified by the NII as requiring clarification before a site licence could be issued. Of the 79 issues that have so far been identified 76 have now been resolved leaving only three outstanding. A number of matters were raised by the NII, the protesters and other people and Layfield stated that these matters should be considered in depth. All but three have been resolved.

One matter worries me and my constituents. It is about Chernobyl, the RBMK reactor. However, at the Vienna conference Professor V. A. Legasov said that the type of damage caused by a faulty Chernobyl type reactor could not occur in the United Kingdom or in any of the West's reactors. It is interesting to note that the Russians have gone ahead with their nuclear power programme and want substantially to advance its capacity by 2000 AD. They have resorted to their own version of PWR for future construction.

The Chernobyl reactor is also different from the ones in the West because of its sudden injection of reactivity. My hon. Friend the Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mrs. McCurley) referred earlier to the positive void coefficient that may make that reactor go supercritical. That is not possible with reactors in the United Kingdom. In fact, several years ago some of us went to look at the Canadian reactor system to see whether it was applicable to the United Kingdom. We came back and suggested that that system should not be accommodated here.

The steam-generated heavy water reactor, which is the nearest equivalent to the reactor in the Soviet Union, was accepted temporarily but was later rejected. We have therefore adopted the right course and not pursued a reactor design that could lead to disasters. I am perfectly satisfied with the safety arrangements outlined in the report and also that the CEGB and nuclear installations inspectorate can get together and lay down the appropriate conditions to safeguard the public.

Since the nuclear programme was commenced in the United Kingdom, the record of the CEGB has been remarkable, such has been the nature of the safety regulations imposed on the industry.

On economics, the first argument to which I give great weight relates to the diversification of fuel sources. At present coal-fired plants dominate the CEGB system, but prudence demands a broader fuel base. There is also a need to prevent the demise of an important technological industry in the United Kingdom, because the teams could disperse if Sizewell is not ordered. It is important to establish a new line of PWRs with the most up-to-date technology. Such reactors could be exported at a much later date. The Kraftwerk Union borrowed its ideas partly from France and partly from Westinghouse in the United States. EDF in France borrowed its ideas from Westinghouse. It has added its own ideas, and ultimately has arranged for valuable disposal on the export market. That has been attractive. I have no doubt that once we have more experience of this type of reactor, we shall be able to do the same.

In my judgment the economics still favourable to Sizewell. In part, economics will be determined by the movement of prices in competitive fuels. The calculations require that such prices will have to be accurately gauged over the life of the plant—from 1995 to 2035—but not on the basis of immediate market trends.

The right hon. Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) said that because of two years of falling oil and coal prices he could project forward accurately over the next 40 years. That is absurd. In other words, the right hon. Gentleman is now drawing conclusions as to why we should not go ahead with the building of a nuclear power station in 1988 so that it can be ready for commissioning in 1995.

It is important to bear in mind that the capacity is warranted and that it must be available in 1995. The right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Steel) asked why we should not consider the Severn barrage. While that might provide its full power, it would not do so until the year 2000 or 2005. Therefore, it would not be able to provide the additional capacity that the CEGB require at the right time.

According to chapter 70 of the Layfield report, international coal prices are accepted as the proper basis for economic appraisal in national resource terms, but it should not be forgotten that British coal prices are controlled by a variety of domestic factors. The CEGB pays £42 a tonne for its coal, but gets its third tranche at world prices. Yet that amounts to only 12 million tonnes. Therefore, it is almost totally insulated from the world market. Furthermore, British Coal is subsidised to the tune of £6 a tonne. If we delve even deeper, we will see that it is subsidised even more heavily, and that disruptive factor will cause great difficulty when making any realistic comparisons.

It is useful to calculate on the basis of world prices, as that avoids going into the complications of the coal industry, but those of us in the House who have been brought up on coal Bills know that the problem is much more complicated.

It has also been said that the price of nuclear power stations has escalated from £1 billion to just over £1·5 billion. I agree that that is a considerable sum, but we should bear in mind the fact that the coal industry has also been subject to escalating costs and expensive outlays. The desulphurisation of flue gases is very expensive indeed. No decision has yet been taken on the removal of NOx, and until that problem is solved no new coal-fired power stations can be brought into operation. NOx may act as a catalyst with sulphur dioxide, causing destruction of fish and trees.

Mr. Barron: I agree with what the hon. Gentleman is saying, but is not that an easier problem to solve than the dumping of nuclear waste in Bedfordshire?

Sir Trevor Skeet: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has raised the problem of nuclear waste. I have never advocated that it should go to Bedfordshire — [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] Obviously the hon. Gentleman did not hear me when I last spoke on the subject. The Layfield report says that nuclear waste can be kept at Sizewell B

[Sir Trevor Skeet]

throughout the entire life of the power station. If that is correct, the waste would never come to Bedfordshire. I also recommended Bradwell and Fulbeck as two places to which the waste could go. However, I do not want to deviate too much from my main argument.

Carbon dioxide remains an environmental problem with fossil fuels. That has been partially explained, and in time, if there is to be increased coal-burning across western Europe, we shall have to find some way of containing its emission.

In addition, the recommendations of the Waddilove report on compensation for subsidence have never been faced. In underground mining, that could be desperately expensive, and I dare say that costings will have to be reflected in the price of coal. Even with substantial mechanisation, mining is still labour-intensive, high-cost, and liable to disruption.

As the Secretary of State will no doubt remind the House if he has the opportunity, last year we had great difficulties with miners in certain parts of the country, and had it not been for nuclear and oil-fired power stations, all the lights of the country would have gone out.

Mr. Frank Cook: That is rubbish.

Sir Trevor Skeet: The hon. Gentleman knows that it is the truth. If only Labour Members faced the facts of life, they would not in some cases be such idiots. I hope that I have not been too disrespectful, but if I have, I willingly withdraw what I have just said.

Another factor that adds to the price of coal is the increase in underground mining costs due to safety arrangements. However, I pay tribute to the miners for the way in which they have increased productivity. I have come to the conclusion that, while oil prices are to some extent a determining factor for coal, the real price of coal on the world market could be affected by increases in supply which would unsettle prices, albeit temporarily. The price on the United Kingdom market during the life of Sizewell, that is 1995 to 2035, which is the key matter, is likely to be on the upward grade. That is all that we have to establish.

The performance of exchange rates, which is also crucial to turning dollar prices into pounds, will be totally unpredictable during that 40 years. No one, apart from Layfield, would venture to conjecture on that. Between 1995 and 2035 the price of crude oil, and hence that of petroleum products, specifically fuel, will probably also be upwards as supplies diminish.

Having examined the Sizewell report carefully, I came to the conclusion that, fuel-wise, Layfield has made out a strong case and that the Central Electricity Generating Board, while it has been a bit too optimistic, has nevertheless reached a satisfactory position.

I reflect once again on the French. The Electricité de France nuclear construction programme could remain profitable for the French, right down to the price of $5 a barrel, never mind the fact that their programme is substantially based on the PWR. We are not likely to find that in the United Kingdom.

I do not wish to take too much time over this, but I shall finish by mentioning one or two points. Today we have been told by some hon. Members who are against the recommendations for Sizewell B that the nuclear industry is totally unsafe. We have been told by a Welsh Conservative Member, my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Harvey) that he does not wish to see Sizewell B brought into operation.

In 1986, 21 power reactors were completed in eight states. Today, the world total is 394 nuclear plants. If the International Atomic Energy Agency figures—

Mr. Frank Cook: How many have been cancelled?

Sir Trevor Skeet: Nuclear is providing 15 per cent. of world electricity. There were cancellations in the United States due to interest rates and over-ordering. I shall not deal with those factors today. Twenty-six countries generate electricity by nuclear power plants in which the PWRs predominate. That is the world scene. Twenty-six countries the world over use nuclear power. PWRs is the system in vogue and it is the one that we may accept in the United Kingdom. The French, under Electricité de France, the Germans under their Kraftwerk Union, and Westinghouse of the United States have all made improvements. If we accept this model, we shall accept it with all those improvements vested in it.

It is important that we consider that. Yes, in the United States high interest rates and over-capacity in the days when they ordered too many nuclear reactors has affected matters, but between 1953 and 1979 orders for fossil fuel power stations were cancelled in the United States in exactly the same way as those for nuclear power stations. However, since Three Mile Island, 62 new nuclear power stations have been ordered in other countries and 113 of those were under construction in 1979 and have now been completed.

Finally, the Liberals tell us that we must turn to other methods. Will they have us put up some windmills to get a power station the size of Sizewell B? Three thousand of these windmills would be required, 500m apart. The ground coverage would be 27 sq km. What an environmental eyesore that would be! It would be totally unacceptable.

Mr. Steel: No one suggested that. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not indulge in the old trick of putting forward views that no hon. Member has advanced in the House just to knock them down.

Sir Trevor Skeet: It is interesting that the right hon. Gentleman mentioned the Severn barrage. I told him that it would not reach full power until after the year 2000, and that the power was required by 1995. Therefore, it would pass the peak time when it was required. That is why it is essential to get going now, well before 1990, so that it can be commissioned by about 1995.

The most practicable solution of the lot is that we should import more electricity from France. A 2,000 MW line could be doubled to get more electricity. Layfield recommends that course. Chapter 62, paragraph 19 states:

> "the possibility of further links, with France in particular, should be actively reviewed . . . the cheapness of some electricity generated in France might make it economic to construct further interconnection capacity"

One might consider that, but the miners have cause to reflect that the French can market electricity in the United Kingdom at costs below that of our production. Would they suggest that that course should be followed? If we took any of the other alternative methods, even if money were spent on them, we could not produce the electricity that we require to keep the lamps burning and to keep

industry productive on the scale required. None of that could be produced by 2000AD and the hon. Gentleman knows that.

Mr. Frank Cook: The hon. Gentleman has referred to the fact that the French can supply electricity at a lower cost than that produced by fossil fuels in this country. Will he tell us whether he is privy to cost figures that are not available to Labour Members in referring to the cost of electricity here?

Sir Trevor Skeet: I must be careful, because I have spoken for some time. I am prepared to talk with the hon. Gentleman on some other occasion. I am interested in the price of French electricity. I have been over to France and I have seen their network. It is most admirable that they have kept it. A Socialist Government came into power in France and promised to close it all down, but they kept it all going. That must be good and so must be the PWRs that we are seeking to get for the United Kingdom.

7.28 pm

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): I have seen that we are destined to conduct our exchanges this evening under three shadows. Those shadows are three refusals. The first refusal was that of the Secretary of State to comment on the Layfield report or to answer questions upon it and, in fact, his refusal to speak for more than six minutes on it which, doubtless, was easy for him, as he had said that he had yet to make his decision. I am yet to be convinced that a decision is not yet made.

The second shadow is the refusal of the Government to heed the plea of my right hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) when he begged the Leader of the House to table a reasoned and considered motion that could be subject to reasoned and considered amendment. Doubtless that tactic could be excused rationally by the Secretary of State's already recorded statement that he had yet to make his decision. However, I remind the House that it is also an excuse that allows hon. Members anywhere in the House, but particularly, it would seem, Conservative Members, to talk about any particular aspect of nuclear energy that they choose to seize upon.

I remind the House that tonight we are discussing the Layfield report and particularly the pressurised water reactor that is supposedly destined for Sizewell. Even that is not the biggest shadow. I suggest that the biggest shadow was the refusal of the head of the Central Electricity Generating Board, Lord Marshall, himself to present the CEGB's case at the inquiry. I am not one of those who would suggest that there was any conflict of interest between the principal procurer and the potential provider of this particular type of reactor—far be it from me to do so—but I find it astonishing that the noble Lord, who is acknowledged as one our foremost authorities on nuclear energy in all its forms, should refuse to present his case at an inquiry of this nature and thereby refuse to submit himself to examination.

Tonight we have a major responsibility which we should not shirk, even though it may go against party political lines. That responsibility is for the safety of the British public. We must decide whether to go ahead with a completely different type of nuclear reactor, the PWR. This step marks a major shift away from designs which we have previously used. Nuclear reactors generate electricity, but they are unlike any other power stations in that they contain within the reactor core a colossal amount of radioactivity which poses particularly difficult problems for both the designers of the plants and the engineers who build and operate them.

I used to work in the nuclear industry, so I speak with some knowledge of the truth about the safety and the design of plants. Some hon. Members would like to label me anti-nuclear. I reject that label because I am in favour of technology so long as it can be proven to be safe and to bring benefit to human beings. Hon. Members will recall that I denied the anti-nuclear label and said that it was as silly to refer to me as anti-nuc as it would be to refer to me as anti-food because I happened to be against food poisoning. Nevertheless, I remain unconvinced by nuclear power plants, in particular by the PWR.

Few people have seen a PWR and understand what is going on in its core. At the heart is a massive steel pressure vessel about 35 ft high and 15 ft in diameter. Inside there are about 40,000 fuel elements which produce a power density in parts of the core as high as 250 kW per litre during operation. That is like the heat from 140 single bar electric fires coming from a pint milk bottle. The amount of heat is colossal, which is why the whole reactor must be pressurised up to 150 times atmospheric pressure and why the reactor must be kept cool at all times. About 20 tonnes of water must pass through the core every second. The PWR is an engineering challenge, if nothing else.

The PWR is designed in that way because, originally, it needed to be compact to fit inside a submarine. Some senior people in the nuclear industry have pointed out that what is good for a submarine in not necessarily good for an electrical power plant on land. Indeed, Sir Francis Tombs, the managing director of Rolls-Royce, which makes PWRs for our submarines, made that very point in a letter to a certain publication printed at Wapping. The late Professor Ned Franklin, former managing director of the National Nuclear Corporation, also criticised the PWR. I hope that Conservative Members who have been giving us a blizzard of bland assurances tonight will listen to this. In November 1986 he wrote that he opposed the construction of PWRs in the United Kingdom because they were

"not sufficiently operator friendly under accident conditions . . . This view is based on a lifetime's experience which indicates that when operators are subject to conditions of extreme emergency . . . they will react in ways which lead to a high risk of promoting accidents rather than diminishing them. This is materially increased if operators are aware of the very small time margins available to them. What is definitely intrinsic for water-cooled systems is that the drive for economy leads to high fuel ratings and to an extremely rapid sequence of events, given an initiation such as a loss of coolant accident. The times available for intervention are such that the reactor has become a 'fly-by-wire' device rather than a piloted one."

I remind the House that that comment comes from a man who spent a lifetime in the nuclear industry and who supported nuclear power to the end. His remarks relate specifically to the PWR. So much for the blizzard of bland assurances.

The PWR places major demands on the engineers in order to get the core cooling emergency systems right. Frankly, human operators cannot react sufficiently quickly. Instead of the minutes and hours that operators have at their disposal to react to accidents at AGRs and Magnox reactors, only seconds are available with the PWR. If human reaction is too slow and we do not feel that we can ask for such a rapid response from the

[Mr. Frank Cook]

operator, we must lock him out of the system. Then we become wholly dependent on a computer-guided system which can never possibly be acquainted with all the sets of circumstances that may arise. Therefore, in the light of all those extra demands on safety, how well, in the eyes of Layfield and others, does the PWR do?

Like most people from time to time I have taken my car in for an MOT test. When I do so, I do not say, "I am sorry but this is not the final design of my car. I want you to MOT it. Test what you have there and let me know whether the rest of it is in good shape too." With Sizewell B, that is exactly what the CEGB has done. As Layfield himself said:

"I was not able to base my conclusions on a final safety case"—

why not?—

"as none was submitted."

Nobody has seen the final design for Sizewell B, apart from the CEGB and the NII. Indeed, design modifications are still going on. Did Sizewell B pass its MOT test at the inquiry? The answer is no, it did not and never could have done. Layfield admits that the design was

"incomplete and not yet susceptible of a final assessment of its safety."

That is an extraordinary state of affairs when the design work for the proposal started back in 1979 and when we were promised that a final design for the reactor would be available before the start of the inquiry in January 1983. If anybody is under an illusion that Layfield passed Sizewell B on safety grounds, let me put them straight: what he did was to pass the buck to the CEGB and the NII to sort the matter out afterwards.

I do not suppose that many hon. Members have gone through the full details of the Layfield report and I would not expect them to. I suspect that most have read about it in the newspapers or glanced at some of the recommendations and conclusions. Close scrutiny of the report, particularly of the safety of the plant, does not give the real confidence needed to vote yes to Sizewell B at this stage.

Let me take up one or two aspects of the safety issue. Let us take the reactor pressure vessel which, if it fails, would have catastrophic consequences. Nobody would dispute that. Did the CEGB's evidence prove that it could meet the safety standards of an accident once in 10 million years of reactor operation? The answer is no. Layfield called on an independent assessor, Professor Kletz, who pointed out that, on a strict statistical basis, the absence of a failure so far could only support the conclusion that the true annual failure probability was less than 6·4 per million per year. Sir Frank, in his ultimate wisdom—or otherwise—decided that he was impressed by the work that the CEGB had done and that as far as he was concerned the CEGB could be trusted to achieve the safety standards which it had set.

Let us turn to the steam generators, which are a fundamental part of the cooling system. Layfield admits that

"it is impossible to say whether the model F steam generator as proposed by the CEGB for Sizewell B, will prove to be reliable or not."

What is his solution to this? It is simply to turn yet again to the CEGB, the credentials of which he accepts and regards as adequate to reach the required safety standards.

What about fuel clad ballooning? There can be swelling of fuel elements which restricts cooling and can lead to melting of the fuel itself. Layfield admits that the nuclear installations inspectorate was not satisfied at the end of the inquiry and that some matters still remained unsolved.

Let us consider loss of coolant accidents, the biggest of which we saw at Chernobyl. That happened after March 1985. Layfield admits that there were major uncertainties in the CEGB's analysis of LOCAs — loss of coolant accidents. The nuclear installations inspectorate regarded the CEGB's work as

"a significant advance towards an adequate safety case, but was not yet entirely satisfactory."

Time and time again Sir Frank has ducked his responsibilities on safety, with all the major uncertainties outstanding, by simply passing the buck to the NII and the CEGB.

Mr. Forman: The technologies which the hon. Member is discussing are, almost by definition, impossible to be totally sure about because of their complexity and safety. Does he not see the strength of Sir Frank Layfield basing his judgment on the best expertise available at the time?

Mr. Cook: I take the point without reservation, but allow me to tell the hon. Gentleman about the scientists on both sides of the Atlantic and around the globe who have stated categorically that research and development finished too soon and that production started too early. We have not advanced the technology to the stage where we can safely put it into operation. If the hon. Gentleman listens further, I shall continue to prove just that.

One of the fundamental issues at the Sizewell inquiry was the question of risk. What level of risk is acceptable to hon. Members, to me or to the general public? The CEGB thought that one in a million was an "acceptable" level of risk. What does one in a million really mean? It is intended to tell us that an accident simply could not happen. Well, the accident at Three Mile island—TMI as we are told to refer to it—did happen. The clean-up costs are estimated at $1 billion—about $300 million more than the plant cost to build. The accident at Chernobyl did happen. So far 31 people are dead, over 200 people are still seriously ill and between 10,000 and 50,000 long-term cancers are expected. Clean-up costs in Russian are already over £2·5 billion, and over £3·5 million has been paid to sheep farmers in the United Kingdom.

There have been two major accidents in seven years —one in a capitalist country with a PWR, the other in a Communist country with a pressure tube reactor. Even if we believe all the CEGB's risk estimates, one in a million is still not acceptable. We cannot afford a single such accident. Such an accident would devastate the United Kingdom and our continental neighbours and have appalling consequences for the national economy.

The industry's assertion, and the Government's response to all this, is to say that such an accident could not happen here. What arrogance. What misguided belief in the supremacy of technology and the ability of humans to be perfect.

At the post-Chernobyl conference in Vienna last August, Dr. Morris Rosen of the International Atomic Energy Authority was a damned sight more honest than many of our own scientists. He told reporters:

"I might say that one of these accidents could happen once every ten years. I might say it could happen every year. If you

did the figures you might still find nuclear safer. You're going to have to tell me whether that's acceptable or not. All I can say is that there were two accidents in seven years."

I ask the House to think about that for a moment. Rosen was saying that a major nuclear accident every 10 years might be acceptable. "Acceptable", or, in the words of Layfield, "tolerable"? I do not think so and I doubt whether my constituents do.

The CEGB has to convince me and my constituents that an accident like Chernobyl or Three Mile Island could never happen in this country. We have a right to demand this because a nuclear reactor is not like coal-fired station, a gas turbine, or a wind or wave generator. Coal miners, like uranium miners, suffer illness and death. The safety record has improved and it must continue to improve.

Comparing the complete coal and nuclear fuel cycles, Layfield concluded that the risks appeared to be of a similar magnitude. However, nuclear reactors have the potential for catastrophic consequences. That is what makes them so different. They have a capacity not just to harm workers, or people living near a plant, but to harm people living hundreds of miles away, and future generations through genetic disease and the exposure of children in the womb.

Three Mile Island and Chernobyl are warnings to us that we have not yet tamed this technology. Layfield has not been able to prove that we have tamed it. Arguments about jobs, the price of electricity and France are, frankly, incidental compared with safety. From the CEGB we are offered only one thing—the pressurised water reactor, plus a lot of delay in order plant for future coal-fired stations — delay designed, perhaps, to exert pressure towards acceptance of the PWR proposals.

In regard to that, I should like to record the concern of the national organiser of the engineering union, TASS, Mr. Keith Sneddon, who said:

"While the nuclear debate continues, the industry is spiralling downwards, causing even more job losses in areas of already massive unemployment. Without the orders, Britain will soon find itself having to rely on imported power equipment."

I commend national organiser Sneddon of TASS for those thoughts.

I remind the House that today we not only put ourselves in prospect of importing power equipment, but we debate our intention to rely on imported power technology.

Sir Frank stated that he was impressed by the confidence of the CEGB and the NII. Does the performance of those organisations justify that confidence? Let us take the NII. I have a great deal of respect for the NII and for the difficult job it must do. However, it is seriously under-staffed, with 23 fewer inspectors than it requires. Even at full strength, we have far fewer inspectors per nuclear plant than many other countries. Less than four weeks ago, in giving evidence to the Select Committee on Employment, senior representatives of the Health and Safety Executive confessed the difficulty they had in obtaining staff with appropriate qualifications of acceptable standards. The NII is under-funded and underpaid.

Until recently it worked hand in glove with the nuclear industry. As John Rimmington of the Health and Safety Executive admitted, some of his inspectors may have "gone native" in the past and not been sufficiently rigorous in their oversight of the plants. The Health and Safety Executive's extremely critical report on BNFL at Sellafield, which was published last year and which threatened closure of the plant, was an indictment of its performance. Having made many criticisms of BNFL's safety standards in 1981, the Health and Safety Executive allowed it to get away with things for a full five years before public outcry, after a spate of accidents at Sellafield forced the Executive to act. That critical report was as much an admission of its failure on safety matters as BNFL's. I consider that the NII is still on trial as to whether it is to be regarded as truly independent of the nuclear industry and standing up for public safety.

Future generations will not thank the House for lacking the courage of its convictions tonight. It is not enough for hon. Members simply to troop through the Division Lobbies tonight like a bunch of radioactive sheep — 300,000 of which are still banned from human consumption in this country, 10 months after Chernobyl.

The House should reject the Sizewell proposals and get started with tackling the real energy problems in this country. Sizewell B is nothing more than an enormous white elephant, which the CEGB, like a spoilt child, does not want to give up even when every reason for building it has disappeared.

In relation to the bland assurances that we have received tonight, Conservative Members should listen to the words—it is fitting that they should be the final words—of the man who was the father of the PWR, Admiral Hyman Rickover. In 1962, when he addressed the House of Representatives and confessed his fatherhood of the PWR, he said:

"I'm not proud of the part I played in it—the most important thing we could do now is to start having an international meeting where we first outlaw nuclear weapons then we outlaw nuclear reactors too."

Our meeting is hardly international, but let the House heed Admiral Rickover today as it ponders the proposals for the adoption of his bastard child.

7.52 pm

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): In one respect I aim markedly to depart from the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook), in that I shall not seek to emulate his rather disagreeable tone.

The purpose of this debate is consultative. It is an opportunity for hon. Members on both sides of the House to make brief, perhaps well-chosen remarks of benefit, one hopes, to Ministers and the Government.

In the first place, was Layfield asked to address the right questions? If one considers the terms of reference, originally given in a written answer on 21 July 1981 in column *126-127* of the *Official Report*, it is fairly clear that, essentially, Layfield was asked to involve himself in something in which he already had considered expertise —a detailed and extensive planning inquiry. However, right from the start, according to the terms of reference, inadequate attention was paid to the broader issues of energy policy and their possible impact upon the wider political and ecological environment.

Secondly, one needs to ask whether Layfield gave satisfactory answers within the terms of reference as stated in that written answer. I believe that the honest response to that must be "Yes, but" and "but" is the important word. Having listened to various hon. Members, it is clear that the economic argument and the economic conclusion reached by Layfield depend critically on three factors: first, the future cost of other fuels and other energy

[Mr. Nigel Forman]

technologies; secondly, the future level of interest rates and the appropriate discount rate that would be connected to those interest rates; thirdly, the ability of the constructors to build such reactors as Sizewell B to time and to cost. The "but" in the affirmative is therefore almost as important as the affirmative itself.

When one considers the safety aspect, it is clear that the conclusions reached by Layfield depend on three equally important factors. The first—this was brought out by the hon. Member for Stockton, North who is no longer in the Chamber—is the degree to which it is appropriate for Layfield to have placed such trust in the CEGB operators and the NII supervisors of this technology. If one reads the summary volume of the Layfield report—I freely admit that I have not had the time, due to my busy parliamentary duties, to read much more than that—it is clear that a process of conceptual narrowing took place in the course of the report. When one studies the concluding volume, it is clear that the focus of attention is on the generating process only. If one focuses on that, different conclusions are reached from those which would flow from the entire nuclear fuel cycle and attendant matters.

The safety argument also depends on credibility and public acceptability. The heroic task undertaken by Layfield was to seek to balance the alleged economic benefits that he thought he saw in such a reactor choice against incalculable safety risks—I am sure that Layfield would admit to that.

With regard to such risks, it is well to remember the remarks of the distinguished Swedish scientist Hannes Alfvén, that the real dilemma in the calculus between cost and risk with regard to nuclear power and many other advanced technologies may be summarised in the question: "How do you put an acceptable probability on an unacceptable risk?" That leads me to ask whether there are any other questions that the Layfield inquiry or a wider, similar inquiry should have addressed, but, apparently, did not address in sufficient detail in this inquiry, long though it was. I believe that there are.

The central question that underlay the nine volumes, but which does not seem to have been addressed in sufficient clarity, at any rate in the conclusions reached by Sir Frank, is what would be the implications of going nuclear with a family of PWRs. I know that it was described as a small family and that in the relevant parts of the report it spoke only of four or five other reactors—a small "nuclear family" if you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will pardon the pun. It is that to which we should address attention.

If, in the light of consultations, the House and the Government go ahead with Sizewell B, no one assumes that it will stop there. Indeed, the CEGB has never said as much. How would such a development, a family of PWRs, affect the economic and safety case and the levels of public acceptability? I would hazard a guess that the economic case would be impoved by going forward to series ordering. That is score one in favour of Layfield. On the other hand, the safety case would move in an unfavourable direction as a result of series ordering, if only for the rather simple arithmetical reason that the more reactors and the more of these complicated processes we have, the more possibility there is for human error and the greater the risks, other things being equal.

The third consideration that arises from series ordering is the level of public acceptability. I suspect that the problem of achieving public acceptability would increase when reactors of this sort became more common and were to be found in more places, sometimes sited closer to large pockets of population. The CEGB has been careful over the years to follow a remote siting policy, but on islands such as ours the possibility of following that policy ad infinitum is not all that great. There is a small recommendation in the Layfield report which is worthy of the Government's attention. It is the idea that it might be wise to provide in central Government financial controls on local government for the emulation of that which takes place in France. We know that the Electricité de France subsidises to a considerable extent to make nuclear siting worth the while of local authorities. In areas where French nuclear installations exist, EDF ensures that the authorities receive some direct financial benefit from what is otherwise centralised technology.

There are a number of other issues that, in the interests of time, I can only touch on. These are issues that should have been addressed more fully in the report. For example, I think that the House and the country would like to know more fully the implications for the AGR programme if we are to go ahead with a nuclear family of PWRs. I suspect that it would mean effectively the slow demise of that programme. The House has already considered the implications for the coal programme. One of the strongest parts of the Layfield report is the section that makes it clear that it is possible to run a continuing and modern coal programme in tandem with a small family of PWRs. When it comes to the more fanciful ambitions of some members of the pro-nuclear lobby, they are looking to a future in which coal plays only a small long-term role and nuclear power becomes the dominant factor. I would prefer a more even balance between the two sources of energy.

Finally, there are implications for energy policy generally. In that context it would have been salutary for the report to address to a greater extent than at present the key question of the implications of not going nuclear. The Swedish example, and some of the work done some years ago by Gerald Leach in his excellent book which hon. Members may have read, which is entitled "A Low Energy Strategy for the United Kingdom", should have been brought into play much more.

I do not have time to set out fully my views on energy policy issues in the context of the Layfield report in what must be a short speech tonight. Suffice it to say—I shall put my views in shorthand for hon. Members—that I think we should opt for what could loosely be described as a six-fuel economy. That is the path of prudence and flexibility. This means coal and nuclear power, chiefly for the production of electricity; oil and gas, recognising that they are finite, and alternative sources on a much more advanced and adventurous scale. There should also be a healthy slug of conservation, to an extent that even this Government have not yet managed. If we had a prudent, judicious and flexible policy that used all these mechanisms, acting both on the supply side and the demand side, we would carry public confidence much more readily with us.

My last point is more methodological than previous ones. In spite of the intelligence and hard work of Sir Frank Layfield and all those who worked with him on this lengthy report, I do not believe that a glorified planning

inquiry under section 40 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971 is the appropriate way in which to address such momentous issues. I have come firmly to that conclusion. I know that it is easy to say that now, but it is as well to get this on the record. I think that instead there should have been a full-blown and comprehensive inquiry into future energy needs. That was the key issue. Consideration should then have been given to the costs and benefits of the various ways of meeting those needs. That points much more to the traditional and now out-of-favour institutional model of a Royal Commission than to the course which was followed.

The House is being asked to offer its views on what is a gigantic, but conceptually limited inquiry, which is inspired by what I shall describe as the doctrine of the limited case—in other words, one reactor in one place at one time. None the less, in the fulness of time it will constitute a definitive test for PWR-type approval. Let no one imagine that we shall go through this long rigmarole again. Future Governments of whatever party will say, "PWR type-approval was settled at the Sizewell inquiry and that will be the end of it."

Successive Governments have chosen effectively to demonstrate, first in the Parker inquiry into reprocessing at Windscale and now in the Layfield inquiry into Sizewell B, that, in the lapidary words of chapter 47, paragraph 62 of the report:

"there is nothing fundamentally secret or sinister about civil nuclear power in the UK."

I suggest that, because public acceptability is the crucial test in the end, and because the public do not yet appear to be convinced of or reassured by the statement to which I have just referred, Ministers will be wise to proceed cautiously to what might be predominantly a nuclear electric future.

8.7 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): This is an important and timely debate. It is worth while to take up the remarks of the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) for a while, to think about the public inquiry system, and to ask ourselves whether it is a fair way of assessing a decision of major national importance.

Is it right that we should appoint one person, with assessors, to sit for such a long time to prepare such a report? Was Sir Frank Layfield in a position to hear balanced opinion? He had before him representatives of the CEGB and British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. In support of them was the lobby of the electric power industry and the nuclear power industry. Against that representation were the interest groups and pressure groups, which had largely to be self-financing throughout the inquiry. In common with other hon. Members, I received today a letter from Mr. N. O. Ratcliff, the chairman of the Joint Parish Councils Sizewell B Committee. The committee represented Middleton-cum-Fordley, Theberton and Eastbridge, and Yoxford. The letter makes it clear that in making its submissions, the committee was forced to finance all its efforts itself. Having experienced road inquiries in the past, I ask whether it is a fair system of inquiry when objectors are expected to employ their own barristers, call their own expert witnesses and marshal their own evidence, generally in opposition to something that in essence has been decided upon by the Government in advance and promoted by Government agencies.

The amount of publicity and propaganda that has been pursued by British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. and the CEGB in support of nuclear power as a concept has been enormous and overwhelming. That pressure, influence and that lobbying leads us on to the research programmes of the Department of Energy, which deliberately underfunds research into possible renewable sources of energy, advanced coal-fired power stations and other options. The result is that we are led inexorably towards the conclusion that only nuclear power can solve our energy problems. This pressure is to be found within the EEC generally and not only within Great Britain. Energy predictions deliberately understate the reserves of coal in Europe by ignoring the coal that is underground in the pits that have been closed. This pushes the EEC more and more in the direction of coming to the conclusion that only nuclear power can solve Europe's energy needs.

Apparently the Secretary of State is listening to the debate and taking notes. That being so, I find it surprising that he has not been in his place for most of the debate. Secondly, it is scarcely credible that he has not made up his mind whether to order the go-ahead for Sizewell, despite the serious reservations that were expressed throughout the inquiry and in part of the report that was prepared and produced by Sir Frank Layfield.

The terms of reference of the report mention the need for a debate about the energy needs of this country and their widest consequences. We are not taking a decision just about Sizewell. Indeed, we are not taking a decision at all. The Secretary of State will be taking the decision at some future date. We are really taking a decision about nuclear power in the long-term future of this country and about energy needs for a long time to come. This is very much a turning point and an awful lot hinges on the decision.

I am one of those people who are extremely sceptical of the claim that nuclear power is inherently safe. I am one of those who are sceptical of the claims that there have been no serious accidents at nuclear power stations in this country or elsewhere. In the case of the Chernobyl accident, as many hon. Members have repeated many times, there have been a large number of deaths already, there are several thousand people seriously ill in hospitals in the Soviet Union and there are unquantified future cancers throughout the whole of western and eastern Europe as a result of one nuclear accident over 2,000 miles away.

It is true that nobody died immediately from the accident at Three Mile Island. It is also true that no one died immediately at Idaho Falls in 1961 or as a result of accidents that happened at Windscale. However, we have seen the storing up of cancers for a long time to come and the inherent secrecy of the way in which the nuclear power industry seeks to operate.

I have before me eight pages dealing with some of the major accidents that have happened at Windscale, now renamed Sellafield. That is supposed to be a safe nuclear plant. All those accidents have been reported and quantified somewhere. If the Minister or the hon. Member for Bedfordshire, North (Sir T. Skeet) or hon. Members from other places say that nuclear power is safe and that leukaemia risks are minimal, I refer them to what Sir Frank said about that. He said:

"I make the following observations: data on leukaemia in all workers and former workers at Sizewell A should be assembled over as long a period as possible and analysed with

[Mr. Jeremy Corbyn]

a view to establishing whether there are any grounds for suspecting the action of a specific cause associated with Sizewell A power station".

He goes on to say that similar data should be assessed in conjuction with all other CEGB nuclear power stations. He also says:

"if action has not already been taken on the fifth recommendation of the Black Report to arrange co-ordination centrally for monitoring small area statistics on cancer and hereditary diseases around major installations such as power stations, then the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys and the Medical Research Council should be asked to undertake that co-ordination work as soon as possible."

That is a serious recommendation by Sir Frank. It is a serious matter.

The research that has always been done on cancers around the Sellafield plant, pollution of the Irish sea, problems that fishermen and fish stocks have suffered in the Irish sea, leukaemia on the Antrim coast of Northern Ireland or the coast of the Republic of Ireland, shows some of the dangers of the nuclear reprocessing industry. People may say, "The nuclear reprocessing industry is not what we are talking about today." In reality, that is very much what we are talking about. If we decide to go ahead with the development of the nuclear power station at Sizewell it will mean development of the reprocessing industry and, in turn, a development of the importation of uranium, the transport of that uranium and a further development of the whole industry and the pollution that automatically goes with it.

We are leading ourselves into a chain reaction. The nuclear chain starts with the exploitation of uranium mining in Namibia, Australia and other countries. It starts with the destruction of the lifestyle of aboriginal people in Australia and the corruption of the political system in those countries by that end of the nuclear industry. It then goes on to the transport of uranium to western Europe, initially as fuel for nuclear power stations. That then goes for reprocessing and some of it eventually becomes nuclear weapons through the development of plutonium. It also leads to a problem of nuclear waste.

I recall, not so many months ago, a group of Conservative Members getting up one after another saying, "Please, no nuclear waste dump in my constituency. Put it some place else." The problem is that it will have to go somewhere if we decide to continue the expansion of the nuclear power industry. Pollution is inevitable. When hon. Members say that the waste can be stored for the lifetime of the power station, I ask the simple questions: what happens when the life of that power station has been spent? What happens when the power station is no longer there? Is it all to be bricked in and concreted over? Is the land to be declared unfit for human habitation for many years to come? We have to assess some of the dangers of nuclear power.

There is another aspect which, perhaps, is not so obvious to many hon. Members. The concern about the nuclear power industry goes far and wide. There is not just the danger of nuclear power stations or what happens to uranium mining sources, but the transport of nuclear waste. A nuclear waste train passes through my constituency three or four times a week. That causes a great deal of worry. The nuclear waste passes playgrounds of the schools in my area and in the constituency of Islington, South and Finsbury and many other constituencies. There is a legitimate concern about the safety of those trains and the transport of that sort of nuclear waste.

There are not just those immediate dangers from the nuclear power industry but the loss of civil liberty that occurs because of the determined secrecy of the nuclear industry, the determination to push through the policies and the determination of that industry to be able to provide plutonium for the development of nuclear warheads. What we have seen in France, where the CRS riot troops have been used to break up the smallest demonstrations against the development of nuclear power stations, and the antics of the police in this country concerning nuclear power, begins to show us what is in store in the long term.

One Conservative Member rather gave the game away earlier. He was talking about nuclear power and the reliability of coal-fired power stations. He and other hon. Members know perfectly well that the problems of acid rain can be largely overcome. They could be overcome if more research was put into coal-fired power stations and if high-temperature burning and more efficient coal-fired power stations could be developed.

There is a political purpose in the development of nuclear power and I believe that that is the determination of the Government, which is well catalogued for a long time, to break the power of organised labour in the energy industry and to break the National Union of Mineworkers during that year-long strike. Opposition Members know what went on during that strike. Conservative Members and the Secretary of State for the Environment know what he was doing in 1978 in his development of the famous Ridley plan to take on and break the mineworkers' union. One of the motives — not the only one — in the development of nuclear power is a way of trying to break organised labour in the mining industry and in any other energy industry.

We have to look at the alternatives for the future. It has been said that there is no alternative other than the development of nuclear power. This country has large reserves of coal. We could use that coal far more efficiently and get a far quicker cost-benefit return if we invested money in the conservation of energy rather than the development of large new power stations immediately. Conservation of energy would be far more useful and of far more immediate benefit to consumers and people suffering high electricity bills at present. We also need far more money to be spent on alternative energy research such as renewables—wind, wave and barrage power. No one of those can solve the problem. More research should be put into the development of solar power in Britain and in other places.

The decisions we are about to take have long-term and worldwide dimensions because the nuclear power industry is a pollutant. It cannot be anything but that. It is inherently a dangerous industry, as we have seen from the accidents at Chernobyl and Three Mile Island and other places and from the cancer deaths that have resulted from those accidents. Therefore, I hope that public opinion, which is increasingly and loudly expressed, concerning the safety of nuclear power stations and the nuclear power industry as a whole will be able to get some voice in the House.

Shortly after the publication of the Sizewell report, an article in *The Independent* of 28 January 1987 stated:

"Half of Britain's voters believe an accident similar to the Chernobyl disaster could happen at a British nuclear reactor, according to a poll published yesterday."

British people are not happy about nuclear power or the nuclear power industry, despite the large sums of money spent by British Nuclear Fuels and the CEGB to convince them that nuclear power is cheap, clean and safe. They are not happy because they know that we do not have the technology to control nuclear power and to provide power safely. We must look to other forms of energy. That is why there must be an immediate increase in expenditure on energy conservation. Immediate expenditure on research into alternatives is important.

We have heard that France depends heavily on nuclear power—that is true—but, even there, expenditure per capita on energy conservation is considerably higher than in this country. The 1980 ratios in European economic units give reasonable comparative figures. Expenditure per capita on energy conservation was: Netherlands, 8·7; West Germany, 5·8; France, 3·5; and the United Kingdom, 0·9. This shows that other European countries are more concerned about the development of conservation measures than Britain.

The need for nuclear power to be developed in Third-world countries has been mentioned. It is true that poor, developing countries need increased energy resources, but I and many people in those countries are not convinced that importing technology from Western Europe or the United States and importing the uranium which goes with it will do anything other than cost those countries a great deal of foreign exchange in immediate development. They will not give them a real return on capital investment for a long time and indeed, might not be appropriate energy sources for those countries.

If western Europe and the United States are concerned about the provision of energy to meet needs in Third-world countries, they would be prepared to spend money on funding research into alternative energy sources rather than trying to foist high-technology nuclear power on those countries, which in many cases do not want it. It is a matter of our relationship with those countries rather than of our determination to shovel those systems on to those people.

A decision will be taken on the expenditure of at least £1·6 billion on the development of this Sizewell nuclear power station. Many people have expressed their fears about the safety of the nuclear industry. Accident records at Sellafield, Chernobyl, Three Mile Island and other places show the dangerous industry with which we are dealing. No amount of political lobbying and pressure will convince people of anything other than that they are dealing with a dangerous industry.

The arguments that we are provided with cheap electricity through nuclear power have been exploded—partly by the reduction in world prices and partly by the rather cock-eyed way in which price comparisons are made. The economic case put forward at Sizewell was one of the flimsiest parts of the inquiry. The authorities know perfectly well that the safety factors cannot be measured against the immediate cost of energy generation. In the more advanced coal-fired power stations which are being developed 2.46p per kilowatt hour is a reasonable figure to assume for the generation of electricity by coal. That is cheaper than for the proposed AGR. It is likely to be cheaper than for many other nuclear power stations which are planned. We must carefully consider those cases.

The overriding case must be that Chernobyl happened 2,000 miles away and thousands of people throughout Europe will die of cancers as a result. A nuclear power station accident nearer home in France would kill many people in Britain. We do not have to step up the dangers of that accident by building another nuclear power station so near London. I hope that the popular understanding of the dangers of nuclear power and of the dangers as a result of the development of the nuclear power industry, and nuclear weapons industry which goes with it, will eventually force the Government, whoever they are, not to go ahead with the Sizewell nuclear power station.

It is curious that in *Atom*, the monthly magazine of the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority, there is a long article quoting the Secretary of State for Energy talking about the opportunity of the 1990s and how Britain's nuclear power industry will be a great success story. A small piece beside that article is headed "Sizewell motors ordered" and states:

"Sizewell B electric motor orders worth more than £4 million have been won by Laurence, Scott & Electromotors. The two contracts are Westinghouse in the USA and the Glasgow-based Weir Group."

The article briefly explains what those orders are. We know that the CEGB is already involved in considerable long lead ordering for the Sizewell nuclear power station, supposedly in advance of a decision by the Secretary of State. Does anyone really believe that the right hon. Gentleman has not already made up his mind that Sizewell will go ahead and that he is going to import this unproven American technology, which even the Americans are not prepared to have in their country, with all the dangers that go with it? We must say no to Sizewell and no to nuclear power and start looking for safer alternatives.

8.25 pm

Mr. John Hannam (Exeter): This debate, although technically about the siting of just one nuclear reactor in Suffolk, is reaching out to cover the wider question of nuclear power and whether this country can or should turn its back on 25 years of nuclear electricity development.

Ever since I entered Parliament and became involved in energy matters, there has been a running battle between the coal lobby and the nuclear protagonists, so one would have expected that battle to continue today, although I have never seen the energy arena in that light. I have always held the view that both these resources were needed in a balanced energy programme with coal increasingly regarded as a valuable long-term industrial feedstock to replace oil when it runs out. To talk in terms of "either or" —either nuclear or coal—when there is 80 per cent. coal burn in our electricity generation is ridiculous.

The other strand of this debate is the choice of nuclear reactor, given that the decision is going to be made. Here again, as in other aspects of United Kingdom industrial scientific development, we seem to be good at the initial research but inclined to go adrift during the development period, often trying the wrong schemes and thereby losing the lead that we had at the start. During the 1970s we changed our choice of reactors three times and finished up with the AGR, which does not seem to be performing as well as it should.

I must therefore express some scepticism about the methods used in the past by nuclear officials to arrive at these crucial decisions. There has been far too much secrecy and not enough commercial input. However, since

[Mr. John Hannam]

Layfield began the inquiry in 1983, a much healthier open debate has developed and, since the ghastly Chernobyl accident, the international nuclear scene has opened up to the advantage of us all. The problem is that nuclear power is such a highly technical subject that it is very difficult for the layman to sort out the detailed, often opposing, information coming at him from the two sides of the nuclear argument — whether it is nuclear versus coal, AGR versus PWR, or both coal and nuclear versus conservation and alternatives, as we have heard today. The argument goes on and people become ever more confused.

Sir Frank Layfield's inquiry has to be regarded, therefore, as a detailed and authoritative attempt to answer the key questions in the United Kingdom debate. The inquiry's findings are clear. The Sizewell B project is justified in terms of cost, safety and national need. Since its publication a few weeks ago, as was expected, a wave of criticism has emanated from opponents of nuclear power who feel that it is their duty to rubbish Layfield's findings. Their main criticisms relate to the price of world coal, the replacement of nuclear power by conservation and alternatives and the inherent safety of the PWR system. The latter two points I shall come on to, but we need to know the facts about coal prices before any decision is taken by the Government. I cannot believe that coal-fired electricity generation can be truly competitive with nuclear power unless we have access to massive supplies of cheap imported coal from the United States, Australia and, indeed, South Africa.

The coal lobby and the Opposition would not buy those options. In any case, we must think of what would happen to world coal prices if we became a major buyer on the open market—all this apart from the problems of acid rain and sulphur pollution. The coal price debate, based on the Cambridge Energy Research Group's report, shows that we would need to have a price of about $50 a tonne to produce a 5 per cent. return. In fact, the CEGB is paying $60 a tonne on current average prices. If we add on the $9 equivalent Government subsidy, the figures add up to the Layfield final decisions.

Some Opposition Members implied that, in some ways decommissioning costs are not included in the capital estimates for the nuclear stations. That is not so. Decommissioning costs are included in the capital estimates for nuclear stations. That point must be made absolutely clear.

This country has been extremely fortunate in having a variety of indigenous energy resources on its continental shelf. They have not been cheap resources, such as middle east oil or United States coal. We have had great difficulty in matching the energy costs of our competitors abroad.

In the world as a whole, the population has increased four times in a relatively short period, and industrialisation is speeding up throughout the developing world. In the foreseeable future, these two factors will place great strains of energy supplies, particularly on our traditional fossil fuels. I shall try to put that matter into some perspective.

This century is the first in the history of mankind when a world crippled by a shortage of energy has become a possibility, but the problems facing the 20th century are as nothing compared with the problems of the 21st century. Oil reserves in Europe are estimated to last about 10 years, gas about 38 years, and coal, at economic prices, about 90 years. This is at a time when 35 per cent. of the Community's electricity is produced from nuclear energy. Without the nuclear component, Europe will have to increase its use of alternative fuels by the equivalent of about 3 million barrels of oil a day—far greater than the whole of the United Kingdom's production.

Europe is more dependent on fuel imports than are the United States, the Soviet Union or China. That dependency is increasing rapidly. Japan is in the same situation. It already has 25 per cent. of its electricity supplied by nuclear power. Within a decade, that will increase to 35 per cent. Ninety per cent. of the known reserves of coal are in China, the United States and Russia. Half the world's gas reserves are in Russia, and half of the oil reserves are in the middle east. Without nuclear energy in Europe, the cost of imports will rise by £35 billion a year simply to replace our own nuclear power.

In world global terms, the story is about the same. Oil is expected to run out in about the middle of the next century, gas a few years later, and coal between the years 2066 and 2076—although I would not put any money on betting that that is the exact period when that will happen. Uranium, in its cheap form, is in plentiful supply for years to come. The fast breeder reactor, which is already operating in some countries, will need very little uranium. Our existing stocks of depleted uranium in the United Kingdom would, in fast reactors, represent an energy potential equal to our total recoverable coal reserves.

The 21st century is when the known finite energy resources of the world are destined to run out. Population growth and accelerating industrialisation make the next century—not so far away now—the one in which energy supply will be the great challenge; and with the Third-world demand for electricity energy creating huge increases in imports of energy, the vital need will be for cheap energy. The estimates are that, by the year 2030, 15 to 20 per cent. of the world's energy needs will have to be met by nuclear power. Without it, we will need to discover the equivalent of the North sea oilfields every two years or, in coal, a huge new Colombian coalfield every six months.

Faced with these forecasts and with the Chernobyl accident spreading a degree of fear of the unknown, we understandably have to look at all the alternative forms of energy that we might harness. Japan, nearly totally dependent on imported energy, has poured countless millions of pounds into research and development of alternative forms of energy. Yet the most promising sources of renewable energy supplies — solar, hydro, tidal, wind, waves and geothermal — might, in combination, contribute a proportion of increased electricity demand but could not hope to replace the 20 per cent. of existing demand now met by nuclear power.

We must look at the other alternative — energy efficiency. I totally agree with the remarks made by my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) that we can contribute towards filling a large part of the gap with energy savings. We are obviously working in all directions, but we are still lagging behind the increased growth in demand. We could reduce our demand to about 20 per cent. below what it might have been over a period of years, but it is still an uphill struggle. Over the past 35 years, we have improved energy efficiency by 35 per cent., but demand for all energy increased by 37

per cent. So we come back to the energy resource to which the world is turning as the only viable source of energy for the future—nuclear power.

Huge investments of £10 billion a year are taking place in nuclear power stations; by the year 2050, the market for nuclear fuel services will be worth £25 billion a year, and capital investment in power stations will average £20 billion a year. Britain has the skills and expertise to share in that expanding nuclear market, and many thousands of jobs will be at stake if we opt out.

The world will continue with nuclear energy now that the true facts of the Chernobyl accident are known. France derives 65 per cent. of its electricity from nuclear power, Belgium 63 per cent., Finland 38 per cent., West Germany 31 per cent. and rising, Hungary 24 per cent., Spain 24 per cent., and Sweden 40 per cent. The United States has 25 stations under construction and 95 operating. Russia is doubling its capacity in five years. China is embarking on a major programme. All this has to be accepted as evidence of the world's inescapable belief in the future of nuclear power as a safe and plentiful source of energy for the 21st century.

The United Kingdom has had nuclear power for 25 years, building up without deaths or any serious accidents to the point at which about 20 per cent. of our electricity requirement is met by nuclear generation and, with the stations to be commissioned in the near future, it will rise to about 25 per cent. Our safety standards, operated by the Health and Safety Executive's nuclear installations inspectorate, are the highest in the world, as borne out by Sir Frank Layfield's report. Having carried out the most exhaustive inquiry ever, he has concluded unequivocably that there is a national interest in building a PWR, that the national interest can best be met by building a station at Sizewell in Suffolk, and that the economic benefits outweigh the risks that are likely to be incurred.

Layfield found that there is only a one in 40 chance of coal being more economic than a PWR, and that there is only a one in four chance of an AGR being more economic.

These findings are all based on a one-off PWR, which will cost £200 million more than any successor of the same design. So, if we are to believe the expert's report, the PWR can be built safely and economically, as it has been and is being built in France, Germany, Japan and other countries. Therefore, do we really need any of these reactors? Do we have enough capacity already? Those are the questions to which we finally come.

Just a few weeks ago, the increase in average demand for electricity reached a peak during the cold weather, and on 12 January demand reached an all-time record of 48,300 MW. Even with imported electricity from France, which we brought in as fast as we could, the CEGB had to shed load with a 3 per cent. voltage reduction. This was followed by two cuts of supplies to industrial customers, and for the first time since the 1960s we were at risk of electricity blackouts in England and Wales.

New power stations take seven to 10 years to build, and with a 1 to 1·5 per cent. increase in demand per year, plus the phasing out of the old Magnox stations, about 10 new stations the size of Sizewell will be needed by the year 2000. That is why plans are ready not only for nuclear stations but for several coal-fired stations to come into operation by the mid-1990s.

The objective for this country, therefore, is not to have the massive French-style nuclear programme—that is necessary because they do not possess other fossil fuels as we do—but to maintain a base load supply of cheap electricity at 25 per cent. nuclear content, to continue to bring our coal prices down through greater productivity in the pits, to develop the alternatives as fast as they become viable and to conserve energy with every effort that we can make. We might then scrape through until the mid-21st century when the next generation of fast reactors will be removing the problems of plutonium waste.

For the other parties to choose the path of what they think is electoral advantage and to "phase out" or fail to expand or replace our 25 per cent. nuclear content is, in my view, an act of reprehensible folly. Our industries would decline as continental energy savings defeated them, our electricity costs would rise sharply, and ultimately the integrity of our supply system would break down. Nuclear power has its challenges and dangers, like most other major industrial processes, but we know that we can meet those challenges; and I trust that in the coming weeks we can carry the country with us on this crucial issue.

8.40 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Some, although, I am bound to say, not as many as this generous House normally accords to authors of reports, polite tributes have been paid to Sir Frank Layfield and his colleagues. I fear that I am a bad fairy in this debate. I believe that it was an expensive fiasco, coming up with wrong, indecisive, late and ill-supported conclusions, many of which have been overtaken by events.

How many Members of Parliament actually went to the Maltings at Snape to see and hear what was going on? I did for half a day. It was one of the most bizarre spectacles that I have encountered. Here were these lawyers going on and on, on a stage which really belonged to the late Peter Pears and the late Benjamin Britten. I thought of happier times in that hall.

I ask this question. Should it ever have been a matter for that sort of lawyers' paradise? Here we had distinguished QCs mugging up their technical brief—how long they will remember it I know not—and questioning various witnesses, in the catch-out way that lawyers do.

The terms of reference were deeply muddled and flawed. Part of it was about whether there should be a power station on the Suffolk coast and part of it was about the future of reactor choice. Those two subjects should never ever have been entangled.

I ask my first question of Ministers. What was the cost of all that? I am told that it is not much less than £25 million. The Secretary of State must know. Can he confirm or deny it? He remains silent. I think that the £25 million is correct.

I would listen willingly to Sir Frank Layfield on local income tax, but why should we listen to him particularly on reactor choice? Is a lawyers' bonanza the way in which to settle those matters—clever lawyers rather than a sensible engineering decision from the point of view of the country? Truth in the interests of the country will be achieved not by legal one-upmanship, but by a group of scientists and engineers with a leavering of laymen. That is why I was so sympathetic to the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman). It should have been some sort of Royal Commission.

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

I am deeply critical because the set-up of the inquiry took on a life of its own. Doubtless it was agreeable for a lot of well-paid people to go up and down to Suffolk.

It is dangerous to be frivolous about it, but one might well ask how many trees were cut down in providing the sheer amount of bumf that sourrounded the Sizewell inquiry and how many man hours were spent by busy people giving evidence, who surely could have been better employed.

Will this country ever again enter into such an inquiry? I hope to heaven that we shall not.

Nor am I greatly impressed by the consultation that is being apparently accorded to the House of Commons. This is in danger of being a polite farce. If the Secretary of State had been serious about giving consideration to the views of the Commons, he would certainly have given the projections that exist in his Department. I suspect that the House of Commons is paid as much attention as an entity as a rubber stamp on his desk. During the speeches by the Secretary of State's hon. Friends and mine, I have not seen him take a single note. I may do him an injustice——

Mr. Peter Walker: Yes.

Mr. Dalyell: If I do, the right hon. Gentleman might like to intervene.

Mr. Peter Walker: The notes that *Hansard* reporters take are more accurate than mine.

Mr. Dalyell: All right. I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman will take serious notice of what is said.

I interrupted the Secretary of State's opening speech to ask whether the lowest oil and coal prices that the Layfield committee assumed were likely in 1990 until 2000 were higher than those which his Department thinks likely, given the recent fall in oil prices. That is a central question. The figure should have been given to the House, because the updated view of the Department on what is likely to happen in 1990 until 2000 is a matter of considerable importance in the debate.

I wish that this country had decided to take the advanced gas-cooled reactor road. The performance of the South of Scotland Electricity Board's AGR power station at Hunterston over the past three years has been outstanding. Along with colleagues, I have visited Hunterston. I have also scrambled over Torness. The Hunterston B performance over that period has proved that the AGR design has now reached maturity.

The standard measure of a power station's ability to produce power is expressed as a percentage of the full output load factor. In the past three years the Hunterston B reactors have continued to operate at consistently high levels. In the year ending 1984, the declared gross output per unit was 562 MW. In 1985 it was 598 MW and in 1986 it was 623 MW. The load factor as a percentage in unit 1 at Hunterston in 1984 was 89·1 and in unit 2 it was 69·9. There were planned outages for statutory inspections in those years. In 1985 the load factor was 73·8 per cent. for unit 1 and 91·1 per cent. for unit 2. In 1986 it was 91·5 per cent. for unit 1 and 72·6 per cent. for unit 2, including the outages. The average was 84·9 per cent. for unit 1 and 78 per cent. for unit 2.

I come back to the road of the AGR, which was dismissed. Although the unit rated output capacity is below the design figure of 660 MW, the output per channel in the reactor is greater even than at Torness. My earlier figures are therefore more representative of the expected performance for later AGRs to this design than load factors based on the original design output.

Performance figures for the Western world's nuclear power stations are published in the journal *Nucleonics Week*, and they are expressed in terms of the gross design output. Even on that basis, the Hunterston B reactors are performing well as detailed—the 1984 output was 71·2 per cent.; in 1985 it was 77 per cent. and in 1986 it was 77·4 per cent. The consistently good performance of the Hunterston B type AGRs together with the construction experience at Torness where the first reactor was completed to the planned six year programme — and work on the second is well advanced—show that these reactors have now reached maturity. That reinforces the South of Scotland Electricity Board's confidence in that design.

The load factor as a comparison for the large American PWRs has been about 55 per cent. over the past three years. The load factor on the two pressurised water reactors of the design similar to that proposed at Sizewell B at Callaway and Wolf Creek was about 70 per cent. last year. The AGR has many advantages over the PWR.

I want to consider the details of the Sizewell inquiry. Paragraph 88.4 of the report states:

"Those figures are subject to considerable uncertainty. Taking that uncertainty into account, I"—

that is, Sir Frank Layfield—

"concluded that Sizewell B was likely to provide lower cost generating capacity than an AGR. There was a probability that the AGR would have lower costs: my broad judgement was that this probability was about one in five."

That is a matter of opinion. Is a lawyer's broad judgement to be absolutely paramount in these matters?

In paragraph 88.7 Sir Frank Layfield states:

"I did not regard the limited experience as justifying the economic appraisal of the AGR on target time and cost estimates which the SSEB suggested should be adopted."

We in Scotland are entitled to ask, "Why not?" The figures for improvements in AGR construction and performance are of recent origin and are necessarily based on a small number of stations. Layfield admits that it was too early to be sufficiently sure that the improvements would be maintained for all of them to be adopted when assessing the figure for central estimates. Four years have passed and the record is known and it is a good record.

Paragraph 88.8 of the report claims:

"Nonetheless the evidence revealed that the construction of new AGRs was running to programme and budget, that the performance of existing AGRs had improved markedly, and that the results of research into plant performance encouraged the belief that further improvements in performance were likely."

Progress has been made on AGR performance. These improvements have taken place. Paragraph 88.8 continues:

"Progress in AGR performance should be kept under close review."

Is the Department of Energy keeping it under review? That observation was three or four years old. Anyone who considers the review and the figures that I have given must be impressed.

Paragraph 88.8 continues:

"Should that progress be maintained for a few years (after 1984) there may be a firm basis for allowing those improvements to figure in the economic appraisal of a new AGR and in reviewing its comparative ranking."

Is that being done? Paragraph 88.10 states:

"Since the time of the Thermal Reactor Assessment in 1977, it has been argued that because of the large numbers of PWRs operating outside the UK there was a risk that accidents abroad might necessitate design changes or shutdowns of PWRs in the UK. The same risk does not apply to the AGR. The NII thought there was only a small chance of a serious PWR accident abroad leading to important design changes in possible UK PWRs. But it agreed that accidents overseas would not affect the AGR except when they had features common to both reactor types."

The AGR wins on that safety score.

Paragraph 88.13 states:

"It should be noted that the economic comparisons between small programmes of AGRs and PWRs were made for illustrative purposes only; no firm conclusions can be drawn from them."

When we consider the small print, the picture rather alters to coming down firmly on the side of Walter Marshall's prejudice for the PWR. Paragraph 88.16 states:

"The Board wished to retain an AGR design and engineering capability until at least 1990, by when it would be clearer whether the CEGB or the SSEB was likely to place a further order for an AGR."

Are we or are we not keeping the AGR in being?

Paragraph 2.163 of the report states:

"If the performance of the AGR since the Inquiry has continued to improve, it may well merit a reappraisal of reactor system choice when the figures are sufficiently reliable."

Is there to be such a reappraisal? This debate is very difficult because on questions of judgment I can understand that Ministers do not want to reply. I complain that Ministers are absolutely mute on questions of fact about what is happening in their Departments. That does not help the House or the country and I believe that that is an extraordinary attitude.

Paragraph 2.164 states:

"The evidence did not enable me to determine what effect consent for Sizewell B would have on the UK's ability to build further AGRs. I agree with the Select Committee's comments that there are problems in keeping open two different types of reactor for the UK. Proceeding with Sizewell B would, in my opinion, impair the UK's AGR capability."

Sir Frank Layfield can say that again. Is it not possible to go ahead with two reactor types? Is that option open? It is either open or closed, yet again the Secretary of State is silent. That is not helpful to the general argument. Layfield continues in paragraph 2.164:

"Doubtless the Secretary of State will wish to weigh the AGR's future when considering the CEGB's application"

What is the future of the AGR? We are not getting much further in this debate in ascertaining that important technological fact.

I am a Scottish Member of Parliament, the first to speak today from the Opposition Benches. Scotland is proportionately one of the world's leading users of nuclear energy. Currently about 45 per cent. of the electricity consumed north of the border comes from nuclear sources and when the new power station at Torness is fully commissioned, the proportion will reach about 60 per cent. The success of the Magnox and AGR reactors at Hunterston has enabled Scotland to keep electricity prices among the lowest in Britain. It follows that the SSEB has a heavy commitment to the continued success of nuclear power in the United Kingdom. That is the view of a great many of my constituents who are concerned about jobs.

After their early teething troubles, the Hinkley Point B and Hunterston B AGRs have operated extremely well. The Heysham and Torness AGR stations based on the Hinkley-Hunterston design began construction in 1980 and are nearing completion. They have confirmed that AGRs can be built to programme and close to budget.

Mr. Michael Morris: The hon. Gentleman says that Scotland will have 60 per cent. low-cost nuclear power, yet all afternoon he has been questioning my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, saying that the lower price of coal undermines the basis of the Layfield report.

Mr. Dalyell: I have just been asking for the facts. We should argue this on the basis of current knowledge, not knowledge that is three or four years old. The hon. Gentleman is a member of the Public Accounts Committee. As a previous member, I know that there are genuine difficulties in relying on figures that are out of date. Sometimes that has to be done in the work of the PAC and other committees. What is so absurd is that there are projections in the Department, yet the House of Commons is served up with facts that are known to be out of date. Although we may sometimes have to deal with out-of-date facts, why serve them up when more recent ones are available?

Then we come to Dungeness B, Hartlepool, and Heysham. The AGRs are in the early operational phase and teething troubles are being overcome. They are providing useful supporting information. However, assessment of future AGR projects must be concentrated on the successful reactors at Hinkley, Hunterston, Heysham II and Torness. The construction of Heysham II and Torness has proceeded to programme. They are nearing completion, and the main commissioning tests have been commenced at both sites. The experience is there. Why waste it?

In the United States, no PWR station has commenced construction since the Three Mile Island incident; I agree with Zabrowski Rasmussen and others that it was an incident, not an accident. The Sizewell B inquiry sat for 340 days hearing evidence on a PWR proposal. One of my main complaints about the way in which the Layfield committee went about its work was that relatively little attention was paid to the AGR, although the CEGB statement of case concluded that the PWR offered lower electricity costs to the consumer.

The case for the AGR was never properly heard by the Layfield committee.

The inspector asked the SSEB, as the only other operator of AGRs, to give evidence. The SSEB, which was not otherwise a party to the inquiry, concluded that, in the light of current experience, the CEGB's assumptions about a future AGR were unduly pessimistic, and it deduced that the PWR did not offer any identifiable economic advantage and in practice could increase electricity charges.

It is now envisaged that no more than 7,000 MW of new nuclear capacity will be required before the end of the century. In those circumstances, it would not make industrial or economic sense to maintain a capability for building two reactor types. The CEGB effectively acknowledged the latter point towards the end of the Sizewell inquiry by stating its wish to build a family of four or five PWRs. The South of Scotland Electricity Board believes that there is no need to build a PWR in the United

[Mr. Dalyell]

Kingdom to establish the option, and it is clear that if Sizewell PWR is built the AGR infrastructure will decay and the AGR option will be foreclosed.

Do Ministers accept that if they go ahead with the PWR, the AGR option will be foreclosed? The Department must have made a judgment on this. It must at least know what it thinks about the matter. It is unrealistic to suggest that, with a PWR at Sizewell, the United Kingdom will have the choice thereafter of building an AGR or a PWR, whichever appears to be preferable.

Now we come to construction times. With the construction of the first Torness unit more than 90 per cent. complete, all the key dates have so far been met on target or earlier, and the original date for starting the main commissioning tests has been advanced by three months. Heysham II is also on programme. Can the same be said of Sizewell? As my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) said in a most important speech, we are building a foreign reactor. The idea that we could build a foreign reactor as well as the most experienced American builder—albeit that his experience would be some years old—is moonshine.

Do hon. Members remember the Spey engine and the problems of putting British engines into American aircraft? There are technological difficulties.

Any suggestion that the AGR is inherently difficult to build is dispelled by experience now available. With major advances in factory fabrication and assembly, the proportions of factory and site work for AGR and PWR plant are at best similar. The advantage may be with the AGR. The present AGR design is well adapted to construction on site. It provides good access and allows manpower to be widely dispersed over many workplaces. The SSEB programme for a future AGR station of 75 months from start of main construction to full load on the first of its two units—the Torness baseliner programme—therefore includes some margin, especially with the scope for streamlining erection techniques further.

What a pity it is not to go ahead, after all the agonies that we have had with the AGR, and to throw British expertise to the winds and suddenly go American. That would be unpatriotic and technological nonsense.

We come next to safety, a point that was importantly put by my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, North. All types of reactor have to be shown to meet the same numerical safety standards to the satisfaction of the licensing authority. Standards in the United Kingdom are comparable with the most stringent applied anywhere in the world.

The AGR, however, has certain inherent features which reduce its dependence on engineered safeguards. The combination of a single-phase coolant, a large thermal capacity and a relatively low fuel rating makes the shutdown reactor change temperature relatively slowly even should there be a failure of the engineered safety provisions.

I see my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, North nodding in agreement. He knows from his engineering experience that this is a very important point as it allows the operators several hours for well considered remedial action as compared with the possibility of a matter of minutes available to the operator of a water-cooled reactor in similar circumstances.

I also was a close friend of the late Ned Franklin. We owe it to his memory and to the opinion of others to accept that one of the great advantages of AGRs in a crisis is that at least there is time, which was in scarce supply at Three Mile Island. Time is of the essence when dealing with a crunch reactor crisis.

The NII said at the Sizewell inquiry that it would wish to review three aspects of the AGR for any future project. The first—the gas baffle—has since been reassessed in the industry and been confirmed to be of high integrity.

The second, conformity with updated seismic design criteria, can be achieved, and initial assessment suggests that there would not be significant cost implications.

The third, the risk from aircraft impact, is not expected to impose any greater siting restriction on this account than for any other reactor types which might be built in the United Kingdom. The safety argument comes down in favour of the AGR.

As for public acceptability, gas-cooled reactors have achieved significant acceptability; PWRs have not. In 1968, the Minister of Power made a statement to the effect that either Magnox or AGR stations in pre-stressed concrete pressure vessels could be constructed much nearer urban areas than had previously been permitted. Hartlepool and Heysham are examples of semi-urban sites. That policy was reaffirmed by the decision to build Heysham II in 1980 and by the NII in its evidence to the Sizewell inquiry.

Siting flexibility is an important issue, in densely populated or, by public reaction, not so densely populated areas. A further constraint on siting is the large quantity of cooling water which is required. Due to the higher thermal efficiency of AGRs as opposed to PWRs, some 40 per cent. more capacity can be stored for a given heat release to the environment.

Does the Department in any way dispute these judgments? If so, it will have to say so, and soon. If not in the winding-up speech, these questions will have to be answered at least by Ministerial letter as there are many people in Scotland and elsewhere, besides me, who want to know the answers.

I shall now turn to the issue of the impact on industry. The effect which the choice of future reactor will have on British industry is important and three aspects have to be considered. First, there is the impact on the manufacturing sector, secondly the impact on the design and construction sector and thirdly, the impact on the electricity supply industry. The Heysham II and Torness design is repeatable for further AGRs using an industrial infrastructure consisting of existing factory buildings, plant, designs, technical services and training in which the United Kingdom has already invested £250 million.

Industry has the resources and proven capability to build AGRs to budget and programme. Replication of this design standard must lead to further economies in manufacture and construction. It would make one weep if all this British investment were to be thrown to the winds for an American reactor. Make no mistake about it, if we go ahead with the PWR we shall become yet again, as in helicopters and elsewhere, America-dependent. For a country with our record in the development of nuclear power that would be a terrible, crying shame.

With the PWR there is at present no committed plan to create in Britain the infrastructure for manufacturing the reactor pressure vessel and some other specialised

reactor components. To establish this with a predictable demand must be very questionable while there is massive over-capacity in other industrial countries.

The foreign exchange element of the Sizewell B PWR design royalties and imports—let us not forget royalties—is expected to amount to about 10 per cent. of the station cost. That 10 per cent. would not affect an AGR. The imports include, and could well continue to include, the most advanced elements of design, engineering analysis and production which will tend to stay to advantage at the high technology end of the British nuclear manufacturing and construction industry.

We must also consider the all-important matter of job creation. The difference in capital cost between the AGR and the PWR implies that a programme of AGRs would create marginally more jobs in the United Kingdom engineering and construction industries than a programme of PWRs — even if no component or service were imported and no royalty had to be paid for the PWR. However, since royalties will have to be paid and components will have to be imported, the advantage of the AGR is overwhelming and the distribution of jobs among firms could differ.

Apart from raw graphite material for the reactor core, the AGR is almost entirely British designed and manufactured. Its total import content is about 10 per cent. The kind of briefings that we have had in the past from impartial shop stewards as well as briefings that my hon. Friends the Members for Stockton, North and Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) have had from manufacturing industry, show that there is an overwhelming case for the AGR.

The choice of a future reactor type is a major national decision. At best, the PWR could do little more than break even in economic terms with the AGR. The reality is more likely to be additional costs and uncertainty, and those difficulties will be faced if the industry is made to carry another British prototype through its learning stage. A decision to discontinue the AGR invites identifiable penalties——

Mr. John Powley (Norwich, South): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. At the start of this debate Mr. Speaker told the House that a large number of hon. Members had said that they wished to speak in it. I was one such hon. Member. Mr. Speaker said that he would be grateful if hon. Members kept their speeches to a modest length. The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) has been speaking for 33 minutes. Would you care to say that other hon. Members wish to contribute to the debate?

Mr. Deputy Speaker Mr. Ernest Armstrong): Some hon. Members have been here for most of the debate and I regret that they will not have an opportunity to speak.

Mr. Dalyell *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have no jurisdiction over the length of speeches.

Mr. Dalyell: I understood that the Whips' agreement with this side of the House was 9.15 pm.

The operation at Hinkley Point B and Hunterston B and design and construction experience at Heysham II and Torness give confidence that the massive effort put into resolving detailed problems has taken the AGR to maturity. There is opportunity to benefit from this. The design of the AGR now established provides a basis for replication and detailed refinement. Worldwide experience suggests that success stems from a continuing commitment to a well founded, proven design.

I end—at 9.15 pm—with the plea that before it is too late, at the 11th hour and 59th minute, this country goes back to its proven technology that we have developed with our brains and that at this stage does not go American simply because of the prejudices of those at the top of the CEGB. The South of Scotland Electricity Board has been right all along and the CEGB has been wrong. The Scots are just as good engineers and scientists as anyone else south of the border.

9.15 pm

Mr. Peter Rost (Erewash): As a member of the Energy Select Committee I have had the opportunity of seeing PWR reactors in America, Japan, Germany, France, Spain and elsewhere. Everywhere they have worked effectively, they have been a cost benefit to the economy, and on the whole they have been built to time and cost. I am satisfied, as was Sir Frank Layfield, that if we are to build a PWR in this country we could and would do so safely.

However, there are doubts, which to my mind have not been satisfied by the Layfield report, about whether we could build PWRs according to the cost estimates presented in the report. There is not much in the record of our nuclear industry — unfortunately a record of indecision, muddle, cost overruns and delays — to suggest, except to the most optimistic person, that we could build PWRs that would result in the cost benefits that are claimed for them. Therefore, there must be an element of doubt and scepticism about the advantages of PWRs.

I hope that those doubts can be resolved. Nevertheless, it is right for the House to express them. Conservative colleagues in particular, like myself, have been waiting all day to contribute to the debate. Unfortunately, it is unlikely that they will be able to contribute. But they have a view which fundamentally disagrees with the view just expressed by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). I think in particular of my hon. Friends the Members for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson), for Norwich, South (Mr. Powley) and for Northampton, South (Mr. Morris). I shall not attempt to make their points for them, but I very much agree that, although the AGR is a British system, and although we have built it, it has not proved the economic merits of nuclear power nor has it exactly been an export success. I certainly have not seen any abroad.

We must accept that if we are to have more nuclear power—and I believe that we should—we must devise a system that can achieve that objective. There are 400 PWRs working in the rest of the world. That is the way that technology has gone. If we are satisfied on safety grounds and that we can do so economically, we should go ahead.

I believe that the pro-nuclear lobby, among which I include myself, would make more impact on the public debate about nuclear power if it did not try to discredit all the alternatives. To some extent that is my main criticism of the Layfield report. I have doubts about the economic viability of the PWR, which, hopefully, we may overcome, but I also have doubts about the way in which the alternative options were discussed in the report. There

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were one or two serious weaknesses in it. I agree that greater investment in energy efficiency would be highly cost-effective and would, to some extent, reduce the demand for extra electricity. However, I accept that most of the savings that would result from energy efficiency would be taken up in higher living standards and not in reduced energy consumption. Therefore, I do not accept the arguments put by some hon. Members that we can avoid building more nuclear power stations simply by investing in greater energy efficiency.

All the evidence is that people have a dissatisfied demand for greater energy, especially more warmth and heat, and would use greater installation standards by enjoying a higher living standard rather than using less energy. I also agree with the Layfield report that most of the renewables, with the exception of tidal power, cannot make more than a modest and long-term contribution to replacing nuclear power.

The Severn tidal power scheme could produce the equivalent of two or three Sizewells and probably at lower cost per unit of electricity, but unfortuntely not within the time scale within which we may require extra power.

The Layfield report was weakest in its comments on the only viable alternative to nuclear power that it seriously considered but rejected on the grounds that it could not make a big enough contribution in time. That was the alternative of using our power stations for heat and electricity production combined and producing more of our electricity from within industry. Sir Frank Layfield assumed that, because most of our electricity today comes from within the nationalised industry monopoly, or effective monopoly, it will always be so. Chapter 53.12 states:

"In the UK about 7 per cent. of electricity in 1983 was privately generated."

The assumption is that, because only 7 per cent. of electricity is privately generated in the United Kingdom, that is more or less the only contribution that the private sector can make. Yet, if we look abroad, we see that the private sector electricity industry is where the greatest growth is taking place. In America one of the main reasons why nuclear power stations are not being ordered is because the utilities in America have worked out that it is cheaper to buy in the extra electricity from industry, in other words by co-generation, rather than by building new power stations themselves. That is where the biggest growth in electricity capacity is taking place. There is already the equivalent of 40,000 MW of co-generated electricity in the United States. That is the equivalent of more than 30 Sizewells.

What Layfield has not taken into account is that, if the economic circumstances were even-handed in this country, there would be more private generation of electricity. Since he made his assumption the Energy Act 1976 has changed the rules and has improved the economics for private generation of electricity. Indeed, that is now taking off. Many projects are going ahead within industry which process heat and produce electricity for export. The economics of that are far more robust than the electricity-only power stations proposed by the CEGB. The report should have assessed that as an alternative, as it should have assessed the alternative of large-scale city district heating combined with electricity production as an additional source of electricity capacity.

The report dealt with that at great length in chapter 58, but came to the conclusion that district combined heat and power would not develop fast enough to meet the needs for extra capacity.

The report completely fails to address itself to why combined heat and power and city district heating are not likely to expand fast enough in the United Kingdom to meet the demand. In Europe 3,000 cities have combined heat and electricity production and the systems are expanding fast. It is not expanding fast here simply because the ground rules are not even-handed. The Government expect city consortia, such as Sheffield, Leicester, Corby, Newcastle and Edinburgh, to get on with district heating combined with electricity production and to raise the money in the private sector at commercial rates of return without the support of the electricity industry. Yet they say to the electricity industry, "You can build nuclear power stations at a discount rate of 5 per cent." In other words, if the Sizewell project goes ahead, it will be subsidised by public money because a 5 per cent. real rate of return is not a commercial market rate. As the Layfield report acknowledged, the main potential alternative cannot go ahead because it must raise its money in the market place at a commercial rate of return which is higher than that at which the electricity industry can invest.

Mr. Barron: Would the hon. Gentleman care to say what the real rate of return should be if 5 per cent. is not big enough?

Mr. Rost: The real rate of return should be the market rate of return.

The only way in which the problem can be resolved and we can assess whether there is an alternative to more nuclear power which is viable and, perhaps, has a better rate of return is to put it to the test of the market. Why is it that when we want a Channel tunnel the Government say, "Yes, let us have it, providing it is a good economic proposition. That can be proved only if investors are prepared to put up the money."? Why is it that when we say we want the Severn barrage the Government say, "Fine, providing private investors are prepared to put up the money."? Why does the whole private sector say that in this case, but the Government say, "No, we can have Sizewell and nobody needs prove whether it is commercial."?

The only way to prove whether Sizewell B is a commercial proposition is to put it to the test of the market place in the same way that the Government expect the alternative to Sizewell to be tested by the market place. We should have a privately led investment in Sizewell and a commercial return should be demanded, not a 5 per cent. discount rate. Then we would probably get not only Sizewell and more nuclear power, but other alternative investments—perhaps the Severn barrage and certainly city district heating in many cities — which would produce a higher rate of return and increase the capacity of our electricity production.

Only if we put energy production of new capacity to the market test, as private utilities must do to assess which is the most cost-effective, will we gain savings in the PSBR and test whether we are putting our nation's resources to the best advantage.

That must be the test for Sizewell. I hope that, if that test were applied, the project would go ahead, as would viable alternatives.

9.30 pm

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): This debate is unique in the sense that it is the first time that I have taken part when the Secretary of State has been banned by his quasi-judicial responsibilities from addressing us. We understand that. However, it is a pity that we have not been able to draw out the facts of the case as opposed to the judgment. We accept the difficulty for the Secretary of State, but hope that he might reply by letter to some of the factual points put from both sides of the House.

The Secretary of State says that his main role is that of a Trappist. He says that he has to sit and listen. In that spirit we think that it might be useful to give him a further indication of our views by dividing the House so that he has a feel of how the House feels. We shall divide, since that is the only way to register our opposition to the proposed PWR construction at Sizewell, in line with early-day motion 636.

We have had a long debate. That is right because we have discussed a long report produced as a result of a lengthy inquiry. The report might be long, but it is lucid, as hon. Members on both sides have said. Sir Frank Layfield has the facility to translate complicated and technical issues into words which the layman can follow.

The report has about 3,000 pages. I fear that it will have a similar fate to "Das Kapital" — many people will quote from it, but few will read it. That is a pity, because the report is in depth, thorough and well written.

I say that it is a pity for a more fundamental reason. It is a pity because, if one reads the report carefully, one sees that the main conclusions by Sir Frank are not substantiated by the detailed analysis in the report. That has been said by several hon. Members. The tone and tenor of the detailed arguments in the text are often at variance with the general conclusions, as I shall attempt to show.

First, I shall deal with another fundamental shortcoming of the report, for which Sir Frank is blameless. I refer to the way in which he was precluded by statute from referring to any events following the closure of the public inquiry on 7 March. Almost every hon. Member taking part in today's debate has recognised that there has been an event of considerable magnitude affecting our nuclear debate—the Chernobyl accident. That tragic accident in the Soviet Union has reshaped the whole nuclear debate. Sir Frank Layfield was prohibited from discussing that accident, but it is the duty of the House to try to interpret his report in the light of the Chenobyl experience. That is our responsibility.

To ask Sir Frank Layfield to write his report on nuclear power generation without reference to Chernobyl is like commissioning a war historian to write the history of the second world war without any reference to the events following the Normandy landing. It is as simple as that.

The effects of Chernobyl have been truly traumatic. Following it, how many people can seriously accept Layfield's bland assertion:

> "An accident at Sizewell B, if built, would almost certainly have tolerable consequences, at worst requiring measures such as the banning of milk near the station. Theoretically possible accidents which could cause hundreds of thousands of deaths would almost certainly not occur."

Sir Trevor Skeet: We are dealing with entirely different reactor systems. One contains a design fault that is extremely serious, but it is most important to state that that fault is not found in the United Kingdom reactors.

Dr. Clark: I expected the hon. Gentleman to anticipate my next point. I accept that there is a difference in technology between the Chernobyl reactor and the PWR. I will not call in aid the Three Mile Island incident that involved a PWR system. Has the hon. Gentleman not heard of the debate that is currently raging in the nuclear sector relating to fuel clad ballooning? That is what can happen to the Zircaloy casing surrounding the PWR's fuel elements in an accident in which the cooling water that flows through the core of the reactor is lost. In such an accident the high temperature and stress can cause the cladding to distend and deform. The result is that the cooling system is affected. Released super-heated steam combines with the Zircaloy and produces hydrogen. That is exactly what happened at Chernobyl and that is what blew the top off that reactor. It could also happen to a PWR.

I also wish to remind the hon. Gentleman of the dangerous concept associated with PWR — the China syndrome. That syndrome cannot occur in a heavy water reactor, but it can take place within a PWR. That is what terrifies so many nuclear experts.

Everything is not as simple as Conservative Members would have us believe because every nuclear station has its own design weaknesses. Nuclear scientists recognise that, and the purpose of spending so much time on the design and its safety is to minimise the design weaknesses of the reactor. Conservative Members have tried to minimise the risk, and that is a disservice to the House and the nation.

My fears about safety are supported by such eminent groups as the Nuclear Electricity Information Group—not an anti-nuclear group — that recently issued an information document in which it said:

> "Could there be a major accident in a British nuclear power station? The answer must be 'yes'."

Those are not my words. I ask the House not to minimise the danger of a nuclear accident in a power station.

The effects of Chernobyl were serious, and they are still with us. The accident affected not only the Soviet Union and the immediate neighbouring states, but every country in the northern hemisphere. It will continue to affect people for many generations to come. The United Kingdom was not immune from the effects. One school of thought believes that too little information has been released to the public concerning the effects of Chernobyl on the United Kingdom.

In the period immediately before the Chernobyl accident, March 1986, the National Radiological Protection Board published a new recommended upper limit for exposure of the public to artificial radiation. It recommended a level of 1 mSv per year. The existing legal limit is 5 mSv. However, the new level of 1 mSv is still much greater than the level in the United States of 0·25 mSv, or West Germany where the level is 0·3 mSv.

It is estimated that the average dose in Britain for the first year, post Chernobyl, is 0·07 mSv. If that is correct, it is not too worrying. However, in the northern region of the United Kingdom — the north, the north-west, Scotland, Yorkshire and Northern Ireland — the radiation exposure level for more than 250,000 children under the age of five was close to the 1 mSv level. Such was the danger for the British people, and we must accept that they were in that position.

As I have said, the effects will be felt for years to come. The director of the National Radiological Protection Board said that about 45 people might die of cancer over

[Dr. Clark]

the next 50 years in the United Kingdom as a result of Chernobyl, and that is widely regarded as a most conservative estimate.

I do not want to go on about Chernobyl, as I think that the point has been taken, but it is a landmark in the history of the nuclear debate. It is worth reminding ourselves that not only human beings are affected. As in so many other instances, we can obtain the first warning signs from animals. It is remarkable that even now, almost 12 months after Chernobyl, the levels of radioactivity in sheep and in grass in some of the infected areas of Cumberland are as high now as they were immediately post-Chernobyl.

The Government have tried to play down the effects of Chernobyl, but the alarm was set off originally when the chief scientist of the radiochemical inspectorate telexed the Department of Energy at 21.30 hours on 5 May 1986. He reported high levels of radioactivity having been recorded in Britain. He added:

"Alpha emitters have been detected at not insignificant levels."

It is little wonder that the chief scientist was worried. At least one reading of caesium-137 in Cumbria was 16,900 bq/kg. That is rather meaningless to most of us, but it becomes meaningful when I tell the House that that was 600 times the normal reading. That was the level of exposure in certain hot spots in Cumbria and other parts of the United Kingdom after Chernobyl. In other words, the reading was serious.

It is interesting that this situation caught our scientists unaware. Even the Prime Minister wrote to me saying that she was surprised at these events.

The problem remains with us. Earlier this month one of the scientists at the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology, based at Grange-over-Sands in the southern part of Cumbria, was reported to have said:

"The radioactivity was safely locked away from plant uptake when it combined with clay. Unfortunately, these upland soils are very thin and not suited to locking away the cesium. It could be a case of years before it is locked away in the soil. There will possibly be a lot of unlocked cesium available in the soil for uptake this spring. We're not sure exactly how much yet."

That is the senior scientist of the ITE speaking about levels of radioactivity on the Lakeland hills. It is no wonder that the farmers, as they approach another lambing season, are worried about the effects of radioactivity. I have made that point at some length because it is important not to underestimate the Chernobyl position.

The section of the report that deals with nuclear waste is one that concerns me. There have been a number of debates on the subject in the House, and the hon. Member for Bedfordshire, North (Sir T. Skeet) he said repeatedly that he does not want nuclear waste to be stored in Bedfordshire. He said that again today, and many others have said the same when talking about their constituencies.

Sir Frank Layfield seems to think that the problem has been solved. In paragraph 41·2, the report states:

"The Department of the Environment believed that there were no technical difficulties in disposing of waste from any envisaged nuclear programme."

As the House knows, there is a world of difference between there being no technical difficulty and an acceptable solution. When it comes to issues such as radioactive waste, there must be a solution that is acceptable to the general public. The storage of nuclear waste under Billingham — that industrial, chemical town — was technically feasible, but it was politically a non-starter. There is no doubt about that.

Mr. Frank Cook: It will stay that way.

Dr. Clark: My hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) has made his point on a number of occasions most effectively.

Layfield's failure to appreciate that point leads us to doubt some of his other basic assertions. That is evidenced by his naive statement in paragraph 41·51, which says:

"Since 1976 a clear strategy for the management of radioactive waste has been established by Government; the means of putting that strategy into practice are now emerging."

With respect, if Sir Frank believes that, he is not living in the real world. However, I am being a little unfair because he was precluded from discussing Her Majesty's Government's ever-changing policy in that respect since 1985. He was not permitted, therefore, to refer to the NIREX initiatives at Bradwell, Elstow, Fulbeck and Killingholme. I hope that those right hon. and hon. Members who protested most strongly about the deposit of nuclear waste in those areas will not go into the Lobby in support of the nuclear industry tonight because they must follow the logic of their arguments and stop the development of an industry that is producing waste that they are not prepared to accept.

In the same reference to nuclear waste, Sir Frank, in paragraph 41.53, says:

"steps must be taken to ensure that a site is ready early in the 1990s."

Is he being realistic, bearing in mind that the test drilling on the four sites will continue for at least another six months, that there will then have to be an evaluation and that then the Secretary of State has promised a public inquiry? I doubt whether that deadline can be met. The House must be convinced that Layfield's deadline is right or we should reject his report because that is a fundamental part of it.

Safety, as Layfield acknowledged,

"was the most important subject considered at the Inquiry."

He goes on to say:

"Any serious doubts about the fundamental safety of Sizewell B would be sufficient grounds for recommending that consent should be withheld."

I think that we would all go along with that viewpoint. In the same chapter he gives general approval to the safety provisions of Sizewell B, declaring:

"My confidence is founded principally on the quality of the CEGB's and NII's evidence, and the way in which it withstood searching and extensive examination."

That crucial statement appeared in volume 3 of the report.

Imagine my utter amazement when I read in volume 4 Layfield's detailed examination of the licences and procedure by which safety standards are set. In paragraph 49.1 he said:

"evidence showed that there were serious management and procedural weaknesses in the conduct of the licensing process."

He goes on to say:

"those weaknesses are of considerable significance."

In paragraph 49.17, he says:

"The inability of the NII to articulate clearly its responsibilities at the design stage suggests confusion in its thinking."

When I make those points I am not being critical of the NII, because it has been understaffed and underfunded and asked to do a job which was far too great for the

facilities it has available. Nevertheless, Layfield found major shortcomings in the work of the NII. He goes on with an even more worrying statement:

"The high level of mutual understanding needed between the CEGB and the NII is not furthered by the lack of sufficiently clear and agreed safety criteria."

I was surprised when I went on and read criticism after criticism. Indeed, chapter 49 is riddled with similar criticisms. Therefore, I was not surprised to find that he said:

"The evidence showed serious weaknesses in the management of the licensing process, but emphasised the inherent difficulties facing the NII and the CEGB."

Layfield started volume 4 with the assertion:

"Public opinion on the PWR will be affected by the confidence felt in the organisation of safety."

He followed that in paragraph 48.2 with the statement:

"The regulation of nuclear safety in the UK is centred on the licensing process."

Layfield is absolutely correct in his fundamental assessments. I put it to the House that, bearing in mind what Layfield repeatedly wrote in volume 4, there can be little public confidence in the licensing and thus the safety question.

Even more amazing is Layfield's statement in paragraph 47.64 that he is satisfied with the safety situation, as he has placed

"a great deal of reliance on the CEGB and NII to provide continuing assurance of safety."

All that contradicts what is written in volume 4.

The House will recall having been given repeated assurances by Secretaries of State that licensing would be completed before the inquiry began. Therefore, it is right and proper for the House to ask: why has that not been done and what is the standing of those numerous assurances today?

As we end this fairly short debate, another point must be made. It is appropriate to note that there is no unanimity of view among nuclear scientists on the safety of the PWR system. Lord Marshall, chairman of the CEGB, does not have it all his own way. My hon. Friends the Members for Stockton, North and for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) quoted Ned Franklin, a former professor of chemical engineering at Imperial college and former managing director of the National Nuclear Corporation, who wrote an article which appeared in *The Chemical Engineer* of November 1986. I shall quote his comments again because they are vital. Understanding of this point may well change one's whole perspective of PWR.

Ned Franklin, who was a pro-nuclear man, was

"opposed to the construction in the UK of pressurised water reactors on the grounds that they are not sufficiently operator friendly under accident conditions. This view is based on a lifetime's experience which indicates that when operators are subject to conditions of extreme emergency arising from a combination of unforeseen circumstances they will react in ways which lead to a high risk of promoting accidents rather than diminishing them. This is materially increased if operators are aware of the very small time margins that are available to them . . . what is definitely intrinsic is that for water cooled systems the drive for economy leads to high fuel ratings and therefore to an extremely rapid sequence of accident events given an initiation due, for example, to the loss of coolant . . . to give sufficient statistical assurance that such a device will 'fly' without crashing, large degrees of redundancy in safety systems have to be provided. The consequent increase in complexity makes it even more likely that the operator, if he intervenes, will do something counter productive."

This evening, because of the shortage of time, I have not been able to deal with many other points in the Layfield report which we find rather doubtful. We have not even referred to the disastrous effect of Sizewell B on the natural environment and the heritage coast. I have not been able to refer to combined heat and power, district heating and renewable energy, which should be discussed. However, I hope that the Opposition have shown that events have changed dramatically since Layfield's deadline of 5 March 1985. My right hon. Friend the Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) has provided irrefutable evidence that the economic case can no longer be substantiated and I have shown how Chernobyl has changed the whole safety perspective.

"The golden rule of safety is that we must assume the worst — that anything which can go wrong will go wrong". — [*Official Report*, 23 May 1986; Vol. 98, c. 667.]

Those are the wise words of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy, the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Mr. Goodlad), and it is wisdom that Layfield fails to match in his report. I hope, therefore, that the House and the Secretary of State will reject the report.

9.55 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Alastair Goodlad): I believe that we have had a most useful and constructive debate this afternoon and this evening. My right hon. Friend and I have listened most carefully to everything that has been said, and I know that my right hon. Friend will carefully study the transcript of the debate before he reaches his decision on the Central Electricity Generating Board's proposal. More than 20 hon. Members have spoken in the debate. Other Conservative Members had hoped to speak, but time ran out.

Mr. Powley: I draw my hon. Friend's attention to the fact that a number of hon. Members representing East Anglian constituencies wished to make a contribution to the debate in view of their nearness to the Sizewell B location. Because other hon. Members have taken rather too much time, they were unable to make what I consider to be valuable contributions.

Mr. Goodlad: My hon. Friend is quite right. My hon. Friends the Members for Norwich, South (Mr. Powley), for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson), for Rochford (Dr. Clark) and for Northampton, South (Mr. Morris) were unable to participate as they wished. My hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Sir E Griffiths) is a Suffolk Member whose constituency is near Sizewell. My right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, in whose seat Sizewell is situated, has been present during the debate.

I should like to take the opportunity to record my deep appreciation for the painstaking and dedicated way in which Sir Frank Layfield approached his task. He faced one of the most demanding tasks in planning history and has discharged it with the most thorough professionalism. He opened the inquiry in January 1983 and heard over 340 days of evidence. This was the longest and most exhaustive inquiry in our history.

Evidence was taken from 195 witnesses on 344 occassions. Two hundred proofs of evidence were presented, supplemented by over 500 addenda, and 14 written statements were read. About 4,330 supporting documents were lodged with the inquiry secretariat. Over 4,000 letters of objection and 112 written submissions were

[Mr. Goodlad]

received. The amount of evidence submitted was vast. The 340 volumes of the daily transcript alone are estimated to contain 16 million words. I am sure that hon. Members who have read the inspector's report will appreciate the clarity with which he has handled this amount of evidence. We are all heavily indebted to him for his work.

I also wish to pay tribute, as I am sure does the House, to the four assessors who helped Sir Frank. Sir Christopher Foster assisted the inspector on economic matters, Dr. Vennart on the biological effects of radiation, Professor Hall on engineering matters and Professor Alexander on the transport of nuclear fuel. Each gave considerable time during the inquiry, often sitting with the inspector to hear evidence, and then afterwards devoted even more time to the preparation of the report.

I should also like to thank the staff of the inquiry who ensured its smooth running and gave the inspector the most valuable assistance with the preparation of the report.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said earlier, we must recognise the fundamental importance for the future of our decisions on the forms of energy that we seek to develop. We are making decisions that are likely to have a profound effect for decades to come. As my right hon. Friend concluded, the experience of this century and the nature of potential worldwide growth in the next century show that Britain and the European Community have a need to see that they pursue energy policies, in whatever form, that could meet the potential needs of the future.

This has been a wide-ranging and well-informed debate, and I should like to thank the House for the valuable and constructive contributions that have been made today.

Question put, That this House do now adjourn:—

The House divided: Ayes 0, Noes 191.

Division No. 98] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Nil

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. D. E. Thomas and
Mr. Allen Adams.

NOES

Abse, Leo
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clelland, David Gordon
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Freud, Clement
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gould, Bryan
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Fife Central)*
Hancock, Michael
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley, N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Janner, Hon Greville
John, Brynmor
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
MacKenzie, Rt Hon Gregor
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Shields, Mrs Elizabeth
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R. *(W'hampt'n NE)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stewart, Rt Hon D. *(W Isles)*
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Wrigglesworth, Ian
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Ray Powell.

Question accordingly negatived.

REME Workshop, Chilwell

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Portillo.]*

10.11 pm

Mr. Jim Lester (Broxtowe): I am delighted to have this Adjournment debate because, as you may know, Mr. Speaker, throughout last week the Opposition were unsure as to whether they would vote in the Aye Lobby or the No Lobby. My debate has been off and on, but since they voted tonight that the House should not adjourn, I can make a constituency case to the House about which I feel strongly.

My hon. Friend the Minister will know that since 25 June 1984, when the first notification of the closure of 38 REME workshop was received in my constituency, the trade unions and I have tried to offer constructive proposals to the Ministry of Defence, with a real interest in the defence capability as well as my constituents, to reverse that decision. I acknowledge that every facility has been given to me and my constituents to make that case. Indeed, after two trade unionists met the Secretary of State in July, we received a letter on 18 December in which he said that although it would be impossible to reverse the decision,

"I appreciate that the closure of 38 Central Workshop is a very painful process for our employees there; and I naturally regret this."

Events since then have made the closure even more painful and the knife has been turned in the already sore wound. Tonight I wish to make one more attempt, first, to ensure that the men affected are treated fairly and, secondly, on the basis of real evidence, to prevent the Ministry of Defence from falling into a no-win situation where they may lose the skills inherent in 38 REME workshop. It is the only place in the entire REME set-up where a tank can be totally stripped, repaired and rebuilt. The Ministry of Defence might discover that, for reasons that have been argued many times, even by rejigging existing provision, Bicester workshops, which will take part of the work from REME in Nottingham, will be unable to meet the targets set. The review that was designed to save money glossed over the most important element, which is a trained, coherent, committed work force. It takes years to create those skills and that ability, and it is easily dispersed. I submit to my hon. Friend that people and skills really matter.

May I deal first with fairness. Despite the fact that the operation of 38 REME workshop has been extended to build engines, many men—especially those aged under 50—with considerable service have been advised to take voluntary redundancy before April 1987 on the grounds that no better terms would be available and that the quicker they entered a difficult job market the better for them, because they might find alternative work.

Some have followed that advice. I am satisfied that at no time were they advised by their trade unions that the unions were negotiating a new redundancy package which affects all Ministry of Defence workers and which was first announced on 2 December 1986. It was a fundamentally changed basis of redundancy which represented a real improvement for the over-50s in technologies that are unlikely to get more orders. They are the very people who are working out their voluntary notices.

The transition arrangements are worked out on a national basis. Intelligently, we always introduce them, but here they miss virtually every man at the workshops who is now under notice. The already painful process of losing a job has turned into a lottery which affects some 556 men significantly.

I should like to quote from just one letter of the many that I have received. It is from Mr. Hadfield. He wrote:

"Dear Jim Lester,

As you know, 38 Central Workshop, Chilwell is closing down. I am being made Redundant on 27 March 1987. With the new Redundancy Terms starting April 1, I would have been getting about £12,000 more Redundancy pay. I feel it is very unfair that some employees will be getting up to three time their original Redundancy pay, whilst others like myself stay on the old terms. We are all being made Redundant from 38 Central and I feel we should always all be treated equally. I am 49 years old and have been at Chilwell for 10 years as a Coach Trimmer . . . With taking . . . promotion . . . men with less service will be there after me, which I was not told at the time."

People with less service will get more redundancy pay.

My hon. Friend the Minister will I am sure agree that this is a matter of heartfelt concern. People who have given many years' service have patently been given wrong and damaging advice.

I agree with the way in which the Nottingham *Evening Post* summed it up when it reported:

"It seems inconceivable to us that the date for this scheme could have been agreed in ignorance of the Chilwell situation. It must be the largest body of civil servants being made redundant at the present time, so it could hardly have gone unnoticed.

And if the Chilwell redundancy date was known, then steps should have been taken to treat the workers there as a special case."

The argument that I want to put before my hon. Friend the Minister is that there is a fair way out.

The non-industrial staff have terms and conditions which allow them to choose which option is most beneficial. I acknowledge that the majority of workers at the workshops will benefit from the new arrangements. The unfairness arises for the people who have been advised to take voluntary redundancy in the last year. They will be badly affected. Some people in their 50s who worked on the basis of getting a redundancy payment to set up in small business or whatever will not have that option under the new scheme, but a pension arrangement instead. I ask my hon. Friend to consider this matter. If it would be helpful, I shall be pleased to see him and discuss the details.

My hon. Friend will know that there has been voluminous correspondence over a considerable period of time. I know that he has been to Bicester. He wrote to me on 31 December 1986 as follows:

"As for the difficulties affecting Bicester which led to the adjustment of the Chilwell rundown plan these are being overcome. The recruitment of non-industrial supervisory staff has improved and is now well back on track. Recruitment of industrial staff of the right calibre is admittedly more of a problem because of the relatively high cost of housing in the Bicester area and the competition with other industries in Oxfordshire. Steps have, however, been taken to attract recruits from our maturing apprentices from other REME Base and District Workshops and from the Chilwell workforce, as well as through local job centres and the media. Manning levels are in consequence very nearly up to requirements."

I quote that part of the letter because recently another letter came into my possession from a Mr. Ward who is the unit civilian staff manager responsible to Colonel Ayscough, who is the chairman of the local joint productivity council which is doing the recruiting. My experience of Bicester goes back to when I was stationed there in 1950-51. Mr. Ward's voice is much more accurate

[Mr. Jim Lester]

and authentic, because he is the man at the sharp end who has responsibility for recruiting these very scarce and necessary craftsmen. His letter says:

"The facts are these. There is a shortage of Vehicle and Electrical Fitters in Oxfordshire. The wages the Ministry of Defence pays equates, at best, to that of a semi-skilled person in outside industry in this area. For this rate of pay we ask the highest qualifications of a formal apprenticeship. There is not a great pool of unemployed craftsmen in Oxfordshire awaiting to start work here, nor is there a group able to increase their earning power by giving up their present job and coming to work at 32 Base Workshop."

Then Mr. Ward talks about recruitment from a distance. The letter says:

"Now let us turn to recruitment from a distance. It is true that there is a large number of unemployed people in various parts of this country. Among those there are craftsmen but, believe it or not, those who have been made redundant in ship-yards, coal-mines, steel-works, railway workshops and the like do not have the qualifications and experience you demand. When recruiting from a distance not only does pay present a problem but so does housing. In the last 12 months the lowest priced housing in this area has advanced from around £30,000 to £40,000 and the trend is upward. Prospective employees are not prepared to sell their own house for £25,000 in the North, which in some places is a substantial property, and come down here and live in a box for a mortgage they cannot afford on the wages paid by MOD. They are not prepared to step down from home ownership to rented accommodation."

Two sentences in this letter bear out the fears that I have had the whole time. They read:

"At the time the decision was taken to expand operations in Bicester it was made known to all concerned that there would be difficulties recruiting all forms of craftsmen. We have exactly the same difficulties over Painters and Carpenters for the COD."

The letter goes on to say:

"the Department of Employment is continually approached, but I am not responsible for their inadequacies. We are not pursuing new advertising avenues through the Daily Mirror's Job Line and that service provided by Central TV on Teletes. There are therefore many aspects of the recruitment of craftsmen which are beyond our control or perhaps even influence. We cannot change the cost of housing in Oxfordshire nor can we alter Government legislation. We have little chance of changing wage levels, though we may have a little influence."

The only proposal that he can make is that they dilute the skills required simply to make to make up the numbers. Yet these men are charged with the responsibility of repairing our A vehicle, the Chieftain tank, an essential part of our defence capability. I should like to make one further point from this letter. It indicates to those who were not present at the meeting as a result of which the letter was written, that no recruiting had taken place in September 1986. The letter says:

"The wastage rate is of great concern to me. A cursory look at this wastage indicates that craftsmen leave for the same reasons as we cannot recruit them. On the 9 January 1987, for instance, you lost a Vehicle Mechanic, who we recruited in September 1986, who left for other employment. Others who left just before Christmas did so for employment giving more money or because there were difficulties living away from home."

That letter echoes an authentic voice speaking about the real problems of getting a committed craftsman in the centre at Bicester who would stay and build on the acknowledged skills that my constituents have gained over many years to provide the service that the armoured divisions require.

I put it to my hon. Friend most emphatically that he should take this question seriously. I would welcome him on an urgent visit to Chilwell. As I said at the beginning, a reappraisal will be too late if it is not done quickly. The skills and capacity will have gone before capital expenditure at Bicester is undertaken, and the sheer inability to recruit sufficiently skilled men to meet the task is well proven.

I return to the original constructive suggestion that we made on behalf of 38 REME workshop at Chilwell. It should be kept in existence so long as Chieftains stay in Army service. The Chieftains should go to Chilwell and the Challengers to Bovington. That solution would be better for the Army and my constituents and would do something to correct the drift from north to south about which politically, in terms of employment and jobs, we should be extremely conscious.

10.25 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Roger Freeman): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Broxstowe (Mr. Lester) on securing this Adjournment debate, and I pay tribute not only to the interest he has shown in the future of 38 central workshop at Chilwell but also to his concern to ensure that the Army continues to receive the support that it needs from the REME static workshop organisation as a whole. I am sure that those of his constituents who work at 38 REME workshop, Chilwell, are appreciative of all the efforts that he has made over recent years, as on this occasion, in pursuit of the interests as well as those of the Army as a whole.

My hon. Friend raised two issues. The first was the effect of the new redundancy provisions that will operate from 1 April. The second was the recruitment problem at Bicester. I shall try to deal with both issues. However, it might be helpful if I take this opportunity to explain the basis of the reorganisation of the REME workshop organisation which is currently under way and how it is progressing.

Before dealing with the specific points raised by my hon. Friend, I should like to set out briefly the principles that underly the plan that we announced in June 1984—and following a period of consultation with all interested parties confirmed in December 1984—to rationalise the static workshop organisation in this country, of which the sad closure of No. 38 central workshop at Chilwell is but one element.

The first principle is our duty to the taxpayer to ensure that the funds which Parliament has voted to meet defence needs are applied in the most cost-effective and efficient manner. The MOD review of the REME static workshop organisation in 1982 was undertaken against that background. It showed that overall the organisation was running with substantially more capacity than the Army would need to meet its forecast workload—nearly 20 per cent. more, to be precise. Clearly, retaining excess capacity of that order is not efficient or economic, and we accordingly needed to reduce the overhead costs of the operation. That meant concentrating the Army's base repair work at fewer workshops. I ask my hon. Friend to contemplate those essential facts. With overcapacity in the REME central workshops, it was essential for us to contract the reorganisation for efficient and economic reasons.

The second principle we have followed is that work should not be retained in-house if it can be done satisfactorily but less expensively by industry, except where operational considerations preclude this. We therefore looked at the scope for putting out to contract repair work, in particular on equipment of relatively low operational priority and significance—for example, B vehicles. By having repair and overhaul work on such equipment performed under competitive contract, we found that we could obtain better value for money and significant cost savings.

The plan that we announced in 1984 involved the closure of the workshops at Chilwell and Newark and an expansion of those at Bovington, Bicester and Old Dalby, a substantial increase in the amount of base repair work carried out by contract, and manpower reductions of the order of 500. This would produce a leaner overall organisation with the right capacity and at the right locations to meet the Army's requirements and deployment.

That plan has significant consequences for many of the Army's employees. Therefore, we made every effort to ensure that ample time was allowed for consultation with the work force and its trade union representatives. I hope that my hon. Friend will agree that we have gone to considerable lengths to consult the trade unions and their representatives both in the trade unions and in Parliament. As my hon. Friend will be aware various delegations and representations were received by Ministers and their officials. Our decision to proceed with implementation of the rationalisation plan was taken only after most careful consideration of all the points which had been put to us.

Over the past two years since we announced that decision most of the changes to which I have referred have been proceeding according to plan. For example, the transfer of the residual load from 33 central workshop at Newark into 35 base workshop at Old Dalby has now been completed. The transfer of part of the workload of 38 central workshop, Chilwell into 18 base workshop Bovington and 34 base workshop Donnington is also running well on schedule.

At the beginning of his speech my hon. Friend implied that tanks can be stripped and repaired only at Chilwell, but Bovington also has that capacity. However, there have been some difficulties over the transfer of the residual part of the Chilwell workload to the workshop at Bicester. These have led to a one-year deferment, to March 1989, of the originally planned closure date for 38 central workshop, although the bulk of the manpower savings expected from closure will still be achieved by March 1988.

The rundown of the workshop at Chilwell is already well under way. Its total strength has already reduced by more than half since May 1984. Its industrial strength has reduced by 260 by the end of January this year and 154 of the workers there have received compensation on early retirement terms. We expect that a further 59 members of the work force will have left on similar terms by the end of March. Fifty-four of those who have already left have been transferred to other Ministry of Defence employment and have received the normal public assistance with the costs of their transfers to other locations.

My hon. Friend mentioned the fact that the new terms for early retirement were announced on 1 December 1986 to take effect from 1 April 1987. These represent a significant improvement for members of the industrial Civil Service leaving on redundancy. Negotiations on these new terms began in 1985, and in June 1986 a joint statement was made by management and the trade unions informing all staff—I stress "all staff" including those at Chilwell—of the broad outline of the new arrangements.

My hon. Friend suggested that that created some inequity for those who have already left or expect to leave prior to 1 April. I shall certainly look with care at his point and write to him. If a meeting would help, I am happy to have one. I must make it plain that our run-down plans at Chilwell pre-date these general improvements for the industrial Civil Service. Irrespective of them, we have still needed to meet our manpower target reductions by voluntary or, sadly, compulsory redundancies. As I have said, I shall consider further the seeming inequity created by the new redundancy provisions and write to my hon. Friend.

I turn now to the financial aspects of the static workshop review and the question whether the balance sheet of costs and savings had altered since our decisions were announced in 1984 in a way which affects its validity.

As my hon. Friend knows, we undertook a re-appraisal of the original costings last year at the request of the trade unions. This, indeed, showed some changes. The expected non-recurring net savings—that is, once-only savings net of once-only expenditure—have reduced from just over £1 million to £300,000. However, the expected recurring net savings have increased from £750,000 to £2·5 million per annum. This increase in the recurring savings has arisen largely because the costs of putting work to contract are less than orginally estimated. The figures that I have quoted do not include redundancy costs. We estimate that these might amount to about £4 million for the two workshops at Newark and Chilwell which are closing. Nor do they include the extra costs of about £1 million arising from keeping the Chilwell workshop open for an extra year until 31 March 1989. However, my hon. Friend will see that even if these additional elements are taken into account, we should break even within two years of full implementation of the reorganisation. Therefore, there are no financial grounds for reconsidering our decision.

The point was also raised whether the revised disposition of repair work under the plan would guarantee that the Army continues to receive the repair service that it requires, especially in the light of the loss of the expertise which exists at Chilwell. I pay tribute to the long and dedicated service of those who have worked and are still working at Chilwell.

I am satisfied that the Army will continue to be well served. For example, the concentration of tank main equipment repair at Bovington will capitalise on experience there of handling first and second line tank repair. As I have already mentioned, the transfer of this work is going well, and the people we are recruiting as skilled fitters have all completed four-year apprenticeships and are thoroughly competent to undertake the work we require of them.

I turn now to the recruiting problems at Bicester. It is true that recruiting was always likely to be more difficult at Bicester than at Chilwell. Factors such as competing local industries and housing all contribute to this. My hon. Friend was right to emphasise that.

The problem needs to be put into perspective. For example, 18 months ago the Bicester workshop employed 34 industrials as the direct labour force—that is, those who actually carry out the repair work as opposed to those who supervise or work in a supporting capacity. Today,

[Mr. Roger Freeman]

their number has risen to 73, which is only 10 fewer than the number required for the prime task—the repair of heavy armoured vehicle assemblies. The plan requires an increase to 145 by March 1989 to cater for the other work that we intend to transfer to the Bicester workshop in order to provide a balanced work load. The current rate of recruiting may leave us a little short of this requirement.

There is sufficient flexibility within the static workshop organisation for part or all of this other repair work to be undertaken elsewhere at the continuing workshops. Indeed, this flexibility will stand us in good stead should the manpower reduction at Chilwell reduce more quickly in the future than we expect.

So, recruiting is proceeding reasonably well at Bicester, despite the difficulties. But we are not being complacent. The Department is taking vigorous steps to maintain and, hopefully, improve the rate of recruitment. I visited Bicester on 16 February, and was greatly impressed by those members of the work force whom I met. These included several young men from northern cities such as Liverpool, Sheffield and Leeds who were returning to their homes at the weekends. I am conscious that housing in the Bicester area is a particular difficulty and may be hindering recruitment. Therefore, I have arranged for a review to be made of MOD-owned housing in the area to see what scope there may be for providing temporary accommodation for new recruits while they are seeking permanent housing.

To sum up on the main issues raised by my hon. Friend, we are confident that the rationalisation of the REME static workship organisation, of which the closure of Chilwell is a necessary part, is financially well founded. As my hon. Friend knows, all the ground has been gone over most thoroughly by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence. He has made it clear that he can see no grounds for throwing the whole plan back in the melting pot at this late stage. We have a duty to manage our resources responsibly and cost-effectively and unfortunately this can involve painful decisions. We much regret the closure of 38 central workshop at Chilwell, which is a necessary but unpalatable consequence of our overall plans. I assure my hon. Friend that I shall take careful account of what he said about inequities, and I shall be writing to him.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-two minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 24 February 1987

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

MID GLAMORGAN COUNTY COUNCIL BILL *[Lords]*
Order for Third Reading read.
Queen's consent on behalf of the Crown signified—
Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

NATO (Missile Systems)

1. **Mr. Tony Lloyd** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the nature and extent of his Department's participation in the study by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's military committee of NATO's requirement for anti-tactical ballistic missile systems.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Archie Hamilton): The United Kingdom is playing a full part in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's studies of the requirement for anti-tactical ballistic missile systems.

Mr. Lloyd: In the light of the Minister's response, and if we are playing a full part at the moment, what role will the United Kingdom have in the decision-making process about the star wars programme?

Mr. Hamilton: This is not connected with the star wars, or SDI, programmes. It is an anti-tactical ballistic missile system and we are discussing it with our NATO allies. As ballistic missile systems are so accurate now, it is worth having tactical ones. That is a threat to which we must react.

Mr. Wilkinson: Will my hon. Friend do everything possible to ensure that these missiles for use against ballistic missile attacks are developed as a matter of urgency, because anti-tactical ballistic missile systems, especially if applied to point defence, can greatly alleviate the threat directly posed to these shores by SS21s, SS22s and SS23s?

Mr. Hamilton: I accept my hon. Friend's point. The United Kingdom is participating in the NATO studies of the threat posed by anti-tactical ballistic missiles and the need to defend ourselves against them.

Mr. Cartwright: Will the Minister assure the House that the current interest in developing anti-tactical ballistic missile systems for Europe will not degenerate into some sort of stalking horse for the American SDI programme by enabling the Americans to try out in Europe technologies that would be banned by the ABM treaty?

Mr. Hamilton: We are not talking about related systems and I do not think that there is any danger of that happening.

Mr. Dickens: Whatever the future of cruise missiles and SS20s, is it not as sure as night follows day that the anti-tactical ballistic missiles will still be required for NATO?

Mr. Hamilton: Yes, it all depends on how we perceive the accuracy of the missile systems. They are becoming much more accurate. If that is a problem that we must face, we must produce a system to counteract that.

Helicopters

2. **Mr. Ashdown** asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he now expects to announce a decision on the procurement of support helicopters for Her Majesty's forces; what is his estimate of the level of funding required for the procurement of such helicopters; and if he will make a statement.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. George Younger): I hope to be able to make an announcement about our future support helicopter requirements within the next few weeks.

Mr. Ashdown: As the Minister approaches a decision that is so vital for my community, I should like three assurances from him. First, will he fully consult the company before reaching any final decisions? Secondly, will he confirm that he realises that the phasing of orders is as important as their number, because drip feeding orders to Westland would be disastrous? Thirdly, will he bear in mind that our helicopter fleet in the central plain is so deficient—perhaps 100 aircraft light of our tactical needs—that an expert recently commented that we have only a meagre capacity to carry out a full air mobile deployment? If the Secretary of State does not recognise those facts, he is letting down the country and my community.

Mr. Younger: I recognise the hon. Gentleman's concern for his constituents, if I can describe it in that way, and I can give him the first two assurances for which he asks. On his third point, he was trying to anticipate the outcome of the study that we have undertaken, which is wide ranging and has the object of establishing firmly what our precise military requirements will be.

Mr. Wiggin: My right hon. Friend is aware that my constituents have a substantial interest in this matter as well. Will he lay the myth, once and for all, that there is no need for more helicopters in the British armed services and accept that there is a need for more defence equipment of all sorts and none greater than the need for helicopters?

Mr. Younger: I appreciate my hon. Friend's great concern for his constituents, who certainly have an interest in this. I confirm that the study, which is coming towards completion, is addressing itself to precisely the question of how many helicopters we are likely to need for our military requirements in the near future. That will be the basis of the decision that we shall have to take.

Mr. Carter-Jones: Does the Minister agree that AST 404 was the product of a study, but that it did not produce

helicopters? Is he aware that Back-Bench Members on both sides of the House have made representations to his Department over four years, and does he realise that without orders Westland is in grave danger of not surviving?

Mr. Younger: The hon. Gentleman is quite right in saying that it has taken some time to resolve this matter. As he will be well aware, exercises took place two years ago in central Europe which gave us food for thought as to what the real requirements for the future would be. As a result of that, this study is trying to articulate exactly what those needs will be.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Army is comparatively poorly equipped with helicopters and that there is a strong case for increasing our mobility rather than, say, purchasing more tanks? Will he agree to equip a new mobile brigade of Lynx helicopters from Westland?

Mr. Younger: Although I would not at this stage make the comparison that my hon. Friend makes with tanks, we certainly have requirements for more air mobility. The study is designed to address the way in which those requirements should be met.

Mr. Denzil Davies: Will the Minister confirm that there really is no future for Westland as a manufacturing company making helicopters without substantial orders from the British Government and in particular from the Ministry of Defence? There is no private sector solution to Westland's problem. Secondly, will he confirm that there is no military requirement for the Black Hawk helicopter, contrary to what was said in some circles during the famous battle for Westland?

Mr. Younger: On the latter point, we have not yet reached a conclusion on what types of helicopters might be required, so, I cannot give the right hon. Gentleman an assurance either way on that point. On the neeed for helicopters and their increasing use, that is what the study is designed to establish.

Mr. Jim Spicer: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the team from Westland, led by Sir John Cuckney, has made the position of that company totally clear and has not in any way indulged in what one might call the histrionics to which we have perhaps become accustomed in recent years?

Mr. Younger: I agree with my hon. Friend exactly. I am in touch with the chairman of the company and I am being fully briefed on the needs of the company, which I shall, of course, take fully into account.

Strategic Defence Initiative

3. **Mr. Beith** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the implications for United Kingdom participation in the strategic defence initiative programme of any acceleration of deployment by the United States Administration.

Mr. Younger: The United States Government have announced no decision to deploy defences against strategic ballistic missiles. The position remains, as agreed by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and President Reagan at their Camp David meeting in December 1984, that strategic defence initiative-related deployment would, in view of treaty obligations, have to be a matter for negotiation. The United Kingdom Government continue to support the strategic defence initiative research programme and United Kingdom participation in it.

Mr. Beith: What did the Secretary of State mean when he said that if our views were not taken into account we should have to consider what our action would be? Did he mean that if our views were not taken into account British participation in the SDI programme would be ended, and if not, why not?

Mr. Younger: I was asked what my reaction would be if I were told that the United States had some change in policy on SDI. I replied that we should have to wait and see what the proposals were before making such a comment.

Mr. Forth: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that any system such as SDI, developed by our friend and ally the United States, is a welcome contribution to future peace? Will he also welcome it in the context of the contribution that we in the United Kingdom are able to make and the jobs and technology that it brings to Britain?

Mr. Younger: My hon. Friend is entirely correct. Indeed, I should add that the United States and the Western Alliance would be deficient in their responsibilities if the Soviet Union were allowed to continue active research in that area without our having some security on our side from similar research.

Mr. Mason: Does the Minister think that research on SDI out of the laboratory will, despite the Soviet deployment of an anti-satellite system, be contrary to the ABM agreement?

Mr. Younger: The right hon. Gentleman will appreciate that it is not for me or the British Government to interpret a treaty to which and to the negotiation of which we were not a party. It is, however, for the United Kingdom Government and for me to be concerned about the United States policy on the SDI programme and the effect that it might have on arms control negotiations. It is for that reason that I asked for and received last week in America an undertaking that if there were to be any substantial change in that policy we would be consulted before any such change were made.

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend: Will my right hon. Friend remind the House of how much money has come into Britain as a result of taking part in the research programme? Has he any idea of how many jobs are involved, and can he confirm that this gives us a chance to have a say in whether the scheme is implemented?

Mr. Younger: My hon. Friend makes a good point. I cannot confirm precisely how many jobs are involved, but about $34 milion worth of business has come to Britain as a result of our participation in the SDI programme. It is worth recalling that if we had not taken part in the programme very little of that would have come to Britain and our best talents would probably have gone across the Atlantic to take part in the programme there.

Mr. Douglas: I accept that the Secretary of State acknowledges that we are not a signatory to the ABM treaty, but is it not incumbent upon the British Government to have a view as to whether that treaty

should be interpreted narrowly, as many of the advocates in the United States suggest, or broadly, as the Reagan Government suggest?

Mr. Younger: We have repeatedly made it clear, as has my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, that we are content with the United States Government's policy on the SDI programme—that is the definition that they are currently using. We have also had an assurance that, as I have said, if there were to be any change we would be consulted before it was made.

Mr. Denzil Davies: Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm what he is reported to have said in the United States—that the British Government would be opposed to any British participation in SDI programmes where those programmes went outside what is called the narrow interpretation of the treaty? If that is the case, does the memorandum of understanding, which was signed by the Government, contain such a proviso and obstacle?

Mr. Younger: No, it does not contain any interpretations of the treaty. We believe in the treaty and we believe that it should be adhered to. It is for the two signatories to define how they see their own treaty.

I did not say what the hon. Gentleman has reported me as saying about our participation. I made it clear that we are content with the position as of now and that if there were to be any change in United States policy we should be concerned and would wish to be consulted before such a change was made.

Royal Air Force

4. **Mr. McNamara** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on morale in the Royal Air Force.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Roger Freeman): Morale in the Royal Air Force in this 75th anniversary year is high. This is due in large measure to the Government's major re-equipment programme and maintenance of pay comparability.

Mr. McNamara: I wish that I could share the Government's complacency, when the recommended ratio of pilots to aircraft is 2:1 and ours is 1·7:1, among the lowest in Europe, and when the mechanistic operation of premature voluntary retirement regulations means that trained Lightning pilots at RAF Binbrook are grounded because they have asked for PVR and their substitutes will graduate just as the Lightnings are taken out of service, making the whole thing look ridiculous. If the Minister is so complacent, why was it necessary to establish the Robson inquiry? When will we have the result of that inquiry, and until then will he modify the PVR regulations so that they are used in a more delicate and sophisticated way?

Mr. Freeman: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that premature voluntary retirement rates for officers and pilots in the Royal Air Force are down in the calendar year 1986 compared with 1985. We very much hope that that trend will continue.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my hon. Friend agree that when young men join the Royal Air Force to fly they are given the option of accepting a branch commission and thus spending all their time flying, or, alternatively, taking a general duties commission through a cadetship at Cranwell? Does he agree that in the latter case they will also be expected to carry out man-management responsibilities and that as part of their career structure it will fall upon them to take jobs that will train them for man-management? Does he therefore agree that one of the problems that we face and the resulting publicity have arisen from the fact that one individual RAF pilot did not understand that situation?

Mr. Freeman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. About one third of all RAF pilots—of whom there are about 3,500—at any one time are on ground duties, and such ground duties are essential to the furtherance of their careers.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: How many skill shortages are there within the RAF? How many similar examples are there to that of my constituent who had his request to buy himself out of the RAF deferred for nine months because of the skill shortages?

Mr. Freeman: Recruitment into the RAF is good. In answer to the hon. Gentleman, it was in 1948 that the then Labour Government introduced a minimum return of service of three years upon promotion to squadron leader and higher. In 1978 the then Labour Government instituted a maximum three-year waiting period for PVR applications.

Mr. Stern: Does my hon. Friend agree that perhaps the greatest danger to morale within the Royal Air Force will come from the threat of all the Opposition parties to cancel Trident and that the cancellation costs of that operation would strip the RAF of virtually all resources?

Mr. Freeman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for reminding me that in the last year of the Labour Government the PVR rates were approximately twice the present level.

Mr. Carter-Jones: Is the Minister unable to combine a little bit of staff duties for pilots with some flying experience as well? Is that beyond the planning schemes?

Mr. Freeman: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who I know has great experience in matters connected with the Royal Air Force. As I explained earlier, it is natural in the career of all pilots in the Royal Air Force to have both flying and ground duties. Flying duties often follow ground appointments.

Mr. Conway: Is my hon. Friend aware that RAF Shawbury in Shropshire, which is on the boundary of my constituency and that of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, is an excellent establishment, with high morale, providing extremely good back-up for groups such as the air training corps based in Shrewsbury? If my hon. Friend is aware that if a particular officer in the RAF wishes publicly, in the newspaper, to decry promotion, there are tactful officers at RAF Shawbury who are more than deserving of such promotion?

Mr. Freeman: I thank my hon. Friend for that. As I said earlier, morale within the RAF is extremely high. I compliment my hon. Friend on the support that he has given to the RAF and the reserves.

Mr. Powley: Is my hon. Friend aware that in January a number of hon. Members representing constituencies in Norfolk visited RAF Coltishall and that as a result of our discussions with officers and men we can confirm that

morale is high? Officers and men understand the important defensive role that they must perform in the defence of this country.

Mr. Freeman: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments and I concur with him.

Contracts (Cancellation Charges)

5. **Mr. Fatchett** asked the Secretary of State for Defence which of his Department's contracts are currently subject to cancellation charges of 125 per cent.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There is one contract where the maximum potential liability is set at 125 per cent. of the contract price; it is for the first Trident boat, HMS Vanguard. It has been agreed, however, that once the contract for the second boat has been placed, the normal liability limit of 100 per cent. of the contract price will apply to both contracts.

Mr. Fatchett: Does the Minister's answer not show the extent to which the Government lack confidence in their ability to sell the Trident project to the British electorate? Is not the high level of surcharge simply an illustration of the Government's attempt to try to bind a future Parliament — a Parliament in which there will be a majority of Labour Members opposed to the Trident scheme and keen to cancel it?

Mr. Hamilton: No. Cancellation charges of 125 per cent. were offered on the first contract to take into account the massive investment that had to be made by VSEL on the first boat and the long lead times. That is the maximum amount that might be spent. The work must be done before the money can be paid out.

Mr. Meadowcroft: What contracts will be under threat from the prospect of United States auditors being able to look at the books of United Kingdom companies? Is the Minister aware that this activity may well fall foul of the Official Secrets Act 1911 and lead to the companies involved being placed on the denials list and not being able to obtain equipment from the United States?

Mr. Hamilton: I do not think that there is any indication of contracts being under threat in that way.

Expenditure

6. **Mr. Watts** asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has received any representations that defence expenditure should be reduced as a percentage of gross domestic product.

Mr. Younger: My Department has received representations on various aspects of defence expenditure.

Mr. Watts: Can my right hon. Friend estimate the impact on the defence budget of reducing expenditure to the NATO average of GDP, which I understand is Labour party policy? Will my right hon. Friend confirm that that would involve a reduction of more than 30 per cent., which is more than the equivalent of the total procurement budget? Does that not give the lie to the Labour party's claim that its policies will involve improving our conventional forces?

Mr. Younger: My hon. Friend is broadly right. It appears from the Labour party's national executive document that the Labour party proposes to reduce defence spending as a proportion of gross domestic product to the average of the NATO allies. The average is 3·3 per cent. and our figure is about 5 per cent. A reduction of some £6 billion in the defence budget would be needed to meet the average figure. That is what the Labour party appears to be preparing to do.

Mr. Merlyn Rees: So that I can decide whether to make representations against it, is there any truth in the story that the Navy is to be cut in the autumn?

Mr. Younger: I have not heard such a report, but if I saw such a report I should certainly ascertain whether it had any validity.

Mr. Couchman: Does my right hon. Friend agree that if Trident were cancelled and replaced by either the French M5 missile system or the sea-launched Tomahawk cruise missiles it would require 11 submarines rather than four and would be more than twice as expensive and, therefore, catastrophic to the defence budget?

Mr. Younger: My hon. Friend is correct. It seems to be becoming generally accepted that any alternative to the Trident system based on cruise missiles would certainly require considerably more missiles and, therefore, considerably more boats to make it effective against likely defences at the time. It follows that it would be considerably more expensive. My hon. Friend is quite right about that.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: If expenditure on Zircon is not part of the secret Vote, why does the Secretary of State refuse to answer my questions and tell me under what Vote and sub-head that expenditure has been incurred? If Parliament is to accept not being told the sum expended, we surely have a right to know under which Vote or Votes the money has been expended.

Mr. Younger: That does not arise under this question. As the project that the hon. Gentleman has mentioned is secret, he will not expect me to talk about it. He should know perfectly well by now, as his right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) has confirmed, that the conventions about informing the House of Commons of expenditure of this sort have been completely fulfilled by the Government.

Mr. Leigh: Following the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman), will my right hon. Friend confirm that if the defence policies of the leader of the Social Democratic party were put into effect, not only would the missiles cost twice as much if they were sea-launched, but we should incur £3 billion cancellation costs on Trident, so we should be paying twice as much for a system that was half as effective?

Mr. Younger: My hon. Friend is correct. It would certainly be considerably more expensive. Unfortunately, it would also become progressively less effective until it was not a deterrent worth having for any money. That is its real disadvantage.

Mr. Haynes: Is the Secretary of State aware that I am making a representation to him about defence expenditure? Is he aware, further, that the Government throw money around like confetti on defence? When will he persuade the Government to throw some money around for the people living in poverty in my constituency? How about an answer to that question to help the people in real need?

Mr. Younger: As the Government are spending vastly more on social services than did the Government that the hon. Gentleman supported, I do not think that that comment comes very well from him. He will find that most of his supporters, even if they have voted Labour all their lives, will strongly support the Government's defence policy as against his own.

Royal Army Veterinary Corps, Melton Mowbray and RAF North Luffenham

7. **Mr. Latham** asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will publish the reports of the working parties regarding the future of the Royal Army Veterinary Corps, Melton Mowbray and Royal Air Force North Luffenham.

Mr. Freeman: It is not our practice to publish reports which are prepared for study within the Ministry of Defence. The future of the Royal Army Veterinary Corps at Melton Mowbray is not the subject of examination by any working party. I shall advise my hon. Friend of the outcome of the study on RAF North Luffenham as soon as possible.

Mr. Latham: In view of the fearful mauling that his Department has had from the Public Accounts Committee over the proposed merger of the Defence music schools, and to avoid further hassles from me, will my hon. Friend throw into the wastepaper basket any half-baked proposals that he may be about to make which adversely affect the excellent units in my constituency?

Mr. Freeman: I note what my hon. Friend said, but we have no half-baked proposals to put before the House or to my hon. Friend. When we reach a decision, we shall communicate it to the House.

Schools of Music

11. **Mr. Hancock** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the future of the Defence schools of music.

Mr. Freeman: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence expects to announce a decision soon.

Mr. Hancock: Will the Minister explain to the people of Portsmouth what is delaying his decision? Is he aware that he has written to them on at least three occasions, the first as far back as July last year, saying that the decision is imminent? Will he make a decision also about the use of the land that the Ministry of Defence is holding at Eastney? Will he explain to the people of Deal, Portsmouth and Uxbridge what the problem is and what information is still needed for the decision to be made?

Mr. Freeman: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would agree that it is far better for us to reach the right decision, however long it takes. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the amount of surplus land and married quarters is monitored closely and constantly. It is our intention to dispose of all surplus land and married quarters as promptly as possible.

Mr. Pike: Will the Minister recognise that, as the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) said, major difficulties are caused in both Deal and Eastney? Would it not be better to take a speedy decision? Have the Government not had long enough to think about it? Should not early decisions be taken?

Mr. Freeman: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would be the first to criticise us if we reached too rapid a decision.

Trident

12. **Mr. Roy Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what are the future financial arrangements for the payment for work on the Trident project.

Mr. Younger: The future financial arrangements for payment for work on the Trident programme will continue to be in accordance with normal Ministry of Defence procurement and accounting procedures.

Mr. Hughes: Will the Minister assure the House that conventional defence support, including the frigate ordering programme, will not suffer as a result of the increased expenditure on the Trident programme?

Mr. Younger: Yes, particularly as the Trident programme is not expected to take more than 3 per cent. of the total defence budget or, in the peak year, 6 per cent.

Mr. Franks: Will my right hon. Friend say how imminent is the placing of the order for Trident 2?

Mr. Younger: I cannot give a date to my hon. Friend at present, but I recognise his great concern about this matter. We hope to be able to do so before too long.

Mr. O'Neill: Can the Secretary of State not be more specific about the future of our frigates and our surface fleet, not least because of the disclosure in the *Sunday Telegraph* last Sunday of the likelihood of our frigate fleet dropping to about 44 or 45 within two years? Will he confirm that that will not be the case and that the frigates will not suffer as a result of Trident?

Mr. Younger: I can confirm to the hon. Gentleman what I and my hon. Friends have said for a long time, that we expect the frigate fleet in the Royal Navy to remain at about 50, which is what it is at present. The hon. Gentleman will also be as aware as I am that in the current financial year we have already placed orders for three type 23 frigates.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my right hon. Friend agree that in all defence projects and spending programmes there are always more people looking for money to be spent and that during the period of the Tornado programme, which is a much larger expenditure programme, the service has continued, despite all the dismal Jimmies who said that it would not be possible?

Mr. Younger: My hon. Friend is perfectly correct. The Tornado programme is in fact a more expensive programme than Trident, but it is also the case that the Trident programme produces the most effective contribution to our defence and could not be replaced at the same cost in any other way.

Armed Services (Morale)

13. **Mr. Allen McKay** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on morale in the armed services.

Mr. Freeman: Morale in the armed services remains high.

Mr. McKay: Will the Minister then say why it is that there are cuts in recruitment to the Royal Navy and cuts

in expenditure on the Royal Navy and why it is that middle officer personnel are leaving the Royal Navy? Will this not reduce the operational effectiveness of the Royal Navy?

Mr. Freeman: As the hon. Gentleman will know, there has been a significant increase — approximately 20 per cent. in real terms — in expenditure on the armed services since the fiscal year 1978-79. That has involved a substantial amount of re-equipment, including re-equipment for the Royal Navy. As for the premature voluntary retirement figures, which are often cited as a symptom of morale, those figures in the Royal Navy have stabilised and the trend is down.

Mr. Sackville: Does my hon. Friend agree that nothing could depress the morale either of our armed forces or anybody else in this country who is interested in defence more than the plans of the Opposition to abolish Trident, the nuclear deterrent, and to leave this country vulnerable to nuclear blackmail?

Mr. Freeman: I agree with my hon. Friend. The figures for PVR applications, as opposed to exits, in the last year of the Labour Government were almost twice as high as the rate today.

Mr. Duffy: Does the Minister not think that morale in the Royal Navy must suffer when, given the mining threat, they see that little more than half the minesweepers and minehunters that were ordered under the £1 billion modernisation programme are likely to come on stream by the 1995 deadline, given the curbs on defence spending?

Mr. Freeman: This Administration has ordered many more ships in the same period of time than did the last Labour Government. As for recruitment to the Royal Navy, we continue to meet our targets.

Mr. O'Neill: Does the Minister not agree that while the PVR rates may have stabilised, they have stabilised at the lowest figure since the mid-1970s, when unemployment was considerably lower than it is now, and that there is little incentive for those individuals who wish to remain in the Royal Navy to do so, given the unpleasantness that much of their work pattern is forcing upon them?

Mr. Freeman: I do not agree with what the hon. Gentleman has said. Indeed, I am not sure what the direct correlation is between the rate of PVR applications and exits and the level of unemployment.

Fighter Aircraft

14. **Mr. Ron Brown** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what recent representations he has received from trade unions about orders for fighter aircraft; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: None, Sir.

Mr. Brown: Obviously I am opposed to the arms race, but will the Minister agree to meet shop stewards and other trade union representatives from Ferranti to discuss this matter, because it is a very important issue in Leith and in many parts of Britain? Will he agree to meet the shop stewards and trade union representatives?

Mr. Hamilton: I am always more than prepared to meet trade union representatives. I was at Ferranti in Edinburgh quite recently. I am glad that the hon. Gentleman's constituents have impressed upon him the need to have an up-to-date European fighter to meet the Soviet threat, because the impression given by the hon. Gentleman is that he would welcome it.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Has my hon. Friend received any representations from the trade unions regarding an interim engine for the future European fighter aircraft? Can he confirm that he would regard it as intolerable that the United Kingdom, German and Italian forces should choose an aeroplane powered by an American engine when we want the RB199?

Mr. Hamilton: I accept my hon. Friend's point. It is the Government's objective that there should be a British engine in the fighter.

Mr. McNamara: What progress has been made with the European fighter aircraft, especially as the experimental aircraft programme has been grounded through lack of Government funding? When will development work begin? Can we be assured that there will be no further delay, especially as we know that the Germans are re-winging Phantom so that it will be operational beyond 1995? Doubts are therefore put over German co-operation in the project. If we do not get the EFA, will the RAF end up with the F18 orders?

Mr. Hamilton: As a participating country, the United Kingdom agreed with Germany, Italy and Spain in August 1985 to proceed with the project definition phase. The industries in those nations embarked on a study in September 1985 and that was completed in September last year. The project definition reports from industry are now being evaluated and we hope to be able to make a decision before very long.

Royal Ordnance plc

15. **Mr. Robert Atkins** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the current position of Royal Ordnance plc.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In accordance with plans announced to the House by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on 24 July 1986, we are negotiating with four companies to sell the Government's 100 per cent. shareholding in Royal Ordnance plc. No final selection has yet been made of the company with which a sale contract will be signed.

Mr. Atkins: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that reply. Does he recognise that there is considerable concern among the work force at all levels about the delays that are being caused to Royal Ordnance? Bearing in mind how successful the company has been, is, and will be, does my hon. Friend accept that there is an urgent need to resolve the matter of ownership as soon as possible?

Mr. Hamilton: We certainly accept that point. The bids are due in the middle of next month and we hope to be able to make a decision not too long after that.

Mr. Denzil Davies: Does the Minister not realise that there is considerable concern among the employees? One source of concern relates to conditions of service and pensions. The Minister will know that when the transfer from the Civil Service to the plc took place most of the conditions were protected under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations

1981 and other provisions. Can he give us a guarantee that those conditions will remain and will not be changed as a result of a change of share ownership?

Mr. Hamilton: Yes, I can give that undertaking. We are talking here about a sale of shares. The conditions of the employees and the terms under which they are employed will not change.

Helicopters

16. **Mr. Heathcoat-Amory** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he has reached a decision on future helicopter needs for the Army; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer to the answer which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence gave earlier to the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown).

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Would it help this issue if a decision was reached on whether the RAF or the Army controlled battlefield helicopters in future? The present division of responsibility is causing confusion in defence policy.

Mr. Hamilton: I know that this issue has been raised before and we have considered it. However, I do not believe that any changes are envisaged at the moment.

Dr. Hampson: What progress is being made with the NH90? There was a great drive behind that European collaborative machine 18 months ago, but it seems, more or less, to have disappeared from sight.

Mr. Hamilton: The NH90 is still under consideration with our European partners.

Mr. Ashdown: In making a decision about Army helicopter procurement, will the Minister assure the House that he will afford the British services in Germany the same level of mobility as is enjoyed by other NATO forces on the Western front?

Mr. Hamilton: The air mobility of British forces in Germany is a matter that we have to take into account when we look to our ordering requirements.

Mr. Jim Spicer: My hon. Friend has heard the Opposition voice their dislike of the Black Hawk helicopter. Will he give an undertaking that the Ministry of Defence will do all it can to encourage overseas orders for the Black Hawk to be built at Yeovil?

Mr. Hamilton: There are a number of export opportunities for the Black Hawk, one of which is in Sweden. We are giving all our support to that.

"Statement on the Defence Estimates 1987"

20. **Mr. Wrigglesworth** asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to publish the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1987."

Mr. Younger: No decision has yet been taken. As in previous years, however, I hope that it will be possible to publish in the spring, in good time for an examination by the Select Committee on Defence and a full debate in the House before the summer recess.

Mr. Wrigglesworth: Will the Secretary of State make it clear to the House that the expenditure on Trident will make it difficult to sustain proper expenditure on the Navy, Army or Royal Air Force conventional forces?

Mr. Younger: The hon. Gentleman is entirely wrong on that matter. The Trident programme is good value for money. If any single programme was going to make it more difficult to buy other conventional equipment, it would probably be the Tornado programme rather than the Trident programme.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Donald Stewart** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 24 February.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others and addressed the conference of the Institute of Directors. In addition to my duties in this House I shall be having further meetings later today. This evening I hope to have an audience of Her Majesty The Queen.

Mr. Stewart: In the light of leaks and forecasts about reduction in income tax in the forthcoming Budget, will the right hon. Lady take time to consider the evidence that the majority of people have a higher concept than the "I'm all right, Jack" philosophy and that they would prefer any excess funds to go to the deprived and less fortunate people in our society? Will she direct the Chancellor accordingly?

The Prime Minister: I am happy, as the right hon. Gentleman knows, to report that the Government have cut income tax and have increased personal allowances considerably and we hope that we shall go on doing so. Many of us happen to think that people such as nurses on £150 a week who have to pay £41 in income tax and national insurance contributions believe that they pay too much. Clearly, the right hon. Gentleman thinks that they pay too little.

Mr. Onslow: Will my right hon. Friend take this opportunity to congratulate the police and security authorities on their recent successes in catching suspected terrorists and in seizing illegal arms and explosives? Does she agree that the fight against terrorism might become much more effective if the official Opposition would stop opposing the renewal of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984?

The Prime Minister: I gladly join my hon. Friend in congratulating the police and security authorities on their constant vigilance in our interest. I agree with him that it would be far better if the Opposition would support the Prevention of Terrorism Act instead of constantly opposing it.

Mr. Winnick: As virtually everybody, including apparently the Prime Minister, believes that the appointment of the present Conservative party chairman was disastrous, will the right hon. Lady consider in future ensuring that the position is no longer be subject to appointment but is by election? Can the right hon. Lady

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Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must ask about the Prime Minister's responsibilities for the appointment and duties of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

Mr. Winnick: Can the right hon. Lady explain to the House why, although she is always on about democracy and the rest of it, she is not willing to bring about any changes in her own party, and, moreover, undermines some of the rights that Conservative party members already have?

The Prime Minister: I confirm that appointments for which I am responsible, including that of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, will continue to be a matter for the Prime Minister.

Q2. **Mr. Latham** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 24 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Latham: Is it not deplorable that in the week when the Russians rightly released Yosif Begun they also refused visas to three hon. Members for an entirely honourable purpose connected with a visit to Moscow for human rights? Will she please tell Mr. Gorbachev that if that is his idea of openness, it certainly is not ours?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend that it was a matter of regret that visas were refused to hon. Members of the House to attend the ceremony to present awards to seven leading refuseniks. However, I am sure that my hon. Friend will be glad to know that our ambassador in Moscow has expressed regret to the Soviet authorities that the visas were not forthcoming and that he was able to present the awards on behalf of the committee and, fortunately, the recipients were allowed to enter the embassy for that purpose without hindrance.

Dr. Owen: Will the Prime Minister confirm that if the link with pensions had not been broken in 1980 the single pension would now be £5·95 extra and the married pension would be £9·40 higher? While it is impossible to give an increased pension to every person, irrespective of their income, the Government policy ought to be—like the SDP-Liberal alliance policy—to restore the link for all those pensioners who have no other source of income.

The Prime Minister: I see that the right hon. Gentleman has joined the great give-away — perhaps up to £28 billion, but we do not yet know. Our pledge to pensioners at the last election was that their pensions would be protected against inflation. They have been more than protected against inflation. Pensions have been paid to a million more pensioners, because there are that many more people. The right hon. Gentleman tries to give the impression that there should be higher pensions, but he never says what the greater burden of national insurance contributions would be on the working population.

Mr. Terlezki: Does my right hon. Friend agree that while we welcome the release of 140 innocent people from slave labour camps, and while it is very important to negotiate about disarmament, it is also very important to negotiate about human rights? When she goes to Moscow, will she tell Mr. Gorbachev that we will give him a vote of confidence only when he practises what he preaches?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend. The releases from prison that have been made are welcome, but there are many thousands more to go. We shall be discussing human rights with Mr. Gorbachev. We welcome what has happened, but, as my hon. Friend points out, many other improvements remain to be made.

Q3. **Mr. Tony Banks** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 24 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Tony Banks: Will the Prime Minister find time today to condemn utterly the vicious, personal and dishonest attacks being waged by certain newspapers against Deirdre Wood, Labour's candidate in the Greenwich by-election? As the Prime Minister clearly has such influence with those newspapers, will she call in the editors and see whether she can get some form of code of honest conduct to be used for by-elections?

The Prime Minister: I am the first to condemn vicious personal attacks, from whatever quarter they may come. I am the first to say that politics everywhere should be about constructive policies and not about personalities.

Q4. **Mr. Dykes** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 24 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Dykes: Will my right hon. Friend join me today in welcoming the unanimous statement of the EEC Foreign Ministers supporting the idea of an international conference on peace in the middle east — an idea emanating from a number of sources, including the Soviet Union? Will she, on her forthcoming visit to the Soviet Union, discuss this matter with Mr. Gorbachev?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I join my hon. Friend in welcoming that pronouncement by the EEC Foreign Ministers. The suggestion for an international conference as a background for middle east negotiations between the two parties directly concerned has been around for a long time. I think that it first came from Jordan. It must be clear that all participants in any such conference would have to accept United Nations Security Council resolutions 242 and 338 as a basis for taking part.

Mr. Kinnock: The Prime Minister claimed earlier today that Britain's industrial base is now healthier than at any time for at least a generation. While I wish that were true, may I ask her to explain how she can make such a claim when manufacturing investment is still 20 per cent. lower than it was in 1979, when manufacturing output has yet to reach the levels that it was at in 1979, when manufactured exports have gone up by 15 per cent. under her premiership and manufactured imports have gone up by 50 per cent. under her premiership? If that is what she thinks is healthy, thank heavens she is not a doctor.

The Prime Minister: Yes, manufacturing is much healthier now than for a generation. It is no longer overmanned. The atmosphere in industrial relations is now infinitely better than it ever was under previous Governments. Manufacturing productivity has gone up faster than in many other countries and management is now able to manage. We now have a very healthy manufacturing industry — something we never had before.

Mr. Kinnock: When manufacturing industry is that much smaller, how it can be that much more healthy is very difficult to perceive. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] Perhaps the Prime Minister can explain that to the 2 million people who have lost their jobs in manufacturing industry. How

can it be more healthy when it is 17 per cent. less competitive than it was in 1979, when engineering, construction and other industries have severe skills shortages and when even the Chancellor of the Exchequer has to admit that this year we shall have a manufactured trade deficit of over £7 billion? I ask again, where is the healthiness?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman says that there are 2 million fewer jobs in industry. It will not help to overman manufacturing industry to the extent of 2 million jobs, even though it is nationalised. That is the right hon. Gentleman's policy — put manufacturing industry back to overmanning and make it less competitive. That is the road to ruination. We must have competitive and sound manufacturing firms. They are. Their profitability is up, their productivity is up and their export volume is up. Manufacturing output has risen by nearly 11 per cent. since the last general election. It is in a good state. That is what the right hon. Gentleman cannot stand. The Confederation of British Industry and everyone else is saying that things are optimistic and good, but not the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. McCrindle: Perhaps I may revert to the question about pensions asked by the leader of the Social Democratic party. Was the right hon. Gentleman not a member of an Administration which, having introduced the very linkage to which he now refers——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will the hon. Gentleman please link his question to Prime Ministerial responsibility?

Mr. McCrindle: Does my right hon. Friend recall that, when the leader of the SDP was a member of a Labour Administration, there was indeed the link to which he now refers, but does she also recall that in two years out of five that Administration failed to implement the link?

The Prime Minister: I thank and congratulate my hon. Friend on making his point so effectively and accurately.

Q5. **Mr. Tom Clarke** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 24 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Clarke: Does the Prime Minister accept that the present industrial dispute involving a large majority of Scottish prison officers is an indication of their frustration at overcrowding, understaffing and a lack of revenue resources for Scottish prisons? Does she further accept that the Government's neglect is particularly unacceptable in view of the increase in the Scottish crime rate of over 50 per cent. since she came to office?

The Prime Minister: I accept that there are considerable problems with prisons in England and Wales and in Scotland. I have also told the hon. Gentleman that the Government have done more than any previous Government to build new and modern prisons.

Q6. **Mr. Richard Shepherd** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 24 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Shepherd: Will my right hon. Friend urgently consider introducing legislation to adopt the practice of India, Pakistan, Canada, the United States of America, Mexico, Brazil and Argentina, among others, and impose fines on airlines which bring in people without valid entry documents?

The Prime Minister: It is crucial that airlines do not bring in people unless they have the proper documentation. Carriers are already required to pay the detention and other costs of people whom they bring in to the United Kingdom and who are refused entry. As my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said last week, the Government are considering urgently whether to follow the example of certain other countries, including the Federal Republic of Germany and Canada, in taking powers to impose financial penalties on carriers who bring people to this country without the necessary passports, visas or other documents. Both the powers and the penalties may well need to be retrospective.

Mr. Hume: Will the Prime Minister join me in calling on the leaders of all the major parties in the House to make clear, as she and the Leader of the Opposition have already done, that whatever the outcome of the election, it will make no difference to the attitudes of those parties to the Anglo-Irish Agreement, as expressed in a vote in the House, and that they will not engage in any power bargaining on that issue?

The Prime Minister: These agreements are signed between countries and not between parties. The Anglo-Irish Agreement therefore will continue.

Q7. **Mr. Bellingham** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 24 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Bellingham: Will my right hon. Friend find time today to consider the City? Does she agree with me that recent criminal proceedings are evidence that the Government's legislation to stamp out insider trading is working? Does she also agree with me that under the last Labour Government nothing whatsoever was done to combat fraud in the City?

The Prime Minister: Yes, Mr. Speaker. This Government will give priority to rooting out financial misconduct and wrongdoing wherever it occurs; witness the action that we have taken to make insider trading a criminal offence. As my hon. Friend also raises the general matter of the City, may I point out that the City as a whole earns a net £7·5 billion in foreign exchange? It is of immense value to our balance of payments and to the country as a whole.

Devonport Dockyard

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. George Younger): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a statement about Devonport dockyard.

As the House will recall, I announced on 20 January that I was satisfied that there existed the basis for an advantageous contract to be placed for the future operation of Devonport dockyard with Devonport Management Ltd. At the same time, we provided the trade unions with further information summarising the main aspects of the draft contract arrangements negotiated with that company. In a statement made on 21 January my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement informed the House that I had invited the trade unions to a meeting on 13 February so that I might hear and consider their views before taking any final decision on the future management of Devonport dockyard.

At the time of that statement the Devonport Management Ltd. consortium comprised Brown and Root (UK) Ltd. with 30 per cent. of the shares, the Weir Group plc with 25 per cent. and Barclays de Zoete Wedd with 45 per cent. As the House knows, it has been our hope that some or all of the 45 per cent. held by Barclays might be transferred to one or more British industrial companies. I am glad to inform the House that since my hon. Friend's statement BICC, acting through its subsidiary Balfour Beatty, has now joined the consortium. BICC, Brown and Root and the Weir Group now each holds 29·9 per cent. of the shares with the 10·3 per cent. balance held by Barclays de Zoete Wedd, in trust to provide an incentive scheme for key employees.

I met general secretaries and other trade union representatives on 13 February to discuss the way ahead on Devonport. The unions made it clear to us that they remained as opposed as they have always been to the introduction of commercial management, continuing to prefer the idea of a dockyard trading fund with the work force remaining in the Civil Service. As I have already told the House, it remains our view that a dockyard trading fund, which is the option involving minimum change, is unlikely to secure the improvements in efficiency we seek or to compete as successfully as a commercial company for commercial and naval non-core work.

We have provided a great deal of information to the unions on our proposed changes to the management of the dockyards, over a very long period. I am grateful to the unions for the work they have done in recent weeks to consult the work force locally. I have considered closely the points they have put to me. These have included the request for the contract which we have already signed in respect of Rosyth dockyard, and the one we have negotiated with Devonport Management Ltd., to be made public; but I am sure that the House will understand the reasons of commercial confidentiality that prevent me from meeting this request. However, I have made every effort to provide all the relevant information that I can.

I am fully aware of my obligations to inform and consult the trade unions and I am satisfied that I have complied with such duties as the Act imposed on me at this stage. I have, therefore, authorised the signature today of a seven-year-term contract for the future operation of Devonport dockyard from 6 April 1987 with Devonport Management Ltd. We are also signing a service contract with the company to cover its operations in the dockyard from now until vesting day, during which time the management of the dockyard will remain the responsibility of my Department.

I have renewed my invitation to the trades unions to devote the period between now and vesting day to useful discussions on matters affecting the work force and have proposed a series of meetings to that end.

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): This statement again demonstrates that the Government had no intention of changing their original decision to privatise the dockyards. All the talk about consultation, frankly, was a sham. As all the independent and outside evidence has shown, there is no reason why the dockyards cannot be run commercially and efficiently by means of a trading fund, as in the case of other companies, within the public sector. We believe that these changes will lead to lower efficiency, a lower standard of service for the Royal Navy, and ultimately a higher cost to the taxpayer.

The House will remember that the Government have now destroyed four dockyards. First, there was Chatham, which has closed. The naval dockyard in Gibraltar was the second. Then Portsmouth was relegated from a dockyard to a fleet maintenance base. Now we have the destruction of Devonport and Rosyth. That does not augur very well for the future of the Royal Navy and the services provided for it.

Could the right hon. Gentleman confirm that the lead company in all this will be Brown and Root, a foreign-owned subsidiary, and could he tell the House what expertise and experience Brown and Root has in operating dockyards of this kind? Could he also confirm that, as is widely believed, the change will lead to a lowering of engineering standards and also to at least 5,000 redundancies at Devonport?

Who are the key employees who are apparently to be provided with an incentive scheme? Why not such an incentive scheme for all the employees at Devonport?

Mr. Younger: The right hon. Gentleman really must appreciate that the objective of all the consultations that I have been having over recent weeks with such great care and consideration has been to find out whether there were any good reasons to assume that one of the alternatives to what I have announced today would be better for the future of the dockyard. The only criterion in my mind in assessing these has been that which would give the dockyards, in this case Devonport dockyard, the best opportunity to operate successfully and to get more business for those who are working in the yards. With great respect to the right hon. Gentleman, I really think that those who will work in this yard for many years in the future will be somewhat depressed to hear him today talking about the destruction of the yards, which is so remote from the truth that it makes what he says quite absurd.

I thought that the right hon. Gentleman would know that Brown and Root has very wide experience of engineering work both in the United States and in this country. There is certainly no reason whatever to think that its standards will be lowered.

With regard to employment, I have expressed the opinion that in the worst case, if the dockyards remained under the present management, there might be 5,000

redundancies over the next 10 years. I understand that the new managers who are being appointed today expect about 2,300 redundancies over the next four years, which is at least a rather better outcome than we had feared. I certainly think that this company has the capacity to run the dockyard extremely successfully and to get new business into it, and that is the greatest security that those who work there could possibly have.

Miss Janet Fookes (Plymouth, Drake): I wish first to dissociate myself from the very gloomy interpretation of events described by the official spokesman for the Opposition. Secondly, I express my pleasure that a place has been found in the new arrangements for the present managing director, Mr. David Johnston, and at the same time inquire whether places will be found for the other senior managers who form the non-winning consortium.

Thirdly, will my right hon. Friend explain in more detail what the precise arrangements are for the service contract between now and vesting day, and what that will involve?

Mr. Younger: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I entirely agree that it is most unhelpful to talk inaccurately about the destruction of the dockyard when this is the best opportunity that we can give to those who work there for a better and secure future.

My hon. Friend asked about the people who have been working as managers in the dockyards and, in particular, about Mr. Johnston. I understand that most of those who were in the consortium with Mr. Johnson are likely to continue in employment with the new company, although probably not all. I expect the new management to attain high standards. The understanding that we shall work with it during the interim period will enable it progressively to move in to take over management, but until vesting day responsibility will rest with my Department.

Dr. David Owen (Plymouth, Devonport): How does the Secretary of State justify restricting shares in the new commercial enterprise to key employees only? In view of the fact that the commercial management has been criticised not only by the unions but by distinguished industrialists, managers throughout the country, two all-party Select Committees, all three Opposition parties and the local and district councils, will he not at least take into account the fact that this decision will be reversed and that a unified, integrated commercial enterprise will be established in Devonport dockyard with share ownership open to all employees?

Mr. Younger: I note what the right hon. Gentleman says and know from his close contacts locally that he will be anxious to know what the future arrangements can be. At this stage the shareholding system that has been set up offers the best opportunity for good, sound management of the company. However, I note what the right hon. Gentleman says, and no doubt it can be considered.

Mr. Robert Hicks (Cornwall, South-East): In view of the consequences for employment opportunities in the area arising in part from the decision to alter the system of management, can my right hon. Friend say what tangible assistance his Department will make available, in addition to that provided by the Department of Employment and the Department of Trade and Industry, to alleviate those adverse affects and to promote the introduction of new suitable industry into the area, thus diversifying the local economy?

Mr. Younger: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The decision that I have announced today does not in any way obviate or remove the obligations that my Department and I have to do all we can to help all aspects of the changeover, including giving any help that can be given from parts of the old dockyard which may no longer be required in the new set-up. I do not regard our responsibilities for that as ending with the new regime. I hope that my hon. Friend and those who are employed in the dockyard will recognise that, while the new system of management will come in on vesting day, 6 April, that does not end my Department's interest in the dockyard, nor our responsibility to supervise what goes on there.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): Will the Secretary of State reflect on what he has been saying about commercial confidence in relation to the contracts? While it may be acceptable to acknowledge that certain aspects of confidentiality must be adhered to prior to signing the contract, there is no overwhelming reason to keep these contracts strictly secret now that they have been signed. Why cannot the trade unions see the terms and conditions that the Secretary of State has accepted with these companies? Who will be the boss at Devonport? If the existing personnel and expertise are retained, who will administer the yard? Who signed the contract with the Ministry of Defence and——

Mr. Speaker: Briefly.

Mr. Douglas: Yes, Mr. Speaker. What was the nationality of the individual who signed the contract with the Ministry of Defence? May we have a complete assurance that at Rosyth the apprentice numbers that we have been led to expect in the past year will be maintained and not diminished, as we heard in previous answers?

Mr. Younger: I understand the hon. Gentleman's desire for more information. However, if he reflects about the contracts and thinks a little further about them, he will appreciate that when two separate contracts with different companies in different dockyards are negotiated simultaneously it would not be fair to either of the parties if the precise terms, conditions and details of one became common knowledge to the other.

If the hon. Gentleman thinks further ahead, after the seven-year period there may be a renegotiation of the contract or even a new contract with a new consortium and it would not be right for the precise details of the previous contract to have been known publicly.

The trade unions have had a huge amount of information passed to them for more than two years, and a great deal of which, I fear, has not been adequately digested. They have plenty to go on with all of that.

The boss will be the managing director of the new company that is to run the consortium that will take over.

Apprentices at Rosyth have been the subject of a statement by the new company. If more information is required, the unions would be well advised to break what they previously regarded as their blockage on discussions with the new company because, with great respect to the unions, that would be valuable to them and their members.

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): Has my right hon. Friend noticed the absence of all the Liberal Members from the House? Does he agree that that suggests that they are entirely satisfied with the decision

[Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop]

that he has reached? Does he further agree that, as there is only one SDP Member present, presumably the other SDP Members are also satisfied with the decision?

As the volume of naval orders does not depend on the decision announced today, will not employment in the dockyard depend wholly on the ability of the winners of the competition to attract overseas repair orders? Does my right hon. Friend agree that world-wide experience is the best warranty that there could ever be for future employment in Devonport dockyard?

Mr. Younger: I thoroughly agree with my hon. Friend's last point. There is no doubt that the level of work in the dockyard, under any form of management, including under the present management, depends on the yard becoming more competitive and able to acquire business other than normal naval dockyard work. I am absolutely clear that the new arrangement with the commercial consortium is much the best way of giving the yard the best chance to obtain new work. However, I do not wholly agree with my hon. Friend's theory that, because Liberal Members are not in the Chamber, they agree with everything that has been done. If that were so, they would be the happiest Members of the House by a long way.

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): If this wretched plan goes through, despite opposition from all the independent bodies that have considered it, will the Secretary of State confirm that the assurance on control of future employment in the yard will be taken from the Government and transferred to the company—and that the guarantees that the Government have given about employment in the yards are of no use or worth?

Mr. Younger: That is a fair point. When the new employers take over the management of the yard, the employees will be responsible to their new bosses for doing their jobs properly and for negotiating any changes that they may wish in their conditions of service. However, on vesting day, their present rights and conditions will be carried through. That is fair treatment for those transferring to a new employer. The Minister of Defence will retain an interest as being responsible overall for the dockyard, subject to the contractors.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): Does my right hon. Friend know that the one interested party that Opposition Members have neglected to mention is the Royal Navy? Will he confirm that the Royal Navy greatly favours his plans for Devonport?

Mr. Younger: My hon. Friend is correct. I understand that the trade unions had a meeting with the Navy Board, asked that question, and were told that the board was absolutely clear that this was the right policy.

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton (Fife, Central): In the light of the information supplied, does the Secretary of State accept that Brown and Root is a company of complete honesty and integrity? As the right hon. Gentleman has estimated that thousands of jobs will be lost, does that not add to the importance of accepting my Bill for the establishment of a development agency for the south-west of England?

Mr. Younger: The hon. Gentleman would not expect me to comment on a south-west England development agency. That is not a matter for me to decide. However, I can confirm that I have no reason to think that Brown and Root is not an entirely honest firm with integrity. It has operated, as he should know, for a long time in Scotland and has provided a great many jobs there.

Mr. Gordon Brown (Dunfermline, East): Will the Secretary of State now admit that he cannot conduct and complete the remaining consultations on conditions of service, pensions and the social and economic consequences of what he is doing and still meet his proposed deadline for transfer, which is only five weeks and a few days from now? Will he take note of the advice from my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) and publish all those details of what I understand are 1,000-page contracts involving jobs, apprenticeships, work load and reserve powers available to the Ministry of Defence so that we can see for ourselves the surrender of British interests and the unpatriotic betrayal of the work forces involved in this pernicious statement?

Mr. Younger: The hon. Gentleman is wrong about the amount still to be discussed. I remain ready to discuss solidly with all concerned between now and vesting day, and indeed beyond if necessary, any points that they wish to discuss. The conditions of service for the employees will be carried through to the new employment, and it is thereafter for them to negotiate any changes that they wish with their new employer. That is a perfectly fair treatment.

Some amendments will have to be made to conditions to recognise the changeover. Those can easily be discussed, and I remain ready to discuss them at any time. The position is, I am sorry to say, that repeated suggestions of dates for meetings to discuss those matters further have been turned down by the unions. I hope that they will now appreciate, in the interests of their members, that they should discuss much more fully all the details with me and my representatives and with the potential contractors at both dockyards. They have plenty of information upon which to work.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Did the Secretary of State hear my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) ask who were the key personnel? Is it not important that we know who those people are and what influence they will have? Is it not somewhat ironic that the flag-waving Tory party, represented by the Secretary of State today, is prepared to allow international money, say, from Libya or Argentina to be invested in this defence area while, at the same time, many British workers who are not key personnel will not be allowed to play a part in it? I think that the Secretary of State must answer that question.

Mr. Younger: On the matter of hearing what was said, my only problem in hearing is usually the hon. Gentleman's sedentary speech which goes on throughout the proceedings. It is for the new management to discuss key personnel with the unions, no doubt, and with representatives of the work force if they wish, on how that scheme can best be put forward. That is much the most sensible way to proceed.

Mr. Sydney Bidwell (Ealing, Southall): How can the Secretary of State be sure that there will be no greater security risk as a result of this widespread involvement in the docklands area? In view of the growing sophistication of armoury of the Navy and other forces, how can he be sure that there is not a grave security risk?

Mr. Younger: There are two points worth making in connection with that question, which is a perfectly fair one. First, all the security conditions and security arrangements that apply at the present will apply in the future. All that will have changed is the precise form of the management. I remind the hon. Gentleman and the other Labour Members who have expressed doubts of the structure of the management company that I have announced today. Certainly 29·9 per cent. of the shareholding is held by Brown and Root, whose parent company is an American company, but BICC has 29·9 per cent. and the Weir Group has 29·9 per cent. Barclays de Zoete Wedd has just over 10 per cent. That is a clear security for anyone who feels that there is foreign ownership of the dockyard. There is clearly a large majority shareholding of non-foreign ownership, for what that is worth. I expect all of those companies to be dedicated to the success of the dockyard under its new management.

Mr. Martin J. O'Neill (Clackmannan): Will the Secretary of State please be more specific about what he thinks the outcome will be in relation to key employees? Will those be people who are at present in the employ of the Ministry of Defence or are they likely to be Brown and Root placemen in the new organisation? Would it not be more sensible to make the terms of the contract clear and explicit so that employees could decide whether they wished to participate in the incentive scheme and so that people are not asked to take a pig in a poke, as the British Navy is having to do in this wretched business?

Mr. Younger: No, the British Navy is not taking any pig in a poke; it is taking an alternative form of management which should have a better chance of making a success of the dockyard. Of course, the key personnel could come from those presently employed in the dockyard and they could also come from outside. It should be an advantage for the future management of the dockyard to obtain the best talents from either of those two sections. The details of the scheme should be negotiated between the unions and representatives of the work force and the new management.

Trade Unions

3.55 pm

The Paymaster General and Minister for Employment (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement on trade unions and their members.

Since 1979 we have proceeded step by step to introduce a succession of measures which, together, have helped achieve the least number of working days lost to industrial action for a generation. We have sought to restore a proper balance of bargaining power between trade unions and employers. We have also sought to establish democraticrights for individual members within their unions. Above all, we have sought to promote an environment in which both sides of industry can work together to generate the wealth the country needs.

We have observed closely the impact of our legislation. In general, progress has been marked and encouraging. However, some unions have declined the opportunity to put their house in order, and union members have not always felt able to take a stand and ensure that abuses are corrected. It is therefore clear that we need now to take another step both to strengthen the rights of individuals within a union and to reinforce their ability to exercise those rights. That is why we are today publishing a Green Paper "Trade Unions and their Members" which sets out a number of possible changes, on which comments are invited, as a basis for further legislation.

The Government have always believed that individuals should be able to choose for themselves whether to belong to a trade union. We also object strongly to attempts to coerce an employer into putting someone out of work on the ground that the person does not belong to any union or to a particular union. Our earlier measures have certainly reduced the scope for the worst excesses of the closed shop. However, I am afraid that in some industries the power of the closed shop still remains. We therefore propose measures which will end the legal protection of a post entry closed shop in any circumstances.

The present law allows a closed shop to be enforced if a weighted majority of employees votes for it in a ballot. Few major employers have yet been affected by this provision, but in the cases where ballots have produced a lawful closed shop the rights of many individuals to choose whether to join a union or not have been extinguished. Experience has shown that unions' legitimate interests are not seriously weakened where the closed shop is not protected by law. The repeal of balloting provisions for the closed shop would give any individual dismissed for not belonging to a union the right to compensation for unfair dismissal. We also propose to end all legal immunity for industrial action designed to force an employer to create or maintain any closed shop. In short, we are proposing to end completely the use of the law in any circumstances to sustain the closed shop.

The most important feature of democracy within a trade union must be the right of the members to a secret vote in the direct election and re-election of their union leaders. The Trade Union Act 1984 established such a right for the election of the voting members of union executives and created a presumption that postal ballots would be used. However, a large number of trade unions have retained workplace ballots, and the conduct of such ballots continues to give rise to controversy. Now is the

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time to act against these abuses. When we legislated in 1984, many trade unions did not have lists of membership of sufficient quality to serve as electoral rolls. Since 1984 they have been required to have such lists and they have now had the time and opportunity to draw them up. There is, therefore, no longer any reason why we should not move to the most secure method of balloting available —the secret postal vote under independent supervision.

The process of election is intended to ensure that the leadership of a union is, and remains, responsible to its members. In practice, not all trade union leaders have been required to be elected. We now propose to make presidents, general secretaries and any others with seats on the executive subject to direct democratic election.

The right to choose to go to work during industrial action is an essential freedom. We believe that union members are entitled to a vote on whether their union should call them out on strike in the first place. We also believe that they are entitled to continue to go to work and honour their contract of employment if they disagree with their union's call. At the moment, legislation does not give union members any right to take action to restrain their unions from calling a strike without a ballot. Nor do they have any statutory protection against disciplinary action by their union if they cross a picket line or carry on working during a dispute. We proprose to give them both.

Recent events have thrown light on the unusual ways in which some unions run their financial affairs. Union members ought to be seriously concerned about some of the manoeuvres that have been used to evade or circumvent the jurisdiction of the courts when unions find themselves in conflict with the law. The Green Paper considers possible safeguards that might be enacted in legislation, of which the most fundamental is a right of access for every member, accompanied by a professional adviser, to current union accounting records.

It is not enough to provide rights and protection for individual citizens if, in practice, they find it too daunting to claim them. As things stand, trade union members need to be exceptionally determined and courageous if they are to embark on the process of enforcing the full rights that the law now gives them. Parliament has provided agencies to help employees to complain against employers about discrimination on grounds of race or sex. It is clear that there is now a need for a new commissioner for trade union affairs to advise and support union members who need to make a formal complaint and perhaps take legal action against unions and their officials who appear to be failing to comply with statutory duties. The new commissioner would help to make sure that trade unionists can defend both their existing rights and the new rights we propose giving them in this Green Paper.

The next steps that I am announcing today are wholly consistent with our approach to trade union reform through the period of office of this Government. We believe that trade unions behave more responsibly when they are in close touch with the views of their members and take steps to ensure that their actions command members' support. We have watched closely developments since 1984 and the Green Paper is based on our experience of events since the last legislation. Its proposals frame sensible solutions to specific problems that can be expected to work in practice. Consultation has, of course, always been an important part of our process of law reform in this area and the Government will welcome informed comment on these latest proposals.

Mr. John Evans (St. Helens, North): May I first draw attention to the usual iniquitous practice of Government Ministers issuing statements to the press, as witnessed in the headline in the new *London Daily News* "Tory assault on unions", before the statement was issued to the House.

Today's announcement is a further petty, vindictive and miserable attack upon the rights of millions of working trade unionists. It is an extension of the blacklegs' charter that has been introduced by successive Secretaries of State over the past eight awful years of this Goverment. It is savagely ironic that this statement has been introduced by a Secretary of State who sits in the other place and has not been elected to anything by anybody. However, he is discussing the democratic rights of trade unionists and that is hypocrisy of the highest order.

Once again we have heard the usual weasel words from the Department of Employment. When that Department is not fiddling the unemployment statistics it turns away for a moment to attack, once again, the trade unions. The Minister's statement informs us that fewer working days are now lost than for a generation. The fact is that, per thousand workers employed, there is more time lost now than there ever was under a Labour Government. I certainly suggest that the statement in the Green Paper —if I cannot use the word lie—was a perversion of the truth.

The statement informs us that the Government intend to extend the rights of trade union members. That is from a Government who have, over the past eight years, successively and repeatedly destroyed the employment rights of millions of workers. That is from a Government who even vetoed the modest Wedding proposals to give rights to part-time workers. That is from a Government who are currently abolishing the rights of teachers to have any sort of trade union rights, free collective bargaining or the right to discuss their prospects with their employers.

The Minister's statement informs us that he proposes to insist upon postal ballots. Can the Minister inform the House why there is nothing in the Green Paper that forces employers to provide workplace facilities for employees to carry out their trade union activities? If workers could participate in their trade union activities at their workplace it would represent the greatest single extension of trade union democracy. Perhaps the Minister can inform the House why it is that every study suggests that there are far more people participating in workplace ballots than there are participating in postal ballots. My union, the Amalgamated Engineering Union, can confirm that.

Why have the Government not said something about the Murdochs of this world? They have used the Government's legislation in the worst possible fashion to create companies, which have denied workers their basic human rights in relation to their contracts of employment. Why have the Government said nothing about the miners who lost their jobs, who have been declared innocent by industrial tribunals, but who are still denied the right of employment by British Coal? Why is there nothing about those rights in the Green Paper?

The Minister's statement informs us that we shall have an Eastern European style commissar for trade union affairs. Why are we to have a commissar for trade union affairs, yet there is to be self-regulation for the City of

London, where some of the biggest crooks in the world are currently operating? It is the height of hypocrisy for the Government, who talk about self-regulation for business, to seek to shackle the trade union movement.

What is the period of consultation? The Minister has not informed us. My hon. Friends and I suspect that the statement is part of the election manifesto of the Tory party. We welcome that. Millions of trade unionists will see through this miserable exercise and will rally to the support of the Labour party at the next election.

Mr. Clarke: On the question of present industrial harmony we lost 1·9 million working days through industrial action in 1986. That is the lowest yearly total for 20 years. I believe that the process of reform that we have introduced in the trade union movement will help to improve the harmony in industry that we require for economic recovery.

I have listened to his diatribe and I am astonished that the hon. Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Evans) has produced this explosion of rage and a confusion of slogans, such as the "blacklegs' charter" as a description for proposals that confer on individual members of trade unions the rights to a secret, well-organised ballot for the leadership of the union and to insist that their union calls a ballot before they go on strike, and provides that the unions should allow their members to know how they spend members' funds. I believe that the hon. Member will have difficulty in sustaining his attack in the face of such propositions.

On the question of postal ballots and workplace ballots, and the suggestion that there may be a higher turnout at workplace ballots, I accept that turnout is a relevant consideration. However, the main thing that people want when they take part in an election is some guarantee about the integrity of the election and the efficiency with which it is organised. Workplace ballots may produce a higher turnout because more ballot papers are generally available for various people to cast. An independently supervised postal ballot is better. */Interruption./* The reason we did not do it under the Trade Union Act 1984 was that unions did not have up-to-date lists of members. Therefore, they did not have an electoral register and that was one of the objections put forward by the unions. They have had two years in which to produce those lists of members and we propose to make this change.

The hon. Member for St. Helens, North asked about the position of Mr. Rupert Murdoch, the recent strike, and the impact of the Green Paper. The main two changes that the proposals in the Green Paper would have had, if they had been in force at time of the News International dispute, would have been, first, that any individual SOGAT wholesale worker could have obtained an order restraining his union from calling a strike without balloting the wholesale workers. As the law stands it was left to News International to seek compensation and seek sequestration of the union's assets. As a result of the proposals in the Green Paper any union member may have stopped his union from committing suicide and pulled it back from the sequestration by insisting there was no call for industrial action until a ballot was held.

The other change would have been that no disciplinary action could have been so lightly entertained by the National Union of Journalists against its journalists, and by the Transport and General Workers Union against its lorry drivers for taking action during that dispute. On both scores, the proposals in the Green paper are adequately supported by the experience of News International.

The idea of describing the commissioner for trade union affairs as a kind of eastern European commissar, when his duty is to assist the individual to protect the rights which Parliament gives him in existing or future legislation, is absurd. The commissioner is modelled closely on the Race Relations Commission and the Equal Opportunities Commission. I very much doubt whether the hon. Gentleman would denounce those commissions as having eastern European-type commissars. I suspect that he heavily supports them.

We have named a date, early in May, and there will be two months' consultation. We are, of course, looking forward to comments on, and constructive criticism of, these proposals to ensure that we consider how best to put them into practical effect.

Mr. Ian Gow (Eastbourne): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that many Conservative Members believe that the right to work ought to depend not on whether a man is or is not a member of a trade union but only on a person's suitability and willingness to work? Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that, in response to his proposals in the Green Paper, he will be prepared to consider making it unlawful for there to be a closed shop arrangement in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Clarke: In effect, any post entry closed shop will be devoid of legal protection under our proposals. Anybody who is dismissed for not belonging to the "right" trade union—in the opinion of his employer or of trade union officials who pressurise the employer — will be entitled to compensation at a punitive level to compensate him for what I agree is a serious infringement of individual liberty and personal choice in the workplace.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Is the Minister aware that I find myself in the rather surprising position of welcoming the Government's conversion to substantial tracts of alliance policy?

On the issue of postal ballots and the selection of office bearers in trade unions, why did the Government resist amendments to legislation to this effect when they were moved by David Penhaligon two years ago? Of course, I welcome the fact that the Minister is now saying to the House that what he told us then was not Government policy and was impossible is now to be introduced in the form of a pre-election proposal for reforming the trade unions. To that extent, I obviously welcome the statement. Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman acknowledge that it would be better if he proceeded with industrial reform in the context of extending industrial democracy in general? That would be a fair-minded and even-handed approach.

Mr. Clarke: If we are indeed moving closer together, of course, I welcome that. The more support for these measures, the better. I recollect that the voting pattern of the alliance parties on the three previous stages of industrial relations reform was singularly confused. On the second of the Bills, they voted on both sides in differing numbers at different stages of the debate. It is clear that the process of reform would never have got under way if alliance Members had been in any position to block it. As I understand it, the latest alliance proposals suggest that

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we should make it easier to establish a closed shop by reducing the weight of the majorities required by the present legislation. I fear that we are going in diametrically opposite directions on that proposition.

As for independently supervised postal ballots, we are now in agreement with the alliance. The difference between us is that, two years ago, it would have been impractical to propose such a thing to unions that did not have lists of members and could not produce an electoral register. Now that we have given them two years during which they have been required to produce an electoral register, it is practical to take that step. The only difference between the alliance and the Government on that proposition, I am glad to say, is that the alliance proposed it when it was unrealistic and we took steps to ensure that it would be realistic before we put it forward.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that one of the most discouraging and cynical operations at the moment is the battle that goes on between trade unions for membership in which the rights and aspirations of their members are very much ignored? Will my right hon. and learned Friend reassure us that these proposals will go some way towards ensuring that, in competition between unions for membership, the quality of service and not the political aspirations of general secretaries will make the difference?

Mr. Clarke: I agree with my hon. Friend that the further we go down that road, the better. I believe, as, I feel sure, does my hon. Friend, that it is entirely a matter of individual choice whether a person joins a particular union or decides to change his union. No person should be at the risk of losing his job because he falls out with his union. Unions should be voluntary associations of people who are brought together in a properly run democratic institution.

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): Does this mean that the Government are revising their attitude towards ballots? Under previous Conservative legislation introduced by the chairman of the Conservative party, there could be closed shops, provided that the workers voted for them, as they did with unprecedentedly high majorities. Now that the workers have voted in favour of those closed shops, the Minister proposes to abolish the ballots. Are we to understand that he is in favour of ballots only when they go his way but, when the ballots go the other way, he wants to abolish them? Is that what the right hon. and learned Gentleman is saying?

Does this mean that the police will no longer have to join the Police Federation, whether they like it or not? Since the right hon. and learned Gentleman has this tender concern for private organisations and is intervening so that they can put their own house in order, does this mean that there will be a ballot for the chairmanship of the Conservative party? Does it mean that individuals can inspect the Conservative party's accounts?

Mr. Clarke: With the experience of recent years, we have seen that, in those industries where the closed shop has come to an end, this has not fatally wounded the trade union movement, as people said it would. We have also found that, where the closed shop has been retained and lawfully protected,the individual's right to choose, which my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) defended, was extinguished. There have been cases — notably that of the tugboat men at Bristol — where people have lost their jobs during the past two or three years because they were not in the correct union. We believe that that is wrong. The post entry closed shop will be effectively finished because it will not be legally protected in any particular employment.

The position of the chairman of the Conservative party is not remotely analogous with the organisations about which we are talking. The leadership of a trade union should be answerable to its membership. It takes decisions which can affect the livelihood of its members. Whatever power my right hon. Friend the chairman of the Conservative party has, he cannot put remotely at risk — certainly not directly — the livelihood of my hon. Friends and those who follow our policies.

Mr. Conal Gregory (York): I welcome the Green Paper introduced by my right hon. and learned Friend. I am sure that it will bring a further note of democracy into the trade union movement as has happened with the right to buy under housing legislation introduced by my right hon. and learned Friend's colleagues. I ask him to extend an invitation to the nationalised industries since, with hindsight, they are forced into a closed shop. A great number of my constituents in York and elsewhere have said that, by sheer coercion, they are forced to join a trade union which is totally unrepresentative of them. They will certainly welcome the opportunity of commenting on the Green Paper.

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I trust that the changes which we are making will have their effect on the nationalised industries, as elsewhere. It is significant that we shall effectively give a remedy to those railwaymen who have been disciplined for refusing to take part in industrial action. I think that in 1982 both railway unions went in for disciplinary action against spectacular numbers of their members simply because their members chose to continue working and providing a service to the public.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): Since the Minister talks about the rights of individuals not to belong to a trade union, will he reflect on what has happened under trade union legislation over the past six years? Trade union members in the midlands coalfield have been sacked for being active members of the National Union of Mineworkers. While the right hon. and learned Gentleman reflects on that, will he reflect on the workplace ballots which have been held for many years under the guidance of the NUM, which have been a classic example of how to run private ballots, whereby individuals can take decisions without ballot papers going to the homes of people who have left trade unions? I experienced that when I changed homes many years ago.

Mr. Clarke: If anybody is dismissed because of his union membership, that is unfair dismissal. It that is the sole cause of dismissal, he is entitled to compensation. Our proposals are to make that equal in both directions. The idea that the hon. Gentleman should cite the midlands coalfields as an example of good practice is a little inappropriate. It is not so long ago that the coalfields had a call to strike in which no ballot took place before the strike was called. It succeeded in severing the union. That

preceded my right hon. Friend's legislation. Since that time, all that we have done has been to make sure that the law guarantees the right to a ballot, which the NUM's rule was supposed to do until it was flouted by the present leadership a few years ago.

Sir Kenneth Lewis (Stamford and Spalding): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that most people accept that trade unions must belong to their members, and, therefore, that the extension of voting must be acceptable in terms of industrial democracy? Does he have any knowledge of whether the TUC and individual unions are prepared to consult on this matter? *[Interruption.]* They might get an invitation to Downing street for beer and sandwiches. Will the matter require one Bill or two Bills? When is the first Bill expected?

Mr. Clarke: I have sent invitations to the TUC inviting it to give its comments and to meet me if it wishes. I am sure that the TUC, together with many individual trade unions, will take up that matter. It will be interesting to see whether, in fact, the reactions of Opposition Members have run ahead of the trade unions.

My right hon. Friend said that unions should belong to their members. I wait to hear whether the various general secretaries — for example, Clive Jenkins, Rodney Bickerstaffe and Arthur Scargill — will argue that it is wrong to make them stand for re-election at the hands of their own members. I am not sure how they will argue that point in public. I have no doubt that it will come out in the course of consultation.

The next step is to consult and reflect on what we get in response. On past form, of course, having consulted, we shall move to a White Paper and eventually to a Bill, but all kinds of events may supervene before we get to the legislative chain.

Mr. Michael Welsh (Doncaster, North): If the Minister's opinion is that there should be a ballot for strikes to take place, and if those who have no desire to strike are in the minority, so they can still work, how will one know who voted against a strike?

Mr. Clarke: The right is not confined. On each day, an individual should be free to decide whether he or she wishes to continue to go to work or to cross a picket line. That is the kind of choice that we have, particularly in situations in which the individual faces two conflicting calls — one from the trade union calling for industrial action, and the other from the employer insisting that the individual carry out the contract of employment and show some loyalty to the firm. In the end, it is an individual choice. It is wrong that people should be disciplined if they take a view that is not shared by the leadership or even the majority of their trade union.

The role of the ballot is still important. As long as the union ballots and gets a majority of its members, it has total immunity as a union against actions that could otherwise be brought by the employer in tort, contract and so on. The ballot has legitimacy, but it does not mean that individuals who want to work should be coerced by the rest of those involved into not crossing picket lines.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask for brief questions, please.

Mr. Andy Stewart (Sherwood): I welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's statement, and so will my constituents who were subjected to 12 months of tyranny by people who had never heard of the word "democracy". For their own protection, they had to set up their own Union of Democratic Mineworkers. The Government's proposals will give the remaining members of the NUM the opportunity to remove the man who brought their own great union into disrepute.

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend's constituents and my constituents in the Union of Democratic Mineworkers have every reason to remember how deep the commitment to democracy was or was not in the case of the trade unions, the Labour movement and the National Union of Mineworkers. Our experience in Nottinghamshire certainly reinforces the need for continuing law reform of the kind we described today.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman aware that the seven major changes already outlined in the Green Paper, if they are followed up by the Government's proposals, will add up to one thing only, and that is industrial slavery for the mass of ordinary workers? The Government have gone out of their way to undermine and destroy the rights of the trade union movement in the interests of capital and employers. I give notice to the right hon. and learned Gentleman that, sooner or later — certainly under a Labour Government — the measures will be destroyed because the workers will not stand for them for ever. Ultimately, they will get rid of the anti-trade union legislation brought in by the Government in the interests of employers.

Mr. Clarke: The general public would not agree with the hon. Gentleman's description of a modern, democratically based union as tantamount to introducing industrial slavery. A union that is led by people who command the genuine support of its members and take care to consult and to take them with them if they contemplate action tend to be more powerful as well as more responsible than those led by narrowly elected little caucuses that seek to lead their members on political grounds and use the discipline of the closed shop, and so on, to get support for such actions.

The hon. Gentleman is totally out of touch with the times, let alone with the current political mood and the current economic climate. We are seeing the emergence of the kind of trade unionism that is much more useful to its members but, of course, quite redundant to the political aims of the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): I welcome the Green Paper, particularly the provisions for postal balloting for the election of union officers. As one who rebelled on that issue, I ask my right hon. and learned Friend to think carefully before the Government should ever be tempted to vote in the same Lobby as Opposition Members on such an issue.

Mr. Clarke: I am delighted to hear that my hon. Friend has not changed his mind and that we are in total agreement on supervised postal balloting. I congratulate him on his prescience.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): The Minister has made it clear that the Green Paper is ostensibly concerned with individual rights and democracy. How does he reconcile those sentiments with the fact that the Government are denying the whole teaching profession the right to joint collective bargaining with employers on

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a national basis? Does it not show that there is great inconsistency between the Green Paper and the statutes? Does it not suggest also that the Government are concerned with forcing down rates of pay for ordinary people?

Mr. Clarke: The issue to which the hon. Gentleman has referred had its background in a totally collapsed bargaining process between rival and warring trade unions on the one side and politically divided employers on the other. It has failed, unfortunately, to come to a negotiated conclusion for over two years. Obviously, questions about the way in which we have decided to resolve the problem should be addressed to my right hon. Friend. He advocates a temporary arrangement which will enable us to consult the parties, reach a settlement and then work towards re-establishing some workable procedure and machinery for this vital national service.

Mr. Charles Wardle (Bexhill and Battle): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that rank and file trade unionists and the general public will recognise the justice in measures that enable individuals to continue to work with impunity, even though the majority of their union colleagues decide to go on strike, and in measures that enable them to examine precisely what has happened to the proceeds of their union subscriptions?

Mr. Clarke: I agree with my hon. Friend about the judgment that the public will make about the reaction of Opposition Members to that measure as a blacklegs' charter, with the occasional call of "scab" from the Opposition, as my hon. Friend defends the undoubted right of someone to decide whether he or she wants to go to work. I agree also with my hon. Friend that most trade union members will not see why on earth there is opposition to the suggestion that they should have access to the current accounts of their trade unions. In fact, they had such rights for 100 years until the last Labour Government repealed them.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Does the Paymaster General not understand that a great many trade unionists resent being lectured about democracy by Ministers representing the Conservative party? Does he also not understand that, rather than embarking upon another round of trade union bashing, the vast majority of the public want him to create genuine, well-paid jobs for people who are desperately seeking work? Finally, if the Paymaster General cares about industrial democracy, will he have a word with the Secretary of State for Defence, who told the House earlier this afternoon that those whose jobs are being sold are not even to have the right to look at the contract for selling their jobs and livelihoods?

Mr. Clarke: I agree with one small phrase that the hon. Gentleman used. I think that there are some trade union leaders who resent being talked to about democracy, but they would resent that from whatever quarter it came. Fortunately, there is emerging a number of trade union leaders who are democratic, who know how to live with democracy and who are also very powerful figures, as they command support in their unions and take care to consult their members before they take action. The difference between those trade union members and the kind whom the hon. Gentleman defends is that the more modern trade unionists are more responsible vis-à-vis their industries and the companies in which their members work. They may be powerful figures, but they use their power in a way that pays regard to the long-term interests of their members.

Mr. Spencer Batiste (Elmet): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that the proposals he has announced this afternoon will be widely welcomed among rank and file trade unionists across the country, none more so than by those in the NUM, a union that has been brought to the verge of bankruptcy and that has denied access to financial information and whose president is able to use loopholes in the law to avoid re-election? Will he ensure that these important provisions are brought into law to protect rank and file trade unionists at the earliest possible opportunity?

Mr. Clarke: The NUM is indeed a shining example of the worst of problems, with its rules having been changed to make sure that its president does not have to stand for re-election by its members, with attempts having been made to change the rule book to exclude members from the right of access to the law courts and with attempts having been made to provide wide immunity for officials who have acted in breach of the law. Most members of the NUM—let alone ex-members of the NUM, who now, in despair, have gone to the Union of Democratic Mineworkers—will welcome any attempt to bring back democracy and proper accountability to that trade union.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Stretford): If the Paymaster General is really sincere in saying that this proposal is about the extension of democracy and the rights of the majority and that it is not about the rights of capital, will he tell the House how these measures would have helped the National Graphical Association and the Society of Graphical and Allied Trades members at Wapping to get rid of Rupert Murdoch?

Mr. Clarke: It would not have helped them to get rid of Rupert Murdoch, but it would have helped them to have a proper say in the activities of their own trade unions. *[Interruption.]* I shall try to avoid a lengthy repetition of what I said earlier. The funds of SOGAT were sequestered because it did not carry out a ballot of its wholesale members. It called out on strike its wholesale members but it did not ballot those members. The result was that SOGAT lost its immunity. Rupert Murdoch's News International took action against it and was awarded compensation, and eventually had the union's funds sequestered. If these proposals had been in force, it would have been open to an individual member of SOGAT being called out on strike to seek an order restraining his union from commencing strike action until a ballot had been held. That would have enabled the members of the union to save the union from itself and to pull back from the unlawful action that brought it near to ruin.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): My right hon. and learned Friend is seeking to introduce welcome rights and safeguards for ordinary, individual trade union members. Will my right hon. and learned Friend write to the hon. Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Evans) in the absence of his more moderate hon. Friend, the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), and ask him urgently to tell us which of those rights he intends

to oppose, because there are millions of trade union members who would like to know the answer to that question fairly quickly?

Mr. Clarke: That is a worthwhile suggestion that I shall certainly act on. Three years ago the Labour party fought tooth and nail against the introduction of pre-strike ballots and the direct election of executives. Since then, it has committed itself to the total repeal of what we have achieved so far, so I am afraid that I regard its reaction to our present Green Paper as wholly predictable and consistent with its opposition to genuine democracy inside the trade union movement for the last 10 years or more.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): Does the Paymaster General not recognise that most trade union members will regard this as a blatant attack on the trade union movement and as an attempt to shackle the trade union movement and weaken its ability to negotiate fair pay and working conditions? Is it not a fact that trade union members already within the democracy of the trade union movement have the right to change the rules if they wish? Does he not recognise that many trade unionists will regard it as complete hypocrisy if the law outlined in this Green Paper has to be approved by a House that is not democratically elected and by the other place that is unrepresentative?

Mr. Clarke: First, I do not accept that unions such as the Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunications and Plumbing Union, or the AUEW, which will have no difficulty complying with this as the last step, are in any way shackled or inhibited from looking after the interests of their members. In fact, they are far more powerful unions to face across the negotiating table than many of the old dinosaur unions with unrepresentative leadership and shaky command over their own followers. Also I do not accept that we can just leave it to the members to exercise their rights by getting the rule books changed. Simply to rely on the rule books involves going through a process of branch meetings, rules conferences, and so on, and that is not a secure, democratic route for the ordinary trade union member to follow. Therefore, I do not think that this proposal will be opposed by most trade unionists, as the hon. Gentleman declares. Most trade unionists will see this as an attempt to give them individually a greater say in whatever action their unions want to take.

Mr. Roy Galley (Halifax): My right hon. and learned Friend's Green Paper will be both apt and timely and he is heartily to be congratulated on bringing forward proposals that will have the rare distinction of being both popular and just. Will he also consider that it may now be timely to take the first steps towards restricting the right to strike for those who carry out essential services and who, by their strikes, disadvantage most those who are in greatest need? Should we not consider tempering the right to strike of workers in vital public services with a sense of responsibility to the wider community?

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks. I agree with him in disapproving most strongly of people taking strike action that adversely affects patients and pupils in hospitals and schools. I do not think that any of us support strike action in essential services, taken against members of the public who are not parties to the dispute. On the other hand, we have no present intention of legislating on the matter because in practice it is extremely difficult to formulate proposals that would be effective and enforceable. However, we shall continue to keep the matter under review. At the moment, thanks to all the other legislative changes that we have made, I am glad to say that industrial peace is more or less restored in most of the essential services. The problem will arise again only if there is a fresh outburst of industrial action in the essential services.

Mr. Richard Caborn (Sheffield, Central): It was interesting to hear the Paymaster General speak on behalf of the AUEW. As a member of the AUEW, I think that these proposals are extremely undemocratic and that, if anything, this proposed legislation will tilt matters clearly in favour of employers. That is not democracy; it is turning democracy on its head. There can be a ballot on the shop floor, but those who participate in it and vote against the majority decision can continue to work. It is ironic that this Government should be putting this type of legislation on the statute book. They have broken more international conventions than any other previous Government. This Government prevented the Vredeling proposals and the fifth directive from reaching the statute book.

I noted the Paymaster General's attitude towards the teachers. I presume that his own profession — the barristers — will not be affected by the legislation. On the one hand, we take rights off workers; on the other, we allow absolute immunity to the legal and other professions because of the closed shop.

Mr. Clarke: The effect of the strike ballot is to give a trade union total immunity against action that might otherwise be taken against it by employers or by the employer's customers or suppliers. The effect of a strike ballot should not be that individual members who still want to go to work should be coerced, intimidated or subjected to disciplinary action, or that they should not be allowed to cross picket lines. Democracy does not entail the right to intimidate or coerce individuals or to take unfair action against them. They are perfectly entitled to exercise their right to go to work.

As for the Bar, this legislation will apply to the Bar Council as much as to any other trade union. In the days when I practised at the Bar, we did not have a closed shop and, as far as I am aware, there is no closed shop at the moment. I should certainly vote against the establishment of a closed shop.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East): I welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's statement, especially as it concerns free, secret and democratic postal ballots. Is he aware that this will be of particular importance to those members of the Civil and Public Services Association who, before the elections for the general secretary, faced massive intimidation and, I believe, election-rigging, which explains why John Macreadie won the election rather than John Ellis? Is he further aware that, after the teachers' surveys and elections for future industrial unrest, ballot papers were hanging around classrooms? My right hon. and learned Friend's announcement today will ensure that we have true, free and proper elections. That is good for the interests of all union members throughout the country.

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend is right to recall the shambles that surrounded the CPSA elections. A re-run also had to be ordered in the Transport and General

[Mr. Clarke]

Workers Union and apparently there is some controversy in the National Union of Seamen. That may explain the absence of one of the more prominent members of that union from the Chamber this afternoon.

Given that we want to see the executive elected properly and directly, it is essential that we ensure that elections are organised fairly, supervised properly and conducted with great secrecy.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): If this Green Paper is so good, and if those institutions which have not already adopted such systems are to be regarded as dinosaurs, why did not the Prime Minister tell the Institute of Directors that it, too, should come under the aegis of the Green Paper? Why should not the Green Paper apply also to the CBI? Why should it not apply to the medical profession, and the legal profession to which the right hon. and learned Gentleman has referred? Why in all this talk about self-regulation for the City could not the Paymaster General take another step-by-step approach and tell his friends in the Cabinet that they ought to apply the provisions to the stock exchange and other areas of the City of London where swindlers proliferate and support the Tory party? Is not the truth of the matter that, just prior to the next general election, the Government are taking another step-by-step approach with a view, eventually, if they are successful in the election, to abolishing the right to strike?

Mr. Clarke: First, the new proposals will apply to absolutely any organisation that is a trade union and, so far as I am aware, that includes, and always has included, the British Medical Association and similar bodies.

With regard to the City, we have just introduced regulatory arrangements and they are subject to legal restrictions. The self-regulatory mechanism is backed up by legal penalties for those who depart from it. It is pointless to make broad-brush comparisons with other parts of our way of life in order to try to evade the crucial point which faces the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and his colleagues. The Opposition must determine why they are so opposed to simple concepts such as the direct election of the executive by the members and of giving the members the right to decide whether they will be called out on strike.

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that his statement will be greatly welcomed by some of my constituents who are, regrettably, still having problems in terms of ballots, closed shops and many related matters? Will he look especially at the role of the certification officer and the ease of access that ordinary union members have to that officer in his capacity to supervise the regularity and correctness of ballots? Will he, in particular, consider the holding of hearings by the certification officer and the payment of expenses for ordinary union members to allow them easy and effective access to the certification officer?

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The certification officer tries to provide a reasonably informal route for complaint. However, there is no doubt that he can take up to six months to hear complaints. That can involve a member facing the certification officer with the union and its lawyers ranged against him and there may be a great deal of procedural argument. Nevertheless, the certification officer has made a number of orders, but unfortunately he lacks the powers to enforce them. At least one union, the Technical, Administrative and Supervisory Section, appears to have implied recently that it will not comply with the declaration of the certification officer who claimed that the election rules should be brought in line with present legislation. For that reason, we believe that a commissioner is required to give support to individual complainants in proper cases and to ensure that someone is not overawed or intimidated and that the law is not just ignored.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Why do the Government spend so much time extolling free trade unionism in countries such as Poland and so much time trying to destroy free trade unionism in this country? How can the Minister refer, as he does in paragraph 2.10 of the Green Paper, to the right to work despite a strike, yet not extend the right to work to the 4 million unemployed people in this country? As he said earlier that the unions should belong to their members, what would be the Government's attitude to these proposals if the unions, through balloting and consultation of the members, told the Government to stick the Green Paper?

Mr. Clarke: My idea of a free trade union is one that elects its own leadership and consults its membership about the way in which it behaves. The hon. Gentleman's idea of a free trade union may be one in which the leadership emerges from some small political caucus, where some leaders are appointed for life and where members are not entitled to be consulted before a strike is held. I believe that the Government's reaction to the activities and events in Poland is wholly consistent with our attempt to have free and democratic unions in this country.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is the Minister aware that I am the vice-president of a trade union which, since 1890, has always belonged to its members and has never needed any lectures in democracy from a political party which did not get around to electing its leader until 1965 and which even now, as I told the Prime Minister, does not subject the party chairman to any form of election? Is it not a form of political corruption for a party which receives fairly substantial sums of money from big business to use its political power to undermine the rights of working people at their places of employment?

Mr. Clarke: I am delighted to learn that the hon. Gentleman's trade union has always complied with the type of measures that we are now suggesting should be prescribed by law. Undoubtedly it will have ease in complying with our provisions. He should welcome our attempt to spread good practice to the likes of the National Union of Mineworkers, the Confederation of Health Service Employees, the National and Local Government Officers Association, TASS and other trade unions which would not have got anywhere near internal democracy unless the law had intervened to look after the members' interests.

Mr. John Evans: I want to take this opportunity to inform the Paymaster General and his right hon. and hon. Friends that the Labour movement welcomes the opportunity to take on the Tory party and the alliance at the next election on the basis of free trade unionism and the right to strike.

Will the Paymaster General now answer the question that he has been evading all afternoon? Why is it that one side of industry—the workers—must be regulated by Government diktat while the other side of industry—big business and the City—is allowed to practise self-regulation?

Mr. Clarke: I look forward to the challenge that we should argue these points before the electorate, given the nature of the Labour party's commitment to repeal everything that we have done and to return to a position in which indirectly elected leaders of trade unions will tell their members to rely on the rule book as a remedy.

On the imbalance to which the hon. Gentleman referred, there are strict constraints on the behaviour of companies and employers, and there always have been. There are strong protections for workers who have been unfairly dismissed, including people unfairly dismissed for exercising their right to belong to a trade union. It is simply absurd to suggest that there is any reason why trade unions should be outside a basic regulatory system which will not weaken the unions in any way, but will ensure that their membership and workers at the workplace will be the real holders of power in the trade union rather than the unelected, irresponsible minorities.

Parliamentary Conduct

4.48 pm

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): I am grateful to you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to apologise to you, Sir, and to the House, for my discourtesy and disregard for parliamentary conduct yesterday. Having looked at column 24 of yesterday's *Hansard*, I realise that my words could have been interpreted as a personal accusation against a right hon. Member of this House, and I withdraw unreservedly the phrase in question. May I also express my regret that I did not on two occasions at once resume my seat when you rose, Sir.

Points of Order

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will recall that last week there was a statement by the Minister of State, Home Office concerning the removal of Tamil asylum-seekers from this country and the following day you granted a private notice question to my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist). News has just come through that the right of the Tamils to seek a judicial review against the Home Office decision has been granted and that, therefore, they cannot be removed from this country until that review has been heard.

My question for you, Mr. Speaker, is this. Can you advise the House so that we can ensure that the decision of the House last year, which granted hon. Members the right to place a stop on that removal, can now be implemented by the Home Office and the Minister concerned brought to the House to explain his disgraceful conduct in trying to remove asylum-seekers from this country against the spirit of the terms of the Geneva convention?

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Further to that point of order Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: It is not a point of order for me. Order does not arise. I can advise both hon. Members, because I suspect that they are making the same point, that the proper course of action is to seek to obtain a statement on this at an appropriate time. It is not a matter of order today.

Mr. Madden *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. It cannot be a point of order for me.

Mr. Madden: I am not asking you, Mr. Speaker, to take a decision now on this, but to reflect on——

Mr. Speaker: I spend my life reflecting. I do not need to reflect on a matter which is clearly a question for the House, and not a matter of order.

Mr. Madden *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I am reflecting on my feet. The hon. Gentleman should have a go at this tomorrow.

Mr. Rob Hayward (Kingswood): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In column 24 of *Hansard* yesterday you gave guidance in relation to comments that have been made about people who are not Members. Has any guidance been given to the Table Office in relation to that in the light of the fact that I have traced 7ft of criticisms of the Prime Minister's son and husband during this Parliament? Will your ruling avoid that sort of condemnation?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I repeat what I said yesterday. If the early-day motions on the Order Paper do not meet the criteria, they are brought to me for my attention. I cannot recollect that any of those particular early-day motions, which are probably from two years ago, were ever brought to me for my attention.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I know that you have carefully scrutinised the Select Committees and other Committees of the House. I wonder whether during the course of the day you would take the appropriate steps, where possible, to find out whether there has been any statement by any Government spokesman on the question of setting up a lifeboat for Morgan Grenfell, one of the firms involved in the Guinness——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am not responsible for Morgan Grenfell.

Mr. Skinner *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I cannot help the hon. Gentleman. I am sorry.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Can you advise me how I can raise today on the Floor of the House last night's news that Fulham and Queen's Park Rangers are to be merged? If it was the Royal Opera House that was about to be sold off and turned into luxury flats, hon. Members would be in uproar, yet we cannot get a discussion on this important issue.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not quite know where Government responsibility would lie on a matter such as that. The hon. Gentleman might have an opportunity when the Minister responsible for sport is due to answer questions.

BILLS PRESENTED

GANGMASTER

Sir Richard Body, supported by Sir Kenneth Lewis, Mr. Clement Freud and Miss Joan Maynard, presented a Bill to require gangmasters to be licensed by justices: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 6 March and to be printed. [Bill 87.]

DEER

Mr. David Knox, supported by Sir Peter Mills, Mr. Robert Hicks, Mr. Ivan Lawrence, Mr. Tom Torney, Mr. Eric Deakins and Mr. Geraint Howells, presented a Bill to make it lawful for deer kept on deer farms in England and Wales to be killed during a close season: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 27 February and to be printed. [Bill 84.]

Public Opinion Polls (Prohibition at Election Times)

4.54 pm

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to prohibit the holding of, and publication of the results of, opinion polls about voting intentions at times prior to general elections and by-elections to the House of Commons.

The first parliamentary consideration of the problem took place under the auspices of the Speakers Conference on Electoral Law which reported in 1968. That conference recommended that there should be no broadcast or publication in a newspaper or other periodical of a result of a public opinion poll or of betting odds on the likely result of a parliamentary election for a period of 72 hours before the close of the poll. Regrettably, however, that recommendation was not implemented.

To avoid taking too much time, I shall not deal in too much detail with the wide discrepancies of the opinion polls that have been published in recent times, save to mention the recent bizarre one for "Newsnight" on the Greenwich by-election, presented by Vincent Hanna who, I am given to understand, is developing the concept that by-elections are created entirely for his personal amusement. That poll result alone should be sufficient to persuade the House of the necessity of a free passage for my Bill.

Numerous attempts have been made by hon. Members to persuade the House to agree to measures for some control, and on 22 October 1985 I presented a somewhat similar Bill which was defeated by four votes. This time I feel confident that the results of recently published polls will persuade hon. Members on both sides that it is becoming even more essential to acquire some sort of control. If the rumours that I have heard today are correct, there might be opposition to my Bill. If that is so, I sincerely hope that this time, unlike the previous occasion, the argument will be soundly based and the occasion not used to expound and develop differences which might have occurred in the Greenwich by-election.

In recent weeks we have been subjected to all sorts of political fortune-telling which is about as accurate as the palmist on the pier. Is it too much to ask that for just three or four weeks we should be spared the peddling of those pointless predictions? Opposition to the Bill and the protestations that I have received have come mainly from interested parties, press barons and pollsters who obtain rich pickings from attempting to predict the results. It is all too easy to manipulate random sampling to ensure that the result is one that will boost circulation or stimulate further interest and assignments for the pollster. Nevertheless, we all appreciate that on many occasions it is the press which deliberately distorts some of the fair and reasonably conducted polls.

No fewer than 50 opinion polls were carried out during the four and a half week campaign of the 1983 general election. When we include the private and unpublished polls undertaken on behalf of political parties and interest groups, that represents a formidable amount of polling activity. Nevertheless, the reliability and validity of the opinion polls and perhaps more significantly the influence of the polls on the election itself is a cause for grave concern.

Students of electoral behaviour have known for some time that opinion polls have low reliability. Differences in question wording, methods of filling sample quotas and interviewer effect, together with the inherent randomness of response from individuals with a low level of knowledge and interest in politics, produce those results. Furthermore, average sample sizes, which between 1970 and 1983 were 1,900 respondents per survey, have fallen to 1,100. Field workers tend to be mostly middle-class, middle-aged women who are disproportionately of one political persuasion, making unconscious bias and interviewer effect an acute problem, particularly at a time of intense partisan activity. Other sources of error result from the changing nature of British politics, with wide regional variations emerging in voting behaviour.

The problems of reliability and validity of polls would not have any wider political significance if there were not compelling evidence to suggest that polls directly influenced the election results in 1983. The system of tactical voting needs special consideration. It is highly likely that opinion poll results could persuade voters not to cast a vote for the favourite party but to use it to produce the most desired or least objectionable outcome. If we are to preserve the true democratic process of electing a Government by the majority accepting the presentation of political parties' policies, we must ensure that pollsters are not the deciding factor and that they are not allowed to sway electors to vote for a party, the policies of which are not liked, just to keep out another party that is liked even less. Tactical voting is encouraged by the present applied system. Until the electorate votes according to conscience, principle and the policies presented, uninfluenced by bizarre pollster predictions, we are allowing the franchise won for us after a considerable struggle by former generations to be lost to the fancies and favourites of the few large influential pollster organisations.

Aneurin Bevan once accused the polls of taking the poetry from politics, and he was right. I want to put the poetry back into politics by banning these polls during the period prior to an election because they are increasingly not just predicting the result but determining it. If market researchers expect to achieve respect for their poll predictions, I suggest that they make further attempts through their advisory group to ensure that their code of practice is immediately and fully implemented. Until this is achieved, my Bill is the only way to protect the electors from voting on the predictions of the polls rather than on the policies of the politicians.

5.2 pm

Mr. Colin Moynihan (Lewisham, East) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Does the hon. Gentleman wish to oppose the Bill?

Mr. Moynihan: Yes, Sir.

First, I thank the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) for providing the House with this opportunity to debate the merits or otherwise of prohibiting the holding of and publication of the results of opinion polls at election times.

Opinion polls are of justifiable concern to many people both inside and outside the House. Arriving from three weeks on the election trail in Greenwich and hardly the beneficiary of gargantuan swings to the Tories in by-election polls there, I wish nevertheless to record my strong support for the continued holding of opinion polls and to make some suggestions to improve their contribution to elections.

The most recent and authoritative report on this subject was produced by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Sir J. Page) for the Council of Europe in 1985 after two years taking expert evidence. The Council of Europe Assembly unanimously accepted the conclusion of the report that no controls of polls at election times were desirable, appropriate or workable, that polling organisations in Europe should comply with their own industry's code of practice, and that no one knew the effects that polls might or might not have on bandwagons, backlashes or the momentum of an election. Polls are not intrinsically harmful to the democratic process although, if abused, they can be. Our concern, and that of the pollsters' professional body, the Market Research Society, should be to deny opportunities for abuse. That requires better scrutiny, further policing and regulation of polls, with the publication of results in full. The Market Research Society and ESOMR — the European Society of Opinion and Market Research — seek to ensure good technical standards, which need to be improved.

Let us consider the implications of a ban. Private polls would proliferate and be leaked. The media would commission polls and use the results by innuendo. Greater weight would be given to the canvass returns. Overseas newspapers would commission polls and give results. Would the hon. Member recommend that overseas newspapers or the international media such as the BBC World Service should be censored? I assume that he would not. For example, *The Times* published a poll when, for a short period of time, opinion polls were forbidden in Germany. The banning of polls would be deeply detrimental to the freedom of the press and especially the international press. Moreover, such a ban would treat the electorate like sheep. Ultimately, it must be for the electorate to decide how to use the information available to them. To ban opinion polls during elections would be a fundamental move away from freedom of information in our society.

I conclude with some reflections on Greenwich and how polls can provide a valuable information service. Is the hon. Member for Ogmore suggesting that, when an alliance campaigner brands Deidre Wood a liar at a public meeting, public opinion should not be tested and the results published to show the disdain felt by the Greenwich electorate for the sickening personality attack made on Mrs. Wood? Is it not justified that pollsters should be able to concentrate on asking and publishing the answers to questions on grossly misleading alliance election photographic material and campaign tactics? In a free society, it is right that opinion polls on all aspects of elections should be permitted, but the need to provide a reinforced code of conduct and further information and judgment on their use in the media should focus the attention of the House. We should concentrate on that and reject this undemocratic and unworkable motion.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business):—

The House divided: Ayes 116, Noes 103.

Division No. 99] **[5.07 pm**

AYES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*	Anderson, Donald
Adley, Robert	Ashton, Joe

Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Bell, Stuart
Bidwell, Sydney
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Carttiss, Michael
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clelland, David Gordon
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Conway, Derek
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Craigen, J. M.
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Dufty, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Faulds, Andrew
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Fookes, Miss Janet
Foulkes, George
Garrett, W. E.
Glyn, Dr Alan
Godman, Dr Norman
Gower, Sir Raymond
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Fife Central)*
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(N'folk SW)*
Home Robertson, John
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hume, John
Hunter, Andrew
Jessel, Toby
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Key, Robert
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Lawrence, Ivan
Leadbitter, Ted
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McCartney, Hugh
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McQuarrie, Albert
McWilliam, John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Moate, Roger
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
O'Brien, William
Park, George
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Radice, Giles
Raffan, Keith
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C.*(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Winterton, Nicholas
Woodall, Alec
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
M. Don Dixon.

NOES

Alexander, Richard
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beith, A. J.
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Best, Keith
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Body, Sir Richard
Bright, Graham
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Cartwright, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Coombs, Simon
Cranborne, Viscount
Crouch, David
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
Dykes, Hugh
Fletcher, Sir Alexander
Forth, Eric
Freud, Clement
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
George, Bruce
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Gow, Ian
Greenway, Harry
Griffiths, Sir Eldon
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayward, Robert
Heddle, John
Hind, Kenneth
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, David
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
McCrindle, Robert
Maclennan, Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maples, John
Meadowcroft, Michael
Moynihan, Hon C.
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Pawsey, James
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rost, Peter
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sayeed, Jonathan
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shields, Mrs Elizabeth
Sims, Roger
Smith, Cyril *(Rochdale)*
Speed, Keith
Spencer, Derek
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thurnham, Peter
Wall, Sir Patrick
Wallace, James
Whitfield, John
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Page and
Mr. Conal Gregory.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Ray Powell, Mr. Don Dixon, Mr. Frank Haynes, Mr. Gareth Wardell, Mr. Tony Banks, Mr. Roy Hughes, Mr. Doug Hoyle, Mr. Lawrence Cunliffe, Dr. Roger Thomas, Mr. James Hamilton, Mr. Jim Callaghan and Mr. Martin Redmond.

PUBLIC OPINION POLLS

(PROHIBITION AT ELECTION TIMES)

Mr. Ray Powell accordingly presented a Bill to prohibit the holding of, and publication of the results of, opinion polls about voting intentions at times prior to general elections and by-elections to the House of Commons: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 24 April and to be printed. [Bill 88.]

Orders of the Day

Ministry of Defence Police Bill *[Lords]*

As amended in the Standing Committee, considered.

5.18 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Archie Hamilton): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

The House will now know that the aim of the Bill is to tidy up the statutory basis of the operations of the Ministry of Defence police. However, it should not be assumed that, because the Government are introducing legislation, they must wish to confer new powers on the MDP.

By introducing this Bill, the Government are responding to the recommendations of the Select Committee on Defence made in 1984 and of the Broadbent report published in July 1986. The hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) commented in Committee on the speed with which the Government were moved to bring in legislation. He described it as

"what appears, in the history of bureaucratic reform, to be indecent haste."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 10 February 1987; c. 18.]

In the circumstances, I take that as a compliment.

May I take this opportunity to clarify again the powers of the Ministry of Defence police? There is a distinction between the position when MDP are within the establishments which they may be called upon to protect and the position when they are outside those places. Inside the establishments, which, broadly speaking, are those in the possession or under the control of the Ministry of Defence, visiting forces, ordnance factories or dockyards, the powers of MDP will not change. When in those establishments they have the full powers of a constable covering all types of crime in the same manner as for a Home Department police constable.

When outside those establishments MDP powers are more restricted. Under existing statutes they have constabulary powers in Great Britain in relation to Crown property and service personnel, including the property and personnel of visiting forces and international military headquarters, and the property of ordnance factories and dockyards. Such powers may be exercised only up to 15 miles from any of the establishments. Under this Bill the 15-mile limit will no longer apply; instead the MDP will have constabulary powers throughout the United Kingdom but they will be able to exercise them only in relation to Crown property and the property of those I have mentioned, the personnel of MOD and visiting forces and matters connected with defence contracts. The Bill also contains some minor provisions which enable the MDP to assist their Home Department police colleagues in the vicinity of a defence establishment and to exercise constabulary powers in United Kingdom territorial waters and and in certain places, such as the Royal Mint, which will be published in gazettes.

The main effect of the Bill on MDP's jurisdiction will be to remove the uncertainties caused by the 15-mile limit when MDP are outside defence establishments. It will not affect their present responsibilities or the way in which these are discharged. The very few other changes to MDP's jurisdiction concern the extension of their powers, when outside establishments, to MOD civilians and defence contracts, and the power to assist Home Department forces in the vicinity of defence establishments

In Committee we explored in detail the relationship between the MDP and the Home Department police forces. Nothing in the Bill changes the primacy which the Home Department chief constables have throughout the United Kingdom, including "within the wire" at defence establishments. As for the working relationships between the forces, I agree entirely with the point made repeatedly by hon. Members in Committee that the effective operation of both MDP and Home Department forces requires, in the words of the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright),

"sensible co-operation with local police forces."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 12 February 1987; c. 58.]

Officials are making progress in discussions with the Associations of Chief Police Officers for England and Wales and for Scotland and interested Departments about the arrangements to be followed in certain situations where the Home Department forces and the MDP have concurrent jurisdiction. I expect the discussions to lead to guidelines covering such subjects as the policing of married quarters estates, public order policy, major crime and terrorism and control of traffic.

Sir Eldon Griffiths (Bury St. Edmunds): What will be the status of the guidelines? Are they to be laid before the House as a statutory instrument? Will they be advisory? How will they be enforced on the respective police services?

Mr. Hamilton: They will be advisory.

I have already acknowledged the prime responsibility which the chief constables of Home Department forces have for all crime and I propose to leave the arrangements concerning the interface between the MDP and Home Department police forces to these discussions on the broad principles and also to more specialised local arrangements in particular areas. But there will be advisory guidelines put out because, as we know, the status of chief constables is such that they take advice from the Home Department.

Sir Eldon Griffiths: That would mean that if, for example, the chief constable of the MOD police chose not to follow those guidelines he would not be required to do so.

Mr. Hamilton: As I understand it, such is the primacy of the chief constable that he can only be advised and in practice he cannot be instructed on what he is supposed to do.

The Government do not believe it is proper to embody such administrative matters in legislation, but in Committee I accepted that the guidelines should be public. I intend, therefore, to have them placed in the Library of the House when they have been agreed and issued.

In Committee, a number of hon. Members raised questions about the Police Committee and its procedures. Its terms of reference are:

"To determine policy for the operation, management and the administration of the Ministry of Defence police, including the identification of the overall money, manpower and equipment resources necessary to achieve that policy."

The chief constable and deputy chief constable of the Ministry of Defence Police will normally attend meetings.

[Mr. Hamilton]

When necessary, the police staff associations will have access to the meetings of the committee, and they will also be able to make written representations.

We expect the committee to meet four times a year. Some hon. Members in Committee queried the terms of clause 1(5) of the Bill because they interpreted it to mean that the Ministry of Defence Police Committee would be inhibited in carrying out its terms of reference. I repeat my assurance that this clause does not restrict in any way the freedom of the Ministry of Defence Police Committee to advise my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on its own initiative.

Viscount Cranborne (Dorset, South): My hon. Friend will remember that in Committee I asked particularly whether he would reconsider the membership of the Police Committee and whether he would be prepared to broaden that membership to reflect something less than the rather cosy arrangement for membership indicated by my hon. and noble Friend in another place. Has my hon. Friend had time to reconsider that point?

Mr. Hamilton: We have thought about the membership of the committee. Of course, it includes an ex-chief constable from an English constabulary and also one from Scotland, so we feel that the interests of police constables have been reflected in the composition of the committee. I do not think there is anything inflexible about the composition; it could be changed.

There are two areas of management in which other bodies complement the Police Committee. The first is industrial relations. The existence of the Defence Police Federation is established in the Bill, just as the Police Act 1964 established the police federations.

The chairman, vice chairman and other Police Committee members will meet the Defence Police Federation and the senior officers twice a year in meetings of the joint consultative committee, which is the forum for dealing with MDP industrial relations problems.

The second is complaints against the MDP. The force is subject to the Police Complaints Authority, just as the Home Department's police forces are. It is not the MOD Police Committee which is responsible for investigating complaints.

Thus the public have an entirely satisfactory means of protection against any misuse of the MDP's power. More widely, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is answerable to the House.

5.28 pm

Mr. Martin J. O'Neill (Clackmannan): When the Bill was published, I gave it a cautious welcome on behalf of Opposition Members. We had anxieties on Second Reading and in Committee over questions of primacy, jurisdiction, the complaints procedure and relationships with the Home Department police forces. We also expressed anxiety about the Police Federation's concern about rights to finance for legal representation, if necessary, for its members on disciplinary matters. We ventilated most of the areas of concern in Committee.

On primacy, we welcome the Minister's clarification of the position. Certainly it is reassuring to know that the Home Department police forces will still be in the lead in any matters outwith the Ministry of Defence and other related establishments. In regard to jurisdiction, we all recognise that the 15-mile rule was somewhat old-fashioned and outdated. It related more to the distance that any thieves of cannonballs could be expected to carry their loot than to anything else. We have now probably got a more sensible arrangement and the concerns of Members on all sides of the Committee about the relationship between the home police forces and the MOD police force have been to some extent reduced.

I think it is fair to say that some of us would probably have preferred some form of statutory instrument to consolidate the relationship between the two bodies. However, the Department's lack of enthusiasm for such a proposal is understandable, even though it is not acceptable. The compromise put forward by the Minister was offered in a spirit of good intent and the publication of the guidelines should be an opportunity for all who are concerned to see whether they are working properly. If they are not, I would imagine that the kind of pressure that was building up on all sides of the Committee will be brought to bear. The biggest source of concern was the uncertainty of those Members with constituencies near which there are major defence establishments. They and their chief constables required some reassurance.

My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) referred to the spectacular haste—I would not think that he would want to use the word "indecent"—of the MOD in bringing forward this legislation. Perhaps it would have been better if it had been delayed a little longer until we had reached the end of the negotiations between the Home Department police forces, the MOD and the respective Ministries. But the Minister has given us assurances and I do not believe that it would be tolerated either by the House or by those who take an interest in matters relating to law and order and civil liberties if a set of guidelines were established which did not afford the kind of provisions and facilities available to the home police forces at the moment. We shall obviously have to wait and see what happens. We are not in a position to change the guidelines but the fact that they will be open for public scrutiny is in itself an advance and should be of assistance to those hon. Members who might want to make representations at some future stage.

I am not completely satisfied with what the Minister has said with regard to the complaints procedure, but I think that any change would probably require legislation to take care of the home police forces as well, because many people on the Opposition side are not at all satisfied with the nature of the complaints procedure. There is always the lingering doubt that it is merely the police force looking after its own and that, even if justice is done, it is not seen to be done. However, that is a problem beyond the terms and objectives of this legislation and if we were to seek to make the complaints procedure more open it would require legislation of a good deal more controversial nature than the kind that we have before us this evening.

With regard to industrial relations aspects, the Minister, as I recall, has met the observations of the MOD Police Federation as distinct from the Home Department Police Federation. There are two organisations, one of which the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Sir E. Griffiths) represents in the House, and another which many of us, having been exposed to its activities, view with some affection. If the MOD Police Federation is to be put on an equal footing with the Home Department Police Federation one hopes that the facilities which the Home

Office makes available to its Police Federation will be made available on the same generous lines to the MOD Police Federation, because the membership base of the organisation is somewhat restricted and the need for some degree of support from the Ministry of Defence has already been recognised. I think it is fair to say that the membership of the MODPF would be grateful for more resources being made available and I know that the Minister did not rule this out. He is too old a hand to be forthcoming in making promises about increased assistance for pretty well anybody — apart, perhaps, from Vickers Shipbuilders, but that is another story.

This Bill has certain problem areas, but we do not think that they are major ones. We would have liked to have the opportunity of debating this later rather than earlier. Having said that, however, this is a Bill which is long overdue. The Select Committee on Defence made recommendations which have been acted upon. They are not to any great extent contentious. We would like to think that recent incidents involving convoys and the like would be taken care of in the guidelines and that the anxieties that have been expressed by local Members of Parliament concerning the activities in sensitive areas of all the security services would be ironed out. If they are not, I am sure that we shall be coming back to the subject. I very much doubt that it will be in the form of amendments, but there will certainly be close scrutiny of the guidelines. In fact, the scrutiny may be so close that the Minister will come to regret that he ever conceded the point in the first place. I will be generous, because this is not a partisan issue, and we are satisfied that this Bill should be given a Third Reading. I know that some of my hon. Friends have observations to make, but I do not think that any of them are of a kind likely to obstruct the progress of this modest, but at the same time important, piece of legislation.

5.38 pm

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): This is a very unusual and in some ways a very difficult Bill. It is unusual in that there has been scarcely any party political disagreement about the need for the Bill and it is probable that it will pass through all its stages in this and the other place without Divisions. But it has at least been debated; it is the first time since 1860 that the question of Ministry of Defence police has been debated.

I inadvertently did an injustice to my noble Friend Lord Trefgarne at column 289 of the Second Reading debate when I said that my hon. Friend was the first Minister of the Crown to introduce a debate in either Chamber on the subject. Of course, I was wrong, but I was seeking to compliment my hon. Friend.

The Bill is also unusual because the official Opposition have raised many quite fundamental objections to aspects of it, only to have been almost instantly reassured by my hon. Friend the Minister. This is a great compliment to his powers of persuasion. It is also a very genuine compliment when I say how patient he has been with his hon. Friends, including me, who have felt it important to make a number of probing comments on his thinking. We have no wish to look in later years at events which may take place and say "We told you so."

Perhaps what is most unusual in this Bill is the degree to which we have been legislating in the dark, and this worries me. On point after point we have been told that consultations will take place, agreements will be reached, guidelines will be established, and we have taken it all on trust.

I said that in some ways this was a difficult Bill. It has been particularly difficult to probe the Government's intentions without giving the totally misleading and unworthy impression that some of us are in some way opposed to the MOD police. I certainly am not. The present position is as unsatisfactory for the MODPF as it is for the Home Department police force.

I have been anxious to ensure that the new arrangements will be better. Perhaps I have been particularly sensitive, because in the county of Wiltshire and in my constituency of Salisbury the county constabulary and the MODPF have worked side by side for many years and because the Wiltshire county constabulary was the first in the country, which is why its motto is "Primus et optimus".

We must not be in any doubt that with this Bill we have for the first time created a national police force, which, against all the traditions, is accountable only indirectly through the Secretary of State to Parliament. It is not true that the Docks police, the Transport police or the Atomic Energy Authority police are in the same category. Their jurisdiction is severely and precisely limited geographically and functionally. Nor is it true that the Metropolitan police are in the same category because they are answerable to the Home Secretary. It is true that the Home Secretary is the police authority for the Metropolitan police, but his jurisdiction is geographically limited and is not national. Like the chairman of every other police authority, he often is heard to protest that operational matters are not for him, but for the chief officer of police.

Yet, today, we shall create a police force with a national jurisdiction under the direct operational control of a Minister of the Crown. Throughout our nation's history we have resisted this sort of arrangement and I am astonished that Parliament has allowed it to happen so easily. I know that I am just one Back Bencher and that not even the Opposition Whips are worried about this, so I recognise reality when it stares me in the face. However, I am certain that we have not heard the last of the Bill.

Clause 1 sets up the machinery for MOD special constables. We were told in Committee that the need for the scheme is being reviewed and that consideration will be given to whether MOD police specials should be paid or unpaid. The Minister could not say how long the inquiry would take or when its findings would be available. Yet, if he decides to adopt such a scheme, clause 1(1) provides for it without the need for further amendment or discussion. Yet to pay MOD police specials would seriously upset the traditional position in the Home Department forces and create anomalies which I would not welcome.

Many of the points of disagreement that were discussed in Committee are capable of resolution only under the guidelines which are to be agreed in future between the Ministry of Defence and chief constables of Home Department police forces. The guidelines are to be established by ministerial direction and my hon. Friend the Minister has told us that he is nowhere near formulating them.

It is in the national interest that those guidelines should have the unqualified support of Home Department police forces and I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to ensure that that is the case. It is also in the national interest that

[Mr. Robert Key]

the guidelines should be in the public domain. They should not be secret and I welcome my hon. Friend's assurances on that.

In Committee the hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) said that any decisions reached on the guidelines should be brought to the House in one form or another and added:

"Very often, decisions are made almost regardless of the operation of a Standing Committee or of the House itself." — [*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 10 February 1987; c. 30.]

That is a problem which I echo. My hon. Friend the Minister said that he genuinely did not know what form the guidelines would take and that it was difficult to know what classification to put on them. I am delighted that that has now been resolved. We look forward to reading the guidelines as soon as possible and practicable.

I hope that in considering firearms in the guidelines my hon. Friend the Minister will exercise the closest possible co-operation with Home Department chief constables. When firearms are taken outside military establishments, for example, accompanying a convoy or policing a base, it is not enough for the local chief constable to be told that that is happening. Home Department forces should be consulted in advance because sensitive community policing is involved. Moreover, since we have established by probing in Committee that Home Department police forces have primacy both inside and outside the wire, it is logical that the chief constables should know what they are to be responsible for. A situation, however remote, could arise when firearms are drawn. Parliament must legislate to cover the worst scenario. If something goes wrong and shots are fired by the Ministry of Defence police, the county chief constable will have primacy and must restore law and order. Therefore, it is a principle of good policing that he should be aware of the possibilities, however remote, before they arise.

I lament the fact that the legislation is necessary, but I do not dwell on the past. I look to the future and to the fundamental importance of maximum consultation in establishing those crucial guidelines. That must be in the best interests of both the Ministry of Defence police and Home Department forces. It is also in the best interests of communities, such as mine in south Wiltshire, and, indeed, of policing the nation.

5.45 pm

Mr. John Cartwright (Woolwich): I welcome the Bill perhaps because of the long association of the Ministry of Defence with the Woolwich arsenal, but also because it provides much needed clarification of the powers and duties of the MDP and much needed recognition of the important work that the MDP does on all our behalfs in the difficult jobs which it undertakes.

Three areas worry me, all of which we explored in depth in Committee. First, the powers of the MDP committee seemed to make it a somewhat toothless tiger. I have explored that in depth with the Minister and I accept his assurances that, although we may argue about the membership of the committee, it will have rather greater powers and be more effective than it appears to be on the face of the Bill. I am happy to accept that assurance.

The second area of concern was reflected in all parts of the House and is the question of relationships with civilian police forces. We all understand the need to achieve what I called "sensible co-operation" between the MDP and the Home Department police forces. In Committee the Minister went a long way to reassure us on that matter. As other hon. Members said, we shall examine the guidelines in depth when they are published. Nevertheless, this is an important step in the right direction. The commitment to consult on and publish the guidelines and to be as open as possible about those relationships is welcome and removes some of our anxiety about the original implications of the Bill.

The third area of concern relates to the complaints machinery. There is no doubt that the MDP will be subject to the same complaints procedures as the civilian police forces. I wish that that general procedure were a little stronger, but the Bill is not the vehicle to deal with that matter. It is absolutely right that the MDP should be subject to the same arrangements as the civilian police and I welcome that.

I do not intend to delay the House. I compliment the Minister on his careful handling of the Bill through all its stages. Its passage has been a model of good-tempered parliamentary scrutiny, and I am happy to support its Third Reading.

5.48 pm

Viscount Cranborne (Dorset, South): Like hon. Members on both sides who have spoken, I welcome the principle of the Bill and, like my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), I draw the attention of the House to the fact that we are creating a national police force for the first time. It is as well that hon. Members should consider what the implications are.

That national police force may be hedged around in clause 2(2)(d) by the restriction that the MDP can operate only on land

"in the vicinity of land mentioned in any of"

the other paragraphs of that clause. As we found out in Committee, only one part of the United Kingdom is excluded from that definition and it happens to be the constituency of the hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George), who distinguished our debates in Committee.

The hon. Member for Walsall, South, perhaps with more ribaldry than is his wont, tried to dismiss my pointing out to him that the area also includes land in the vicinity of the United Kingdom. That was not an entirely frivolous remark because, of course, the existing Ministry of Defence establishments, together with the definition of the vicinity, means that we are giving jurisdiction to the Ministry of Defence police that covers virtually the whole of this country, especially when one considers how indented is our coast line.

Therefore, it behoves us to consider what we are creating in the way of jurisdiction. That is something that we would do well to take more than merely on trust, however much we are wont to trust everything that my hon. Friend says. Therefore, I hope that he will not only publish the deliberations of the committee, which we understand is considering the issue of jurisdiction, but will find a way of embodying its conclusions—so long as we agree with them — in the proceedings of the House. Perhaps some form of order would be an appropriate way of dealing with it, as the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) suggested.

My remarks in Committee about the composition of the Ministry of Defence Police Committee were not wholly

frivolous. On 10 February, at column 24, my hon. Friend suggested that the membership of the committee which came from the Home Office represented an outside element. I know that my hon. Friend is not so parochial as to expect us to believe that Home Office membership of such a committee would effectively represent the concerns of the general public over and above the concerns of the Home Office, as against those of the Ministry of Defence.

In view of the strong constitutional implications of the Bill, I urge my hon. Friend to consider that there would be a great deal of merit, if only to appease the worries of my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury and myself, in the suggestion that some member of the great and good on that list, who is also a member of the public and not a civil servant, might be included as a member of that committee. I understand that there are still one or two people on the list who are not civil servants.

Like other hon. Members, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister on the extraordinary persuasiveness that he has displayed. He certainly persuaded us not to seek to press these matters to a Division. I hope that during our debates in the coming months he will reassure us on the worries that we have expressed.

5.52 pm

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): I have suffered several grievous blows in these proceedings by being quoted approvingly by three Conservative Members. It would be most helpful if the Minister would denounce me, lest I return to my party in even greater difficulties.

The proceedings in Committee were unique. I did not think that it was possible to find an area of defence where there would be no divisions, and the Minister must be complimented on finding at least a tiny area of consensus about defence security policy and for building upon it as fast and as far as possible. The proceedings in Committee were notable partly for their brevity—there were only two sittings—partly for establishing a sort of consensus, and partly because several myths were discussed and eliminated.

We heard earlier that the Government were legislating in the dark, and that is partly true. However, we must distinguish between the darkness for which the Ministry of Defence is responsible, having turned off the lights, and the darkness which is our responsibility. If information is not there and if we do not seek to find it, that is our responsibility and we cannot completely blame the Ministry of Defence for that. However, the criticism that things have been unfolding in and since the Committee stage is absolutely valid.

The Committee was notable for enlightening us all on defence matters and for taking us along the highways and byways of Salisbury on a veritable "Down Your Way" with Franklin Engelmann. I must say to the hon. Gentleman, who managed — I do not say this too harshly — to create almost a "Guinness Book of Records" in terms of mistakes per paragraph in *Hansard*, that most of the alleys turned out to be blind.

A couple of new areas have been introduced that I did not catch in Committee, and one is the establishment of a national police force. The hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) talked about his unhappiness — I am not quite sure whether that is the correct word — that the Bill had to be introduced. I do not feel that, somehow, we are creating a gendamerie, a KGB, a unit of black or brown shirts, or a national police force that would somehow be unleashed on an unsuspecting public. We have managed to avoid that during more than a century of policing in this country. For a start, there are only just under 5,000 Ministry of Defence police officers. If a national police force were created, it could hardly be of a magnitude such as to threaten civil liberties. It is far more important and inevitable that a police force that would be attached to the Ministry of Defence should be a part of national operations, because crime does not confine itself to neat geographical or policing boundaries. Despite the constraints upon the Ministry of Defence police, that force clearly must operate not only within the national framework but, in some cases, within an international framework. It is not right at this late stage to introduce a new concept and suggest that we are opening a Pandora's box and establishing a national police force. Some of the myths have been eliminated, but some have been recreated.

In Committee we were informed about the "rubber-stamp" police committee. I understand that, since then, the composition of that committee has been announced. However, I am not entirely placated by the Minister telling us that two ex-chief constables have been added to it. I mean no disrespect to the Minister in saying that hon. Members of all parties said that it might be better to appoint from those outside the normal policing framework. I am disappointed that my volunteering to serve on such a committee was so swiftly dismissed. However, there must be a broader basis of experience on that committee. I hope that when the Minister provides us with the necessary information, we shall be reassured that the committee will not simply do the Minister's bidding, but will have a wider basis of representation.

The Minister was silent about the suggestion of publishing an annual report to Parliament on the activities of the Ministry of Defence police. Until this Bill, its activities went largely unnoticed by this place, but it has now emerged as an interesting issue. Although we are obsessed by the Home Office police forces, we should also not be indifferent to the Ministry of Defence police. Therefore, the publication of an annual report to this House would give us the opportunity to scrutinise the activities of that important force, and a report by the chief constable to the Secretary of State would not be an adequate substitute.

My hon. Friend the Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) reiterated an issue that was raised in Committee about the Defence Police Federation. Unlike the Police Federation, that federation is very small, with a membership of less than 5,000. That gives it an inadequate financial base upon which to mount its activities. The Defence Police Federation is inadequately funded because of its lack of membership and it is unable to mount the range of activities that it should mount. Therefore, I hope it will be possible to establish a degree of parity with the Police Federation. I understand that there is some financial contribution to the Police Federation from the Home Office — or the provision of certain facilities. I would like to see that replicated within the Ministry of Defence relationship with the Defence Police Federation. I hope that something will emerge from our deliberations.

An issue that was not raised in Committee, which is of critical importance, is the use of firearms. Clearly, the attractiveness of the Ministry of Defence police over contract security is the access that they have to firearms.

[Mr. Bruce George]

They do not carry firearms, but they have access to them. Surely that is a deterrent to any potential terrorist if he or she is considering raiding the royal ordnance factory at Enfield or anywhere where there are arms or small arms that could be used for illegal and terrorist activities.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House are concerned that the police, the Ministry of Defence police and anyone else who has access to firearms are properly trained. I am not in any way criticising the Ministry of Defence police, its method of training or the amount of time spent in training, but I ask the Minister in all seriousness—he is being as helpful as possible—whether he will review the training given to the Ministry of Defence police. I should like to see the system of training sufficiently refined so as to give people with an interest in policing the proper reassurance that the degree of training given is adequate to meet the tasks. I hope that it is not just a question of examining that aspect. I understand that a working party involving the Home Office police forces has been examining that aspect. I would at some stage like to have reassurances that the Ministry of Defence police weapons training is adequate to meet the growing threat that it faces.

I understand that something that I brought up on Second Reading is proceeding, I might add detrimentally. I now believe that the central London detachment of the Ministry of Defence police is to be moved from guarding the headquarters of MI5. I should have thought that this was not the right time to do that. The argument that £250,000 might be saved by moving the Ministry of Defence police and inserting a civilian grade, the Property Services Agency security guard, is questionable. I hope that the Minister will be prepared to give the House, or the Defence Select Committee representing the House, adequate opportunity to examine that decision because, obviously, everyone here is interested in national security. While efficiency and cost saving is to be elevated to the highest order, national security is much more important than the saving of £250,000. I hope that the Minister is prepared to argue his case in the House, or before a Select Committee, to justify the decision that his Department has taken.

What the Select Committee on Defence, the Standing Committee and the House have done is to debate an important police force that we tend to forget about, and an important police force that, as a result of this legislation, has justification for saying that it is not a second-class police force. It is not some ramshackle security outfit that happens to be given the privilege of guarding sensitive property, but is a force whose history goes back many years. It has a history of 300 years of policing military establishments. The legislation gives that police force the statutory recognition that it deserves. I hope that the people who read and listen to these proceedings will recognise that here is a police force of competence, one that needs to be taken seriously and not just dealt with on sporadic occasions by the House.

It is important that the activities of this police force are constantly brought to our attention. I do not mean that they should always be brought to our attention in a critical way. I hope that the Minister will give serious thought to presenting an annual report to Parliament. Even though these proceedings have been dealt with rather swiftly and there has been little fundamental disagreement—despite what the hon. Member for Salisbury said—this modest Bill is one that needs to be passed. I am pleased to participate, in my own way, in the passage through the House of an important though small piece of legislation.

6.4 pm

Sir Eldon Griffiths (Bury St. Edmunds): Some Standing Committees tend to polarise the divisions of the House while others create an atmosphere of brotherly love. I did not have the pleasure of serving on the Standing Committee, but it is clear that the charm and blandishments of my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement have brought about a quite unaccustomed unity of view on both sides of the House, and I congratulate him on that. In those circumstances, it may be indelicate on my part to intrude a few questions about the wisdom of what we are about to do.

By instinct, I favour defence and I support the police, so I have no choice but to support the Bill. I also read with great interest the report of Sir Ewen Broadbent and I congratulate him and his committee on the thoroughness of their work. I also congratulate the Select Committee on its thoroughness. With that sort of authority, how dare one raise one's voice about some aspects of the Bill? As I am also in favour of my hon. Friend the Minister, it is with the greatest reluctance that I must point to certain defects in the Bill.

It is common ground that the Ministry of Defence police need a statutory framework, and we are all for that. I think that we all agreed, too, that at a time of increasing attacks on British and American defence installations in this country and of increasing demonstrations and thefts of MOD property, there should be a stronger and clearer arrangement to provide the necessary support and protection for those agencies. However, having examined the Bill in detail with representatives of the Association of Chief Police Officers and with the Police Federation, I must say that I am unhappy about it, and so are they.

My hon. Friend the Minister has succeeded in convincing the Committee that the powers that the Ministry of Defence police will exercise will not be increased, but I am advised that the Bill changes their powers substantially. Broadly speaking, their jurisdiction is extended in area in the sense that, henceforth, they will have responsibility and powers across the entire country. Their powers are also extended by function in that, for the first time, the MOD police may exercise the powers of a constable on any matter that has been the subject of a contract between the Secretary of State for Defence and any other person. A contract can mean virtually anything from the procurement of food for the American forces, right the way through to the complexities of modern weapons procurement. It is therefore a broad extension of powers by function.

The status of the Ministry of Defence police is materially altered and strengthened. Henceforth, instead of being special constables its members will be full constables. I have no objection to that, but it is important that the House should recognise that nearly all legislation touching upon the criminal law starts out with the words "that constable may". The term "constable" has a special status in this country. Now that we are conferring that status on Ministry of Defence police it is incumbent on the House to ensure that the powers of the constable are balanced in every way by the same accountabilities that the

Home Department's police constables are required to observe. At present, the Bill confers the powers of the constable on the Ministry of Defence police, but it does not require the same degree of accountability as for the civilian police. I will try to illustrate that.

Mr. George: If the powers to confer accountability on Ministry of Defence police already exist in other legislation, it would be superfluous to introduce them into this legislation.

Sir Eldon Griffiths: This legislation clearly goes further because legislation to date gives the Ministry of Defence police only the powers of special constables, which are very different from those of the constable under the criminal law.

One of the central differences that will continue to exist between the two types of constable is illustrated by clause 1 of the Bill, which states that the MOD police shall consist "of persons nominated by the Secretary of State".
Moreover,

"The Secretary of State shall appoint a chief constable"
and
"shall have power—

(a) to suspend a member of the Ministry of Defence Police from duty; and

(b) to terminate a person's membership."

In other words, the Secretary of State hires and fires every member of the MOD police. That is entirely different from the Home Department police. No Minister of the Crown has ever sought to arrogate to himself the power to hire and fire police officers, and it is central to the separation of the powers of the police from the political management of our country that the Home Secretary, who is the only Minister who has anything directly to do with the police, does not have that power. The House should therefore recognise that the Bill will create not only a national police force but a one-man political police force under the control of the Secretary of State for Defence. That has never happened before. The House should be clear about what it is doing.

My next point concerns jurisdiction. The MOD police will henceforth have power to go into virtually any area of Britain provided that they are carrying out the functions laid down in the Bill. I am advised that unless clear and mandatory guidelines are laid down—I emphasise the word "mandatory" — there could be unnecessary collisions between two groups of officers who in general work well together. I give just three examples. I hope that I can attract my hon. Friend the Minister's attention in offering them to him as they arise not from my imagination but from the advice of those who have perhaps rather more experience than he or I in practical policing.

My first example concerns a surveillance operation conducted by the Metropolitan police, or indeed by any other police force, through the CID or the special branch in respect of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984. When such a surveillance is being conducted, the police must be sensitive to the situation in the local community. They may have to operate, as from time to time they do, under cover without there being much knowledge of their presence. That is implicit in the nature of counter-terrorist activity. In those circumstances, what will happen if members of the new MOD police move in—in pursuance of one of their operations in plain clothes, and armed because they are conducting the CID or detective side of their work — without advance notice being given to the police conducting the counter-terrorist operation? Without elaborating too much, the possibilities of collision or worse are grave.

I hope that we shall overcome that problem by establishing beyond peradventure, wherever the MOD police are to operate outside their installations and within the area of another police force, not merely that it ought to be their duty but that it shall be their obligation to inform the chief officer of police of the county force in question of what they are doing and why. If they fail to do that, they may run the risk of arrest and of a collision between the two forces.

Mr. Key: Does that not also reinforce my earlier point that in those circumstances, having established that the Home Department force has primacy, the chief constable of the county constabulary would be responsible for clearing up the ensuing mess although he did not know that it was likely to happen?

Sir Eldon Griffiths: He would indeed. That is another example of the Bill's asymmetry.

Secondly, the House and the country now expect the police to deal with the problem of drugs. It is the common experience of police officers in big city areas that if they seek to enforce the criminal law in respect of drug trafficking by stopping, searching and even arresting two or three young people, perhaps in an ethnic minority area, before they know it, they are confronted with a threat to the Queen's peace — in other words, a race riot. The delicate area between the enforcement of the criminal law and the maintenance of the Queen's peace requires the greatest sensitivity, which, I concede, the police do not always achieve with the greatest efficiency. But if, in that situation, without the knowledge of the officer in charge of, say, the Metropolitan police operation, members of the MOD police then come lumbering in — *[Interruption.]* Tiptoeing in, shall we say — I do not need to use pejorative language. If the MOD police insert themselves into the area, pursuing their obligations to look into some contract with a defence producer or in respect of some particular member of the Armed Forces whom they are seeking — an extremely sensitive situation — and if they do so without giving advance notice of what they are doing, who is doing it, and why, the situation will be replete with difficulties.

My third example has been mentioned on several occasions and relates to convoys. Of course, I am in favour of ensuring that convoys of sensitive materials through Britain are properly protected. I want to see the MOD police active in that difficult duty. But it must be completely understood that where a convoy goes into a civil police area there must be proper advance warning of what it is doing and where it is going. It was put to me by a senior member of the Association of Chief Police Officers only this morning that if the police have determined that a demonstration is likely to take place, for example, near a defence establishment in my own or any other constituency and they decide for a variety of reasons that it is important to route traffic away from a particular area, it is critical that the MOD police should advise the chief police officer and, through him, his traffic department of what they are about to do.

In mentioning those possible difficulties to the House, I understand full well that my hon. Friend the Minister will say that the primacy of the civil police is not in doubt and

[Sir Eldon Griffiths]

that it is certainly the intention that the chief constable of the MOD police should do his duty and inform the local chief constable in advance. I am sure that in most circumstances that would happen as between practical men, but nothing in the Bill requires it. There is only, with respect, my hon. Friend's assurance and the circular that he has yet to produce. That circular should be mandatory in respect of the chief constable of the MOD police. I appreciate that it can only be advisory in respect of the other chief constables, but in respect of a man who is hired by and can be fired by the Secretary of State, that instruction should be mandatory and binding upon him.

Mr. O'Neill: As the hon. Gentleman has just been in consultation with the Association of Chief Police Officers, can he enlighten us as to what progress has been made in the establishment of the guidelines and whether the association is satisfied with the present position, given the length of the discussions?

Sir Eldon Griffiths: It is much more for my hon. Friend the Minister to satisfy the House on that than me. The ACPO committee put forward its views on the initial draft offered by MOD and there was a wide divergence of views. As I am advised, MOD has returned with a further draft and ACPO is not satisfied with it. It may be that in the course of the consultations, and I have been involved in this kind of thing over many years, a sensible conclusion will be reached. I certainly hope so. But the important point remains. The ordinary chief officer of police is, in a sense, his own man under the law. His police authority can give him general instructions, but he is his own man with regard to operations. The chief constable of the Ministry of Defence is a different creature. He is a servant, an employee, a man to whom the Secretary of State can say, "Do this or be sacked". The circular should be advisory in relation to the chief police officers who do not come under the jurisdiction of the Secretary of State, but in relation to the Secretary of State's own man the circular should instruct that chief constable to inform the chief officers of police into whose jurisdiction his force may go. There can be no compromise — no question of asking the MOD police politely to advise the police force into whose jurisdiction they may go. They must advise the chief police officers, and it is for the Secretary of State to ensure that they do so.

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. He may recall that a few months ago I spoke about some misdemeanours occurring on a London housing estate. The charges were denied by the local police, but months later when people were sent down at the Old Bailey it was discovered that the estate and certain people living on it had been under surveillance by Scotland Yard. That illustrates a lack of information as it is clear that the local police did not know about the Scotland Yard operations. How does my hon. Friend expect cross-communication between the military and the police to work if it does not always work within the police force?

Sir Eldon Griffiths: My hon. Friend is correct. From time to time there is a lack of co-ordination between individual forces or branches of the same force. I am not proud of that. I deplore it. But the House should not institutionalise the likelihood of its happening. I therefore make a plea to the Minister, who has still to determine the guidance to be given, to ensure that it is binding upon the MOD police, before going into a chief constable's area, to tell that chief constable what they are about, what they are seeking to do, and why.

I should like to examine further the difference in status between the two types of constable. The constables that for some 17 years I have had the privilege to represent are unique citizens under the law. A police constable is given, through legislation, certain powers that are not available to other citizens. In return, special duties and accountability procedures are laid upon him. The constable is accountable, first, under his oath of office; secondly, to his discipline code; thirdly, to the law of the land; fourthly, in general terms, to his chief officer and the police authority; and, finally, to the independent Police Complaints Authority.

The Minister should make it clear that every constable in the MOD police is as accountable in those specific ways as any other constable in the country. That accountability is not clear in the Bill. Nor is it clear from the various byelaws that the Bill pulls together. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister can find a way of attaching some code or schedule to the Bill to make that accountability clear beyond peradventure.

My final point is a political one. Throughout my life in the House, in my connection with the police services and on behalf of my party, I have always held one thing dear — that we must at all costs separate the police from politics. No Minister controls a civil police force in Britain, as my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary would be the first to agree. The police authority in Manchester, Merseyside or the west midlands is not the operational controller of the police in that area. Similarly, the Home Secretary is not the controller of the Metropolitan police, nor should he be. But with this Bill we are creating for the first time, by statute, a police force which is the creature of the Secretary of State for Defence. He gives the orders. He can hire or fire members of that force. It is he who defines where that force will go. Ultimately, the Secretary of State is responsible to the House. That is the only safeguard on Ministry of Defence police actions. But what has happened to the separation between the police and the politician? The Bill destroys it. That question should have been examined by the Opposition in Committee. It is the job of the loyal Opposition to try such issues before a Committee of Parliament.

I wish to end my speech with a quote from the chairman of the legislation sub-committee of the Police Federation. Inspector Mannion and his experienced colleagues have examined every major piece of legislation that has come through the House in the past 10 years. They have examined every clause and every amendment to test legislation against the background of practical experience. Inspector Mannion writes of this Bill:

> "Amongst a host of sloppily drafted, abstract, inconsistent and vague legislation this Bill ranks supreme. It says very little. It leaves much up in the air and if I were a member of the Defence Police Federation I would regard it with the utmost dismay."

That is the considered judgment of the chairman of the legislation sub-committee of the statutory Police Federation of England and Wales. My hon. Friend should take that judgment seriously. I have sent my hon. Friend a copy of the letter from the Police Federation, which has

objected to a number of points in the Bill. I hope that there is still time for some discussion before the circular is agreed and sent out to police forces.

I hope that this Bill is passed. Overall it is a sensible Bill, as it is high time that the Ministry of Defence police were placed under proper statutory jurisdiction and that they performed their job of protecting our defence establishments more effectively. But while I respect my hon. Friend the Minister's intentions, the Bill is defective. It has moved in other directions than the House has previously recognised. The circular, when it emanates, must tidy up those problems. Otherwise, there will be nothing but trouble ahead.

6.27 pm

Mr. O'Neill: I did not intend to intervene at this stage, but I must tell the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Sir E. Griffiths) that a number of the points that he raised were ventilated in Committee.

The hon. Gentleman takes his money from the Police Federation and he is entitled to do so. However, he did not participate in the Committee proceedings, nor did he seek to participate. He made one or two superficial interventions on Second Reading——

Sir Eldon Griffiths *rose*——

Mr. O'Neill: As far as the Labour party is concerned — other parties can speak for themselves — any representations that were made either from the Association of Chief Police Officers or, for that matter, the Ministry of Defence police force were subjected to discussion. The fact that we did not put such matters to the vote is, frankly, of no consequence because——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I was misled by the hon. Gentleman. I believed that he wished to make an intervention. However, if he wishes to make another speech he must have the leave of the House. Does the hon. Gentleman have the leave of the House to speak again?

Hon. Members: Yes.

Mr. O'Neill: I am sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It had not originally been my intention to speak again. However, I waited until the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds had finished his speech.

It is only fair to reply to the hon. Gentleman's speech because his remarks were tantamount to a slight on all hon. Members and the manner in which we discussed the Bill in Committee. It was open to the hon. Gentleman to put any complaints or grievances to the Committee about how it had dealt with the Bill. The hon. Gentleman could have approached the Committee when it sat for two days. Indeed, there were certain critics on the Conservative side of the Committee who attracted media attention and who were capable of putting forward the amendments that the hon. Gentleman sought to discuss. Frankly, I believe that it is a disgrace for an experienced Member to make on Third Reading, a Second Reading speech—I imagine to save face with his paymasters. That is unacceptable.

Important points were made constructively in Committee by a number of Conservative Members. We should have taken on board some of the points which the hon. Gentleman made had they been brought to our attention by him or by the individuals and organisations with which he associates. We are not prepared to take that kind of criticism because it is totally unfounded. We raised points on many matters and the fact that we did not detain the Committee unnecessarily with Divisions which would not achieve anything reflects hon. Members' good sense and is to their credit. Too often we are accused, correctly, of using adversarial tactics in Committee. We had no intention of doing so on that occasion.

6.30 pm

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I seek the leave of the House to speak again.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. In the particular circumstances the hon. Member does not need the leave of the House.

Mr. Hamilton: That is reassuring, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This has been a constructive debate with good contributions by hon. Members on both sides of the House. It has been a good, non-partisan Bill.

The hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) was not happy with the complaints procedure, but I think that he recognised that the complaints procedure provided for in the Bill follows that of the Home Department police forces. If we wanted to change this complaints procedure, it would be sensible to change the Home Department's complaints procedure. I should be surprised if, in practice, Ministry of Defence police did not follow suit in any changes made in the Home Department police forces.

My hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) said that the Ministry of Defence police were a national force under the operational control of a Minister of the Crown. The Secretary of State is directly accountable to Parliament for the actions of the Ministry of Defence police who, in common with other police, are accountable to the courts and to the independent Police Complaints Authority. Direction and control of the force are exercised by the chief constable, who is under oath to administer the law in the same way as other members of police or any other police force. That is an important point. There has been much talk about us having a political police force. That is not true.

Sir Eldon Griffiths: I am sorry to interrupt my hon. Friend, but I must point out that no other Minister can sack a chief constable in the fashion that the Secretary of State for Defence can in this case. The chief constable of the Ministry of Defence police is the creature of the Secretary of State for Defence, and no other chief constable is put in that position.

Mr. Hamilton: I take my hon. Friend's point about hiring and firing, but I should like to come to that problem when I deal with his speech.

The hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright) raised three points which I think were covered reasonably well in Committee. I thank him for his general welcome for the Bill.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, South (Viscount Cranborne) mentioned, once again, his concern that the definition of "Crown property" covers the foreshore. I am sorry that he thought that I was deriding him in Committee. I am afaid that I still cannot conceive of a large number of circumstances in which the Ministry of Defence police will want to operate on the foreshore, even though they may be free to do so. I think that my hon. Friend was slightly misled.

The hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) does not mislead us often, but he gave the slight impression

[Mr. Hamilton]

that his was the only area that was not covered under the 15-mile limit. I have a map with some black areas on it which I should be happy to show to the House. It shows that extensive areas of, for instance, Scotland are not covered under the 15-mile limit. *[Interruption.]* I shall certainly ensure that a copy is placed in the Library. I might even send one to my hon. Friend so that he can see that there are incomplete areas which are not covered under the 15-mile limit. This causes embarrassment if there are convoys going to nuclear areas in Scotland. That is one of our difficulties.

The hon. Member for Walsall, South made a strong point about the national police force. At the end of the day, we are talking about crime, which happens all over the country and knows no boundaries. It is important that the police should have the capacity to deal with crime wherever it happens on Ministry of Defence property.

The hon. Gentleman was concerned about publication of reports. There is, of course, the chief constable's report. I have a copy of the report for the year ending 30 September 1985 which, as the hon. Gentleman can see, is restricted. It is quite a document. We have agreed that future reports may be placed in the Library. Last year's report ran to 19 pages and eight additional annexes. It is not altogether fair to dismiss that as inadequate. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State would have to draw extensively on the report if he was to write another report for the House. We might agree therefore that, if the report is placed in the Library, we can discuss whether we should go further and whether the Police Committee should produce its own report.

The hon. Member for Walsall, South raised the problem of firearms and training and expressed concern about whether people were being properly trained. I repeat what I have said because it is extremely important. The use of firearms is always a serious matter because of the possibility of injury or even death arising from their use. That, of course, includes innocent people not in any way involved in the offence to which the firearms are related. Firearms are therefore issued only to Ministry of Defence police officers who are fully qualified to use the types of weapon to be carried and only when the order for their issue has been given by the chief constable after the authorisation by the Secretary of State.

Training in the use of firearms is undertaken regularly and the senior police officer at each establishment is responsible for ensuring that all ranks are fully conversant with the MDP's safety precautions and general instructions on the use and carrying of firearms. I shall consider this training aspect because the hon. Member for Walsall, South is clearly concerned about it. We should not dismiss it lightly because it is sensitive. We must have total confidence in police training. I shall write to the hon. Gentleman to tell him of my findings.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Sir E. Griffiths) is worried about the role of the Secretary of State towards the Ministry of Defence police and the degree to which he is able to hire and fire. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is responsible for hiring and firing a large number of people. I suppose that he is responsible for most of the civilian work force in the Ministry of Defence which, according to the last figures I saw, numbered 160,000 people. I do not envisage my right hon. Friend spending a lot of time worrying himself too much about who is hired and who is not.

I agree that there is concern about the firing of people within the Ministry of Defence police, but I do not think that my right hon. Friend has quite the freedom of action suggested by my hon. Friend in terms of firing a member of the Ministry of Defence police with whom he does not agree. There would be a fantastic furore if my right hon. Friend were to take what could be seen as very arbitrary action in firing a member of the Ministry of Defence police. I should have thought that, in those circumstances, there would be a serious row if it were not seen to be a reasonable action of getting rid of someone who was not doing his job properly.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds raised a number of questions and gave a number of hypothetical examples of what might go wrong in terms of the inter-relationship between Home Department police forces and the Ministry of Defence police. He mentioned surveillance operations under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984 with Home Department police forces acting under cover. He saw armed plain clothes Ministry of Defence key people moving in without giving any notice and without saying that they were there. That conflicts with practice in almost every way. In practice, when it comes to armed people moving about, the MDP makes certain that the local Home Department police forces are informed about what is happening. The CID of the Ministry of Defence police spends most of its time investigating fraud. To deal with fraud that body wants the greatest freedom of action. It always communicates with the local police forces to say what it is doing and what lines of inquiry are being pursued.

It is in those respects that the police are likely to range widest across the country when tracking down contracts which have gone wrong and cases in which people have cheated the Ministry of Defence. That is not a likely hypothesis, nor indeed is the hypothesis on the drugs investigation and the sensitive policing that is going on. I cannot imagine the Ministry of Defence police going into an area such as that. As I have said, most of the matters in which they are involved concern fraud. They would be unlikely to end up in some difficult part of Brixton, for example.

Sir Eldon Griffiths: I am quite sure that the Minister means what he says, but how does he know? How can he say that he does not think that it is likely that the Ministry of Defence police would go into a particular area? He is not prepared to give them an instruction that they should not go into such an area without telling the civilian police beforehand. That is the issue.

Mr. Hamilton: It is better, rather than to deal with hypotheses, to see what has happened under the existing practice. Under the existing practice there is close co-operation between the Home Department police forces and the Ministry of Defence police. Indeed, at a low level, they work extremely well together. On the whole, when crimes are investigated, the Home Department police forces are likely to contact the Ministry of Defence police and say, "Will you deal with this one for us?"

The practice now is for Ministry of Defence police always to notify the Home Department police forces and tell them where their convoys will go and the routes that

they will follow. They will not find themselves going into a demonstration or anything of that sort, because the local Home Department police forces will already have been informed of the route that they intended to take. Obviously, if there were demonstrations and such matters going on, and the chief constable were concerned that they might get mixed up in them, he would come back to them on that matter.

I apologise to the hon. Member for Walsall, South. I have been trying to dream up some basis on which I could denounce him. I have his political interests at heart. He has made my job extremely difficult. I echo his words to the House. The Ministry of Defence police are not a second-class police force. They are doing a useful and valuable job in protecting Ministry of Defence property. They are available also to back up the Home Department police forces, and regularly do so, when their resources run low. They are playing a magnificent role in maintaining law and order.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed, with amendments.

Food Aid

6.42 pm

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. John Selwyn Gummer): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of the un-numbered explanatory memorandum dated 21st January 1987, submitted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, describing draft Regulations: amending Regulation 1785/81 on the common organisation of the market in sugar; relating to a decision on placing sugar held by the Italian intervention agency at the disposal of charitable organisations for consumption within the Community; on the free transfer to charitable organisations of products processed from cereals held in intervention; and amending Regulation 804/68 on the common organisation of the market in milk and in milk products and Regulation 1842/83 establishing general rules for the granting of milk and certain milk products to students in educational establishments; and endorses the Government's decision to work speedily through charitable organisations to achieve free distribution of beef, milk and certain milk products to the most needy in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Mr. Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition and others.

Mr. Gummer: These arrangements arose from the decision of the Council of Ministers in the European Community to react to the extremely hard weather earlier in the year by ensuring that the supplies of food that we had in surplus were available to those in the Community who were most needy and had therefore been affected more than others by the weather. The decision was taken after a quick discussion over a couple of days so that the distribution of food might be started before the weather warmed up. I put it as simply as that because, with some of the suggestions that I have heard about what we might have done and how we might have arranged it, it would have been flaming June before anybody got any butter or beef. Therefore, it seemed to me that it was important for us to act as rapidly as possible.

I make no apology for the timetable that was forced upon us by the nature of what we sought to do. Nor do I apologise for the fact that, from the beginning, the United Kingdom was concerned lest the speed with which we acted and the haste with which the Commission presented its proposals meant that the scheme was unworkable. We pressed a number of changes upon the Commission, all of which were accepted, and have ensured that we at least had a scheme that could properly be implemented. For that reason, on the very day on which the decision was made, we sought a meeting with charities in this country to get the scheme under way.

The idea that the scheme would make a major contribution or, indeed, even a partial contribution to getting rid of the surpluses in the CAP was not entertained by the United Kingdom Government. After all, butter stocks amount to one and a half times the annual world trade. They are equivalent to 10 months' supply for every man, woman and child in the Community. Unless one envisages the delivery of a quantity of butter on every family doorstep so enormous as to reach well into flaming June, it would be unlikely to make any real impact on our stores. We were concerned to use the opportunity that was afforded to us in a sensible and realistic way. We were much happier to do so, given that the proposals that came after the decisions in the December Council which, as we

[Mr. Gummer]

know from yesterday's decisions, are soon to be implemented, enabled us to see that there was a change of heart in the CAP, and the tap was turned off. In other words, we shall not produce the kind of stocks that we had in the past. The 9·5 per cent. cut in milk quotas and the further cut in the year after the coming marketing year mean that we have a realistic approach and that our present stocks, once they are removed from cold store, will not be replaced.

In that context, it seemed sensible that even the small contribution that could be made by providing butter and beef and the other surplus products for the most needy was worthwhile, particularly as we were looking for additionality. The idea was that we would seek so to distribute it that it would provide extra food for those who had been most affected by the weather. To do that, we used charitable organisations. That was part of the Commission's intention. It was not a choice by us, although I shall not disguise from the House that it is a system through which I am pleased to have worked. There was no flexibility on this point. There was no way in which we could directly use local authorities, for example, because the legislation was directly applicable in the United Kingdom.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Gummer: When I finish dealing with this passage of my speech, I shall be happy to give way.

The point that I wish to make clear is that what we sought—and we achieved this—was to ensure that we should decide which charities we should invite to help us. Originally, the plan was to have only two charities throughout the European Community, the Red Cross and Caritas. Admirable though both organisations are, they are obviously not the two organisations which, alone, would be satisfactory in this country, and, in the event, we have seen that this is so.

Mr. Foulkes: The Minister seems to imply that these rules, to which we must adhere, are laid down by some external body. Will he confirm that that is not the position? The Commission puts up a proposal to the Council of Ministers, of which he is a member, and he and his colleagues in the Council of Ministers are responsible for the ultimate decisions. Therefore, he, together with his colleagues on the Council of Ministers, must take the responsibility for whatever scheme was agreed. They—not the Commission—are the ultimate authority in the Community.

Mr. Gummer: I am happy to accept what the hon. Gentleman said. All that I said was that the decision was not for the British Government alone. That seems to be a perfectly unexceptionable comment. The truth is that, on the recommendation of the Commission, the Council of Ministers agreed that the scheme would be operated through the charities. I said that I agreed willingly. I am not opposed to it—in fact, I am pleased about it. But once we agreed, there was no question of our being able unilaterally to make a different decision. I merely made that point in case people considered that we could have chosen to do both. We felt that it was not necessary to do both, because most of our charities work extremely well with most of the local authorities and they have been able to work side by side with them. However, the charities have been the engine of the operation. That is valuable. The voluntary movement in this country is particularly good at this kind of operation, and it has shown itself to be good in this case.

Hon. Members are familiar with the list of charitable organisations concerned. I do not wish to be invidious by choosing one, or another, or a number, for special mention as having been particularly helpful. Nevertheless, I stress how very generous they have been in terms of the time and effort that have been put into this operation and how enthusiastically the voluntary movement has sought to carry out difficult operations. The charities had to move very quickly. The decision was made at 2 am, our time, in Brussels. I arrived back at 3 am. By 5 pm the charities were sitting round the table in the Ministry discussing how best to carry out the operation. At no time since then have any of the charities, save perhaps one, suggested that they could not cope with this operation.

Mr. Robert Atkins (South Ribble): I apologise to my right hon. Friend for not being here at the beginning of his speech, but may I endorse what he has said about the British Red Cross, for example. I went to see the ladies who were doling out the butter on Saturday morning in my constituency. They were doing a remarkable job. Many of the people there were delighted to take advantage of the butter that was being provided for them. All that upset them was the thoughtless and rather silly attack of local Labour party members who suggested that old people were being demeaned by being provided with this butter. The British Red Cross are doing a remarkable job and will receive the grateful thanks of the local community.

Mr. Gummer: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for what he has said. That is certainly my experience, too. In Wolverhampton, for example, I found that the Women's Royal Voluntary Service was doing a remarkable job in distributing these products through the meals on wheels service. I have also seen the Salvation Army operation. In parenthesis, may I say that those who have not seen the Salvation Army operation at full stretch have missed a remarkable sight.

I accept that because this came very quickly upon them it caused difficulties for some of the voluntary organisations. Some of them said, "We shall make our arrangements tonight and start tomorrow." Others said, "We are not directional organisations; we do not run from the centre outwards, as the Salvation Army does. We consist of federations; therefore, it will take us a little longer to get off the ground." We accept that. Some voluntary organisations found it easier to deal with some products rather than others. Again we accepted that. We sought to have, not a formal system, but one that they could work out together. We hoped that the smaller organisations—the territorially more limited organisations—would be able to work through the main group.

To the main group we added a number of others. It was felt that the original selection did not wholly cover all the needy. Therefore we sought the advice of the Scottish Office and the Northern Ireland Office to make sure that they, as well as the Welsh Office, were covered and that every part of the United Kingdom had the best mix that we could possibly put forward. Again I thank all those groups, both the ones that we have dealt with directly and the rest, for the work that they have done.

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): I accept what the Minister has said about the role of the voluntary organisations, but is he aware that in the London area there appears, sadly, to be a lot of confusion in the minds of elderly pople as to where to go to collect the surplus butter? Could he tell the House what kind of publicity has been made available because, frankly, many people have not benefited at all? If this is the start of other surpluses being made available, although the charitable organisations may continue to distribute them, it would be a good idea if the Minister could consider an advertising campaign so that people would know where to go to collect the surpluses.

Mr. Gummer: When I describe to him what has generally happened I think that the hon. Gentleman will discover that in fact we have reached a very high proportion of those who come into the general categories that we have sought to reach. The hon. Gentleman is quite right; there are difficulties. We could have had a bureaucratic scheme whereby we defined precisely who might have the surplus products. It would have taken us some time, of course. However, we could have given them a voucher and made sure that people knew exactly where to go for the products. But that was not our intention. We decided to use the voluntary system to reach as many needy people as quickly as possible. In general, that objective has been achieved. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that there will be some who have not been reached, but if I describe to him how we have done it I think that he will find that he is happier than he was to begin with.

I ought to explain some of the logistical details. Butter is stored in intervention in bulk, and it takes three or four days for the butter to warm up sufficiently to be able to chop it up into suitable packs. That is paid for by the Commission at a flat rate per tonne for repackaging and transport. Beef is made available in boxes of 25 kg. It consists of cuts of boneless beef. Therefore, although butchering is necessary, it is not of a very sophisticated type. We sought to ensure that we got out as much as we could as quickly as we could.

We started with butter, because that was the easiest product for most of the charities to deal with. Then we took the beef and sought first to get the large orders out — in other words, in 1 tonne pallets — to those organisations that could deal with them. Having got that beef under way, we were able to provide charities with beef in 25 kg boxes so that a much wider range of people was able to receive it. Normally about 10 boxes were taken rather than 40, which is the size of a pallet.

Some organisations and charities found that they did not have the resources to do the butchering. I pay tribute to the initiative of the meat trade. It has provided its expertise free, or at nominal cost, to the charities. As for transport, the Commission is making a flat rate payment for transport to distribution points.

We have discussed eligibility with the charities and have sought to lay down guidelines as to those who might be categorised as particularly needy and particularly affected by the cold weather, but we wanted the charities to feel that they could make sensible judgments about the people with whom they were in general contact. The advantage is that these people are dealing from day to day with the needy. That is why we chose the charities.

We laid down guidelines to the effect that those normally in receipt of supplementary benefit or family income supplement, the homeless, those living in hostel accommodation, or attending feeding centres, or receiving meals on wheels, or those who are disadvantaged in other ways, should receive these products, but we wanted the charities to use their common sense. For example, if the majority of people who use a luncheon club come from needy backgrounds, it would obviously be invidious to provide butter for some but to say, for example, to Mrs. Jones, "No, you can't have it, because you are not on supplementary benefit." I did not want this scheme to be based on people producing their supplementary benefit books or their family income supplement entitlement. It seemed to me to be better to leave it to those who know the circumstances and who can act sensibly within the guidelines.

We have not broadened the scheme to cover all pensioners. That was not the arrangement under the agreement. The arrangement was that these products should go to the needy. Although some pensioners are needy, others are not. Therefore, it seemed to be more sensible to do it that way. We have also sought to ensure that the product received is additional rather than a substitute. It would be very expensive to give butter to those who normally buy it. They would then put it into their own freezers and would not buy other butter, which would mean that we ended up with as much butter in store as we started with, and also with the great cost of distribution. That would not have been sensible. It would have repeated the failures of past arrangements, of which hon. Members on both sides of the House have been very critical.

Having set up the arrangements for beef and butter, we turned our attention to milk, cheese and certain other milk products. Having talked to the charitable organisations, we decided that milk and cheese were the two that we particularly wanted to distribute. They felt—and we felt, too—that yoghurt was probably not one of the products that we wanted to use in this way. On 6 February that part of the scheme began to operate.

The Community legislation that is in front of us today is different in this case, because instead of the products coming out of intervention store—because we do not intervene in the case of these products—they are bought on the market and the charities are reimbursed. The charities are able to purchase whole and semi-skimmed milk, buttermilk, cheese and concentrated butter and these products are distributed in many parts of the country.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I apologise for missing the start of the Minister of State's speech. However, what about the booze? What about the wine lake? Will pensioners get to grips with that?

Mr. Gummer: I am not sure that the House would have been very enthusiastic if I had proposed that we should spend a large sum of money importing wine to distribute free to pensioners. Many hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor), would have had some comments to make about the distribution of free alcohol. I have noticed that the two categories in the population who have remarked about this distribution of alcohol are Members of Parliament and journalists, both of whom felt that we should do it. I have decided not to accept the blandishments of those who wished us to distribute free olive oil or free wine. Neither of those products came into the categories that we wanted to distribute.

[Mr. Gummer]

I have also decided, in concert with the charities, that both flour and sugar, for different reasons, should not be distributed.

Mr. Foulkes: Why not?

Mr. Gummer: I was about to explain why and the hon. Gentleman does not need to intervene from a sedentary position.

We have no milling flour in this country in intervention. We would have had to bring it in, although at least it would have been paid for by the Commission. It would have come from Germany, been milled and made into loaves. It would not be easy to provide what I call additionality in the business of bread. That is not a sensible way to use money to which, in the end, we contribute.

Similarly bringing in and distributing quantities of sugar from Italy at great expense would not have been a sensible way of implementing the proposals.

Mr. Foulkes: I would have thought that the Minister could have made do with a couple of loaves and a few fishes.

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman may make jokes about this, but I believe that we are distributing in a sensible way.

To date, the figures for authorised releases from intervention stores of butter are 22·6 million packs and for beef 4·16 million meals.

Mr. Brynmor John (Pontypridd): I want to make an important point because there are different base lines for the calculations. Did the Minister say authorised for release, but not released?

Mr. Gummer: No, I used the expression "authorised releases" because I did not want to mislead the House. I am absolutely sure how much has been authorised for release. That means that which has already gone out or is going out in some form. In other words, it may have just left the intervention store or it may already have been consumed. Any other figure is arbitrary. For example, on Wednesday five tonnes of butter will arrive in Tunbridge Wells and I know that because an hon. Member asked me about it. There should not be a moving base line, so I have always used the same base line and the House can see how it builds up. I believe that that is the best base line and I will continue to use it.

A very large number of the most needy in the United Kingdom have already received a substantial addition to their weekly diet and others will receive that addition before the scheme ends. A comparison between our efforts and that of our neighbours will show that we have been very much more successful on the whole. I say "on the whole" because, for example, the French have operated a system for many years which might inevitably be called "beef kitchens". The French provide, as a matter of course, all over the country, the equivalent of soup kitchens, into which they put cheap beef. The French have used that system for distributing free beef. However, the French have been much less successful in the distribution of butter. The Germans appear to have distributed much the same amount of butter as we have, although it is difficult to know the exact up-to-date figures. However, they have distributed a good deal less beef. I must stress that that is the latest position, but we do not have up-to-date figures such as I have been able to give about our distribution.

However, in the rest of the European Community, no other country appears to be distributing in the same way as we have distributed. There has been no report of implementation in Greece. The latest figures from the Netherlands show a very much more limited distribution. The Irish, the Luxembourgers and the Spanish all have a much more limited distribution. The Italians are not reported to have made any distributions. There have been no distributions in Portugal. There has been a certain amount of distribution in Belgium and Denmark. However, none of those countries has operated in the same way as we have.

It was the Council's decision that the distribution should be made. We all had reservations about the method and the sense of making the distributions. However, having decided to distribute, it seemed to be correct that the United Kingdom should take action and do what we could as well as we could. Our action has meant that throughout the country there has been an addition to the diet of those most in need and that has been distributed by those most able to distribute it. The voluntary societies for which Britain has an international reputation and of which we are proud are distributing those goods.

It was therefore, with some amazement that I read today's Order Paper. I discovered that the Labour party, concerned as it always is for the most needy, does not in its amendment mention any congratulations. There is not a word of thanks for the 22·5 million packs of butter for the most needy. There is not a scintilla of thanks for the Red Cross or the Salvation Army. The Opposition have not thanked Help the Aged or Age Concern. They do not mention the Church of Scotland or the Church Army, nor do they reach out to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul or to Bryson House. The Opposition have not mentioned any of those organisations. Indeed, I doubt whether they have heard of them. All that the Opposition wanted to do was to make a cheap party political point.

Mr. Foulkes: I have two points to make about the Minister's impudent diatribe. First, will he confirm that the Church of Scotland was not included in the original list until some of us raised that matter? Secondly, does he not remember that I used to work at Age Concern and I know a little more about it than he?

Mr. Gummer: The fact that the hon. Gentleman used to work for Age Concern does not change the fact that he did not mention in the amendment the good work carried out by Age Concern. He appears to have forgotten more about Age Concern than he should have. The hon. Gentleman is not correct about the Church of Scotland.

Mr. Foulkes: Yes, I am.

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman must really wait for my answer. I shall tell him exactly what happened about the Church of Scotland. We had the meeting at 5 o'clock in the afternoon and the arrangement was made through the Church Army at the behest of the British Council of Churches, as I understand it, which covers the Church of Scotland, that initially the Church Army would make arrangements with the Church of Scotland and tell the Church of Scotland that it could choose how it wished to be associated with the scheme, either directly or indirectly,

through the Church Army. The Church of Scotland chose to be associated directly. We made the arrangements as it wanted. It had nothing whatsoever to do with the impudent comment made by the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) who did not contribute to the matter. The hon. Gentleman's only contribution is his whingeing and miserable attitude.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): I know about the Minister's connections with the Church of England. Does he not recognise that the Church of Scotland is the established church of Scotland and a direct approach to it would have been appropriate?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman must accept that in the United Kingdom we have a very close working relationship between all the major denominations, both established and non-established. I do not think that the establishment has anything to do with the matter. What we sought to do was deal through all the organisations that were most appropriate and that could be gathered together between 3 o'clock in the morning and 5 o'clock in the afternoon. It may have escaped the hon. Gentleman's knowledge that the Church of Scotland operates mainly in Scotland and, therefore, it was easier, in order to have that meeting, to arrange for someone to stand in for it at that time. I make no apology for that.

Mr. Foulkes: That is not true.

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman must not say that. What he is saying from a sendentary position is utterly untrue. I was present at the meeting and I heard the statement made on that occasion. It was my statement which said that we should ensure that the Church of Scotland was represented in whatever way it wished to be represented. I do not see how one could be fairer than that. My relationship with the Church of Scotland has always been extremely cordial and I would not wish to remove it or exclude it. I think that what the hon. Gentleman has to say is in a spirit that is far from Christian charity.

Mr. Foulkes: I am in regular touch with different people in the Church of Scotland and their account of the set-up which took place in relation to its involvement is totally different from the Minister's. Having in my constituency, in Crichton West church in Cumnock, a lady minister, someone ordained in the Church of Scotland, I can recommend that for any church. Women can play a far greater part in the Church than the Minister.

Mr. Gummer: I suspect, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that you would say I was out of order if I tried to explain to the hon. Gentleman what a difference there is between those of us who hold the historic ministry that comes from the universal church and those who seek to break that historic ministry. It has nothing to do with sexism but a great deal to do with the catholic doctrine. I shall now move on to discuss the motion before us and in that I know that I am supported by the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) who understands catholic doctrine in these matters.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Before the Minister moves on—I am not in any way seeking to detain him on matters we have been debating in the past few moments—can he confirm some of the amounts of money involved in surpluses? Can he confirm that British taxpayers are now paying well over £1,000 million a year to subsidise the mountains of butter and beef? Can he also confirm that British taxpayers, in the latest sale of butter to the Russians, are having to foot the bill, which comes to £650 million? Are those not astronomic amounts of money coming from British taxpayers and is not the scheme we are debating just a tiny bit coming back to this country?

Mr. Gummer: Obviously the hon. Gentleman was not here to listen to the first part of my speech when I made my point clear. I do not think that anybody who was here missed the point. I said right at the beginning that this was only a small contribution to the reduction of surpluses but that it seemed, nonetheless, a worthwhile one. In that catalogue of woe that the hon. Gentleman put before us, he might have mentioned that in December, because of the action of the British Government in the British presidency, we have now changed the arrangements of the common agricultural policy so that surpluses in beef and dairy products will no longer be built up. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman was not in his place when I announced that from the Dispatch Box so that he could congratulate the British Government, which sentiment I know would have been in his heart at the time.

Mr. Ian Gow (Eastbourne): In the presence of my hon. Friend the Member for Beverley (Sir P. Wall) and my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, West (Mr. McLoughlin), could my right hon. Friend find it within himself to pay a tribute to the faithful Church of Rome?

Mr. Gummer: I feel that I am going to be led down a whole series of unsuitable courses. However, I have to say that the Roman Catholic organisations have been particularly good in the distribution of this food. Indeed, I believe that the Roman Catholic cathedral in Middlesbrough has been used as a storage point from which the butter has been distributed over the diocese of Middlesbrough. I should like to thank the Roman Catholic organisations for that and to say how much we appreciate it.

Mr. Cyril Smith (Rochdale): I should like to ask the Minister to take up the point made by an Opposition Member about publicity. I have listened with great interest to 98 per cent. of his speech—I missed the first three lines or so—but I must tell him that my experience in the north-west is totally different from everything I am listening to in the House. I am fed up with people in the north—I even had it in the train travelling down today—telling me that they have never seen the butter and asking where it is and who has got it and so on. I accept everything that the Minister said. I do not doubt the points that he has made for one second. However, I wonder whether some sort of publicity about the limitations and who are the correct recipients of the butter might be in the Government's best interests. A lot of people who think they should have got it should not have got it within the scheme. Some publicity about that might be in the Government's interest and certainly in the interests of some hon. Members in the north.

Mr. Gummer: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. However, I have heard others in the north congratulating us on the extent by which we have been able to get to those in most need. It is in my experience, sadly, that any hope of anybody getting something for nothing tends to bring people out, whether one has advertised to them that they come within the category or not. I have appeared—

[Mr. Gummer]

some Opposition Members would say too often—on the television and radio and on every occasion I have tried to make the point clear. I took every opportunity because I wanted to help the voluntary organisations, which themselves explained the restrictions. I agree that it has not always been understood, but I do not think that further advertising would have been satisfactory.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (Derbyshire, West): Will my right hon. Friend accept that his Department has informed Members of Parliament of the scheme and that it is up to hon. Members, not only his Department, to provide press releases and advertisements on the scheme to inform our constituents about it and not to rely on national advertising all the time?

Mr. Gummer: I agree with my hon. Friend. I made sure that there was a full and detailed statement available to all hon. Members through the usual channels in quantities large enough for every hon. Member to take action on it. That was not only through the usual channels on the Conservative side of the House, but through the usual channels of the various Opposition parties. I did that personally because I thought that it was necessary for every hon. Member to act upon it. I hope that that was successful.

It does not help the House or the reputation of the Opposition if they are not willing to accept even the part of our motion in which we express some thanks and congratulations for the activities that have gone on. It leads me to think that the Opposition amendment is tabled in the vain hope of getting a bit of party political propaganda. I am terribly sad because I would have expected more of one or two of the signatories. I would not have expected much better of one or two others, and with one or two I am surprised that it is as moderate as it is. Their amendment states:

"Regrets . . . the lack of proper consultation with, and information to, charitable organisations".

They say "proper consultation" but there was a meeting at 5 o'clock on the day on which we decided on the scheme. Not a single one of the charities has complained about consultation. Where is that from? It goes on to say that the charities were "prevented . . . from making preparations". They were told that the scheme was under way in the morning, they met to discuss the scheme and the scheme is phrased in the way that they wanted. How could we have done it better than that? The motion then goes on to say:

"as a result of which large numbers of the most needy are likely to be excluded from this aid."

That cannot be so because we have already distributed 22·5 million packs of butter—*[Interruption.]* I was quite clear in saying that it is either distributed or on its way. The hon. Member for Pontypridd (Mr. John) knows perfectly well how this figure has gone up day by day and week by week and will continue to do so. The Opposition would stand better in the eyes of the country if they had the grace and courtesy on occasion to say that the Government have done as well as they could in the circumstances and thanked the charities and the Ministry officials for having made this possible.

7.20 pm

Mr. Brynmor John (Pontypridd): I beg to move, to leave out from "establishments" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

'but regrets that the lack of proper consultation with, and information to, charitable organisations in the United Kingdom prevented them from making preparations for a speedy and efficient distribution, as a result of which large numbers of the most needy are likely to be excluded from this aid.'.

When the Minister was about half an hour into his speech—and had said very little—I began for the first time to feel sorry for the Archbishop of Canterbury. His combination of querulous behaviour and heckling tone sits ill on a Minister discussing an item of this nature. The motion—in a wadge of dough with very little currants in the form of facts—contains no word of congratulation to the charities, but merely asks this House to endorse the Government's action.

The Minister has the effrontery to talk about somebody seeking to extract political capital out of this issue. Scarcely a day goes by without this Minister being photographed in front of some open door or another, in some silly hat or another, yet he talks about political capital. I genuinely seek to have a good and fair distribution of what is available to everyone, but we are not helped by his attempt—thinly disguised by facts, because the Minister can handle them least well of all—to be a national figure.

The Minister and the Council of Ministers have decided to distribute the £36 million worth of food to the most needy. Whatever our views of the idea—and the Minister made clear his dislike and distrust of this scheme—we must now make the best scheme possible for the United Kingdom. But it must be put on record—and I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) has already referred to it—that it is a sweetener to smooth the disposition of 400,000 tonnes of butter to the Russians with a forced loan of about £400 million by the United Kingdom on uneconomic terms to the EEC, and for a further 400,000 tonnes to be disposed to animal feed.

How should we assess the success or otherwise of the scheme? The duty on any Government in this country is to give as wide and prompt a distribution of the aid available as possible. The question we must answer tonight is how many of the most needy have received the aid and how quickly, and how many of the available commodities have been distributed? As the Minister made a partisan point, I want to make it clear that nothing in our amendment or anything that I say tonight is in any way critical of the charities that have been involved in this scheme. Many people have worked very hard and with great dedication——

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West): Oh.

Mr. John: I do not know what the hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby) is saying, but I think he probably finds difficulty in following the complexity of this debate.

Mr. Ashby: No; I can understand it.

Mr. John: The hon. Member says that he understands it. A less vacuous appearance on his face might benefit the House.

Many people are working very hard and with great dedication to distribute this food. They deserve our thanks. The hon. Member is now seeking to sing a duet, and since his voice is unmusical the effect is unpleasant.

We must ask ourselves whether the charities were given a fair chance of meeting the criterion of wide and prompt distribution, given the way that they were handed the problem by the Government. Prior to the EEC announcement, as has been confirmed this afternoon by the Minister, there was no warning and no consultation on the likelihood of any scheme being set up. Therefore, I think that the Minister will accept that some of the charities involved are not distributing charities. There was no organisation in place, nor was there any system for this operation. The factors that the charities had to face lead us to suppose that a better system of consultation and more prompt information could have improved the scheme.

Mr. Keith Best (Ynys Môn): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. John: The hon. Gentleman has been in the House for none of the speeches. He needs to wait a little while before he can intervene. I will give way to him once he is accustomed to the House.

The first factor that the charities had to overcome was in the form of food. The Minister of State said that both the butter and beef are in 25 kilo blocks — immense quantities. Some of the charities did not have refrigeration facilities, so that once the food was defrosted it was unuseable if the charities did not pick it up. Last Monday the Salvation Army was appealing on HTV in Bristol because 140 lb of beef was on their hands and defrosting. The charities concerned did not pick it up and the Salvation Army was asking any luncheon club to take it. That sort of problem is caused by these large quantities of food.

This morning it was reported in *The Scotsman* that a Fife butcher has constructed a scheme whereby the beef in question can be reduced to be used in hamburgers. The report said that the butcher had to find some use for it because otherwise the charitable bodies with which he was speaking were suggesting that the best thing to do was to dig a hole and bury the beef in it. That is a real problem facing charities. The form in which the food was released was so large and difficult to handle that the charities had to have help.

Secondly, another difficulty is the number of people involved. The Minister of State said that he did not want to tie that down to any particular figure and that supplementary beneficiaries were a major but not the sole category. Charities such as the Salvation Army and the Womens Royal Voluntary Service can identify the people within this definition with whom they deal, but they have no comprehensive knowledge of who is within this category, even by pooling their ideas. I put it to the Minister that it is unlikely that the pooled ideas of all the charities involved are likely to reveal all those who are eligible. Some may supplement that by phoning in to state their own claim but the DHSS could not possibly release their confidential lists of people who are eligible and in receipt of supplementary benefit. The number is more than 5 million people in this country.

I regret, since the Minister played a part in the decision by the Council of Ministers, that local government authorities were not involved—not for any doctrinaire reason but because they could have helped to identify people within their areas who were in the subject categories. A few became involved in this operation, but had it not been for the exclusive nature of the resolution and the form of legislation which the Commission and the Council of Ministers adopted, many more would have become involved and the charities would have had much better knowledge of those who were eligible for aid. Distribution of food to people eligible to receive it is likely to be more comprehensive and speedier. Earlier and better consultation in that area could have improved the scheme.

Thirdly, there was the question of speed of distribution. Not only was there the need to set up the organisation, but a great deal of hard-pressed charity cash, which could have been used for other cases, was absorbed on postage and telephones. That is not only my view; it was expressed by the European Conservative group when it commented on the measure.

Despite the very careful words which the Minister of State used at Question Time last Thursday—many of us were listening to him carefully—it is quite clear that the cost of distributing food will be borne by charities unless the EEC rules are changed. I do not believe that any charity is in such luxurious financial circumstances as to be able to bear that expense. Moreover, such expense will reduce charities' ability to help those whom they normally help.

The Minister will probably want to convey to the EEC our call for administration and distribution costs to be lifted from the shoulders of charities so that they can do their work safe in the knowledge that their future work will not be hampered as a result.

We have not taken up all the items of aid for which we are eligible. The Minister implied that the charities could not handle the extra burden, but why have we not taken advantage of sugar from Italy? Ireland is just one of the countries which has taken advantage of it. We also have surplus cereals. We have 2·36 million tonnes of bread wheat in store in the EEC. Why have we not used it?

It is not suitable to distribute wheat in the form of bread because it is so perishable, but why are we not distributing cereals as flour which the needy can use for cake or bread? The Government said initially that there was no demand for it. When there proved to be a demand, the Government said that the surplus could not be distributed except at disproportionate cost. The sad thing is that we are the only country in the EEC which is not taking advantage of those surpluses.

I intervened in the Minister's speech to ask about the quantities of food that have been received. He recognised my serious point. There is the world of difference between authorising release from storage when charities ask for it and distribution. At column 1049 of *Hansard* on Thursday, the Minister appeared to give different statistical bases. He talked about packs of butter and portions of beef. The Minister has said what is in store and can be released if asked for, but he has not said what has been released.

Mr. Gummer: It is a matter not of whether charities ask for it but of what they have asked for and what we have released. We will release anything that they ask for. We are talking of butter or beef which has been distributed, is on its way and which charities have ordered. There is nothing potential about it.

Mr. John: With respect, I think that it is a little different. The figures reveal a wide disparity between the Minister's formula and what has been distributed.

I want to challenge what the Minister said last Thursday. I remind him that he said:

"Britain got off the ground first."

It was the United Kingdom, but never mind.

"We have distributed more than any other country in Europe and have done it more efficiently." — [*Official Report*, 19 February 1987; Vol. 110, c. 1049.]

I would welcome confirmation of the suggestion that he was referring to the figures given to the European Commission as of noon on 16 February. There were no more contemporary figures at that stage. If that is so, his statement was seriously misleading because earlier he told my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) that 15 million packs of butter and 3·15 million portions of beef had been released.

We have already considered authorisation, and I have demonstrated that it does not mean that the commodities have been released. If the Minister's words were taken literally, each of the 5 million supplementary benefit recipients in Britain would already have had three packs of butter. Nobody believes that that has happened. Indeed, none of us has met anybody who has received three packs of butter. As at 16 February, 639 tonnes of butter had been released. By 20 February, 2,358 tonnes of butter had been released. Will the Minister confirm those figures because the number of packs that they imply is markedly lower than the figure he gave on Thursday?

The same is true of beef. We were told about the size of the 3·15 million portions of beef but, at 16 February, only 58 tonnes had been distributed from cold stores in the United Kingdom. The Ministry told me this afternoon that, by 23 February, 191 tonnes of beef had been delivered. The Intervention Board gives a somewhat larger figure. All the figures, however, show a much less sanguine position than that given by the Minister last week. If 3·15 million portions have been issued, on the basis of the volume of beef that is known to have been distributed, each portion would have been less than one ounce — hardly a significant addition to people's diet.

There are even disparities in authorisation as between regions. I understand from the Intervention Board that 174·5 tonnes of beef have been authorised for England and Wales, that the figure for Scotland is 71 tonnes and that that for Northern Ireland is 221 tonnes. Therefore, more beef has been authorised for release in Northern Ireland than in England and Wales. Certainly Wales comes out badly because the figure authorised for release there is nil. Northern Ireland seems to have got more than its fair share. Why? Why, for example, has none of the 150 tonnes of beef in store in Truro been authorised for release?

On the figures, can the right hon. Gentleman be forgiven for saying that he was correct in his assertion that we have distributed more than any other country as opposed to saying that we have authorised it for distribution? I looked quizzically at the right hon. Gentleman when he gave the figures because on 16 February we were third in the EEC for the amount of butter distributed. Germany had distributed far more than we had, as had France. We were also third in the distribution of beef. France and Ireland had distributed far more. Ireland, which was second, had distributed four times as much beef as we had. If the right hon. Gentleman reads *Agra Europe*, he will see the source of the figures. I have checked with the European Commission. I think that the Minister is getting agitated because he is using a different statistical base. I am talking about food actually distributed, food that has got to the needy. We are lower in the pecking order than he suggests.

Mr. Gummer: To take the Irish position, on 18 February — this is information that we have gathered directly — small, unspecified amounts had been moved. The Irish intend to move considerable amounts, but on 18 February the figures for Ireland for butter, cheese, milk, beef, flour and sugar were small, unspecified amounts. I am happy to mix figures with the hon. Gentleman. I have been trying to give as accurate figures as I can. I have been careful to try to find out the realities. The evidence is as I have given it. If I discover that I have been wrong, I shall be happy to apologise, but that is the evidence we have.

Mr. John: I will release the figures to the Minister, but a perusal of *Agra Europe* would have given them to him. It gives the figures that were released by the European Commission. I have checked directly with the European Commission that at 16 February the Irish had released 245 tonnes of beef. That is the reason for my assertion. Whereas we are third in the two major categories, all the other countries are also distributing commodities which we have deliberately by our own choice refused to distribute. We have said that we cannot handle them.

We will never know how many of the people who are eligible for this food aid will get it. Some will get more than their share, but many will get little or nothing. That is why I am concerned, and that is why we tabled the amendment. The Minister has given charities the political equivalent of a hospital pass. Let me tell him what that is. It can be seen sometimes on the rugby field, most commonly when England plays international rugby. It is a pass where the ball and the opponent arrive simultaneously at the same spot. In this case the ball is the responsibility for carrying out the scheme and the opponent is the demand which has been stoked up by news of the scheme.

There have been disappointments. We have all had letters from people complaining about their disappointment at not benefiting under the scheme. Paradoxically the disappointments are blamed on the charities and not on the Government. The Government have claimed responsibility for beneficence, with many photographs of beaming smiles. The beneficence of the Government is seen by everyone, but the responsibility for disappointing ordinary men and women who have applied for food aid and who have overwhelmed the system has fallen on individual charities.

Lest the tabling of the amendment is misunderstood by some of the slower learners on the Government Benches, let me once more pay tribute to the work of charities. They deserve better of us than to be landed with the responsibility for disappointing many people. Their organisation has been stretched beyond reasonable limits. If we as a House do not endorse the Government's action, that is in no way critical of the charities or unwelcoming of their actions. It means that if there is any follow-up proposed by the Government it will be much better than this scheme has proved.

7.46 pm

Sir Philip Goodhart (Beckenham): The hon. Member for Pontypridd (Mr. John) is a notable member of that

small minority of sensible Members within the parliamentary Labour party. I am not surprised that he seemed to distance himself from the amendment which was so effectively demolished by my right hon. Friend the Minister in his opening speech.

Mr. John: In that case, it must be the only example of an author distancing himself from his book.

Sir Philip Goodhart: There are many cases in which an author has had second thoughts on reading what he has written and has done his best to strike it out. I think that is what happened today.

I note that the emergency scheme that we are discussing is only part of the subsidy system for distributing cheaper food. In 1986, the Intervention Board spent some £5 million on subsidising the purchase of 4,000 tonnes of butter which went to 3,869 non-profit-making organisations. One recipient of the subsidised British butter is St. Christopher's hospice in my constituency. The authorities there tell me that the subsidy is worth about £56 a month to them. That works out at about £1 per bed per month, or nearly £700 in a full year. For an organisation with an annual budget of £2·5 million, a subsidy of £700 a year is very welcome. The Intervention Board scheme is hedged around with rules of Byzantine complexity, which cannot be altered dramatically without the approval of the Community. When the emergency scheme has run its course, I should like to see the Intervention Board subsidy scheme simplified and expanded.

I note in passing that if the scheme were to be expanded in the right way it could be of considerable help to the London borough of Bromley and to the Bromley health authority. Last year, Bromley council provided 200,000 meals on wheels. There were also 100,000 meals served in the day centres for the elderly. The council provided 2·5 million school meals. The local authority also provides meals every day of the year for 600 elderly people in residential homes. In other words, Bromley council provides, directly or indirectly, more than 3 million meals a year, while the Bromley health authority provides more than 1 million meals for the occupants of the 2,000 hospital beds which it maintains in acute, geriatric and mental health wards. A subsidy for the butter, cheese, meat and sugar components of those millions of meals would surely lead to increased consumption of these products and bring considerable benefit to the consumer. In my constituency, some of the day centres for the elderly have been serving meat which has been made available under the present winter emergency scheme, the pensioners have paid 40p rather than the 80p normally charged for their meal, and they have had more meat to eat than they would normally have had.

At Christmas, and perhaps at Easter, there may well be a case on a regular basis for distributing individual packs of butter and cheese, and indeed bags of sugar, to individual pensioners. After the present scheme has run its course it would be sensible to look at the desirability of increasing the scale and the scope of the Intervention Board's butter subsidy scheme to cover other dairy products and meat and sugar as well. This could substantially increase the amount of food used by the caring charities and by local authorities. There would thus be minimum dislocation in the market place and one would be using a method of support which has been well tested over the years. It would also be comparatively easy to monitor the scheme to see whether there had been any real increase in consumption rather than a displacement of normal purchases.

The sale of large quantities of butter to the Soviet Union—some 222,000 tonnes in 1985, at a cost as low as 15p per pound—has provoked widespread protest. If the taxpayer is to go on paying substantial sums in subsidy, we want to make sure that our own pensioners get some of the benefit on a lasting basis.

7.54 pm

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): It is not entirely clear what the Minister thought was being achieved by the debate tonight. This question of intervention food to meet needy cases has been drawn to the attention of the House as suitable for further debate by the seventh report of the Select Committee on European Legislation. This was done on two grounds, to neither of which the Minister referred.

First, the Committee asked whether, bearing in mind the objectives of the common agricultural policy set out in article 39, the present proposals could be appropriately based on article 43, on which the regulations were issued in late January. The Minister had nothing whatever to say about this. The alliance view is that the objectives of the common agricultural policy are certainly not being met at this time by the administration of the CAP. They do not give a fair standard of living to the farmers, they do not stabilise markets wholly and they do not take into account a number of other factors which are of considerable importance, including the provision of food at reasonable prices to our consumers. We would wish to see the objectives of the common agricultural policy widened considerably. I need not linger on the legal point, because I do not think that it gives rise to a great deal of anxiety in the House.

On the second point to which the Select Committee drew attention — what it called the wider context in which these proposals were made and their political importance — it was presumably referring to the extensiveness of the scheme and the amount of money involved: the 50,000 million ecu or £36 million in total throughout the 12 member countries of the European Community. Again, the Minister did not refer to that, and I think it odd that he did not choose to do so.

One must therefore ask oneself why the right hon. Gentleman initiated the debate in the way that he did. It seems that his sole objective was to give himself a substantial pat on the back. So far, he has not given us any reason to believe that that is deserved. He has drawn attention to the language of the motion standing in the name of the Government, which endorses what he now calls the Government's decision. I thought that the opening part of his speech was designed to demonstrate that it was not the Government's decision but the decision of the European Community, ratified by the member countries of the Council. He went on to say that not only was it not the Government's decision but it had been laid down by the Council and he had simply to follow the lead of the Council. I understood him to be saying that that was the case and that, although it was the case, he thought that they had taken the right decision.

I say that the Minister has not deserved the pat on the back he wanted, very largely for the reasons that were given in an intervention earlier in the debate by my hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale (Mr. Smith), who

[Mr. Robert Maclennan]

pointed out the sense throughout the country that, if there is a scheme in operation, no one quite knows how it is going, whether they are eligible and, if they are eligible, whom they should approach.

There is no doubt that any scheme being operated by the charities under considerable pressure of time is bound to some extent to be hit or miss. I would certainly wish to begin my remarks by paying a considerable tribute to the charities for the work that has been done. I will single out two in particular, although they are by no means the only bodies that have played a notable part in this: the Salvation Army and the Women's Royal Voluntary Service, which have, through their national administration, greatly facilitated the distribution of food not only by their own hands but by other charities as well.

However, they are not without their criticisms of the scheme, or of the Government for the lack of consultation. I have spoken today to several of the charities involved. Among those that voiced considerable anxiety was, of course, Age Concern, which specifically criticised the lack of consultation and said that it had had to spend too much time answering inquiries from the public during the initial stages and was unable to concentrate on setting up a system of distribution.

The Red Cross said that it believed that the system would have worked better if there had been more consultation with charities, as the success of the scheme depended on all charities coming together at local level. There have been several other individual comments. To some extent, those difficulties were inevitable because the Government were under some pressure of time. The scheme is due to end at the end of March. When the Minister replies, it would be interesting to hear whether the Government believe it has been sufficiently successful to be extended beyond that date.

A ministerial answer last week to the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) partially gave the game away about the Government's approach and revealed how they could have done better. The hon. Gentleman pointed out that there had been a lack of liaison between the Department of Health and Social Security and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. The Minister replied, oddly:

"I must warn my hon. Friend about . . . the DHSS."—*[Official Report,* 19 February 1987; Vol. 110, c. 1050.]

The implication of that warning was that it was inappropriate for the DHSS to be in any way involved. The hon. Gentleman was not saying that the DHSS should be responsible for administering the scheme—that was never in his mind and certainly is not in mine—but if anyone knows who the needy are and who falls into the categories which the Council of Ministers intended to help, it is certainly the DHSS. It is certainly in a position to advise the recipients of the assistance that it dispenses of the availability of this help and how it can be obtained locally. By setting his face against the DHSS, the Minister has not helped to extend the take-up of the scheme.

Similar dogmatism on the part of the Minister has informed his attitude to local government. Social work departments are also well placed to assist in the distribution of food to the needy. Although several have undoubtedly been involved through the work of charities, no systematic attempt has been made to use the services of local government to extend the operation of the scheme.

The scheme is somewhat limited. Not only does it not reach all those who need it: it cannot operate extensively without creating some difficulties in the market place. The disposal of stocks from intervention on a large scale would almost certainly eventually, and probably not far down the track, simply result in stocks being consumed by those who would buy them in any event.

What has been done is a welcome response to exceptional weather. I expected the Minister to give some indication of how much money had been spent or of the value of the stocks released to date. We are now five weeks from the end of the scheme and it would have been informative to know. In judging the value of the scheme, it would have been interesting to know the costs and value of what has been done, together with the costs of storage.

The Government set out in last month's White Paper on public expenditure the figures for intervention stocks held in this country. It shows a steady rise in intervention stocks of beef. In 1981-82, 11,000 tonnes of beef were held in store; the forecast for this year is 60,000 tonnes. In 1981-82, 1,000 tonnes of butter on average were held in intervention; this year the forecast is for 250,000 tonnes. The cost of that to the Exchequer is enormous. It should be stressed that the money does not go to line the pockets of farmers when goods are held in storage. The storage and related costs have risen from £15·5 million in 1981-82 to an estimated £134·2 million in 1986-87 for this country alone. That is some yardstick with which to judge the impact of what has been taken out of intervention for distribution. It is a tiny proportion of what is being held, both in quantum and in value.

The decision that the administration of the scheme should be handled by the Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce was inevitable. It has not been made clear how much will be made available under this scheme and how much is being made available at present. In answer to a parliamentary question, the Secretary of State for Scotland said:

"The amounts of food to be distributed will depend on the needs established by the charitable organisations."—*[Official Report,* 30 January 1987; Vol. 109, c. 427.]

I hope that that remains the position. I have been informed that there is some anxiety that the amount that is available may not be limited by that consideration and that charities are having some difficulty distributing the amounts that they can identify as needed. The Salvation Army told me today that it may be reaching saturation point on inquiries and making supplies available and that it is trying to spread the burden to other charities. I hope that the Minister is in sufficiently constant touch with the charities to help to relieve those that are operating under pressure.

The second question on administration relates to how the needy are to be identified. I have already pointed out that the Minister denied charities the assistance from which they might have benefited, if the DHSS were used to inform those in need of the availability of the scheme and local points of collection.

Furthermore, have charities given priority to the distribution of food to those in institutions? In some areas, fear has been strongly expressed that understandably charities have focused on institutions with which they are most closely connected and have not, also understandably, known how best to distribute the food quickly to those living at home. That has resulted in some food going to

those less in need than those living alone at home. That was bound to be a problem with reliance almost wholly on charitable distribution.

However, these problems should now be taken on board by the Minister in case there is any question of ever utilising such a scheme in the future. There are lessons to be learnt from this, but the Minister does not appear to realise that. Indeed, his cockiness in introducing the debate was quite striking. As a reader of the King James version of the Bible and the Sermon on the Mount, I was reminded of the passage that reads:

"charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up."

The Minister would do well to take those words to heart.

The alliance parties welcome the scheme, so far as it goes. It is a modest scheme with, as the Minister has reasonably admitted, a modest impact on the problem of surplus disposal. Indeed, he even suggested that it had nothing to do with surplus disposal, although I suspect that if other suitable occasions arose for the distribution of food in emergencies, the Minister would not recoil from the thought that it would be appropriate to use such a scheme for the distribution of surpluses.

We recognise that the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has recently devoted more attention to his activities in the Soviet Union—no doubt butter was on the agenda—than to helping needy people at home—*[Interruption.]* I do not know whether the Minister's ejaculations reflect his disagreement with the facts or with my interpretation of them. I am bound to say that it seems perfectly self-evident that butter has been on the agenda. We look forward to hearing the results of those discussions about butter because they have certainly been controversial in the past.

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): Come off it.

Mr. Maclennan: About 5 million people are living on or below the poverty line in this country. All of them could have benefited by being included in the scheme. I do not think that the Minister can tell us how many have benefited from the scheme. However, if he is to operate such schemes in the future, it would be considerably to our advantage to know that and for the Minister to conduct a proper follow-up survey of what happened.

I hope that the Minister will treat this debate not so much as a pat on the back, but as a kick in the pants, and get on with a better analysis of what has been done ex post facto so that when we next have food to spare for those most in need, we do so with greater efficiency than proved possible on this occasion.

8.13 pm

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): I had intended to compliment the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) on his speech, but he spoiled it in the last few minutes. If ever there was a case of a speech that needed a little oiling, his was it—whether with olive oil or wine from the wine lake.

Although the hon. Gentleman associated himself too closely with the Opposition amendment, he drew attention to my earlier parliamentary question, and I shall pat him on the back for that. He understood what I was asking and I hope that the Minister will give us the answer for which we both hope.

I want to comment on the Opposition Front Bench speech of the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Mr. John) because we have seen action and not words in this scheme. Quite frankly, if we were to consult all the institutions that the hon. Gentleman would have wished, we would still be talking, the food would still be in the cold stores, and no one would have it. The whole point of the scheme was that it had to be put into operation during the cold weather, although we might like it to continue for a little longer than 31 March. Speed was essential and it is fully to the Government's credit that they showed that they could act.

I want to make three brief points. First, I applaud the splendid work that has been undertaken by the voluntary organisations in my part of Hampshire. Secondly, I want to identify one or two ways in which the scheme might be improved; and thirdly, I want to take up the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, West (Mr. McLoughlin) and speak about the scheme to publicise it. I trust that hon. Members from both sides of the House will issue to the press the speeches that they now wish they had made to give the scheme wider publicity.

In my part of the country, the voluntary organisations are already doing a magnificent job in distributing the free food. The WRVS, for instance, has extended its initial order of 10 tonnes of butter for Hampshire to a total of 15 tonnes. A tonne of butter and a tonne of cheese are on their way to my constituency right now.

Age Concern should also be praised. In the Southampton area, where it looks after meals on wheels, nearly 4 tonnes of butter a week passed to pensioners, direct to their door with the daily milk delivery by milkmen from the Unigate and Vines companies. That is a good example of co-operation between a voluntary organisation and businesses that are prepared to pick up a challenge and help.

The scheme is being run by hard-working volunteers. They have had to set up their own distribution systems virtually from scratch. The voluntary bodies and their workers are usually unpaid and some of them are elderly; they deserve our warmest congratulations for having done so well in so short a time.

My right hon. Friend the Minister has been asked by many people to publicise the scheme a little more and I ask him again to do that. Some of my constituents are still unclear about who qualifies for free food, what foods are available and where they can obtain them locally. Cannot my right hon. Friend take further steps to advertise the names and telephone numbers of participating charities on a regional basis, using the regional press, television or radio stations? My local media have shown tremendous readiness to participate. I know, for instance, that the Salvation Army is making good use of the media to spread the word. Can my right hon. Friend say whether the charities that are obliged to buy advertising space can be recompensed by the Government and repaid those costs?

My second point relates to eligibility. My right hon. Friend has told me that the assessment of eligibility for the scheme lies with the charitable organisations. It does not seem to be widely known that there is some room for discretion in the assessment of beneficiaries. Some organisations are including borderline cases in their distribution, for example, an elderly person who has not applied for supplementary benefit but who, in the opinion of the charity worker, would qualify if he or she were to apply. Perhaps my right hon. Friend could take steps to give wider publicity to the fact that some discretion can be exercised by the charities involved.

I should next like to touch on the question of abuse. I am confident that the charities in my area are scrupulous

[Mr. Michael Colvin]

in administering the scheme according to the rules. However, I am afraid that there is potentially some scope for abusing the system as there is no way of checking that an applicant for free food has not toured around the other outlets to obtain supplies of free food from other charitable organisations. I should add that there has not been any evidence that that has happened in my area, but the potential for abuse exists. I suggest that some system of marking pension or other benefit books to denote that the holder has received free food could prevent abuse.

While the charities have been able to organise the distribution of butter and cheese, and I welcome my right hon. Friend's decision to extend the scheme to cover milk, cheese, semi-skimmed milk, buttermilk and concentrated butter, the drawback has been distribution of beef. The drawback so far has been the distribution of beef stocks. I welcome the Minister's decision to reduce the amount of beef that can be drawn from store at one time from one tonne to only a quarter of a tonne. That has certainly been extremely helpful, but the charities working in my constituency tell me that they have not opted to take any beef as much as they would like it.

I am pleased to learn that the European Commission has made payments available to charities at a flat rate per tonne for repacking large quantities of food into smaller amounts, but that still does not solve the problem of meat because it must be cooked and distributed as part of a meal. That, incidentally, is probably the reason why the two organisations most concerned in my constituency, the WRVS and Age Concern, are the two that are already involved with meals on wheels. No one else is yet involved in the business of distribution. I hope that my right hon. Friend can be persuaded by us in this debate to return to Europe and argue for the distribution of beef without the stipulation that it is cooked. That would give many more needy people the chance to enjoy food from the intervention stocks.

Finally, I shall say something about the extension of the scheme. This free food for the needy scheme is due to end on 31 March. There are no immediate plans to extend its operation, but surely there is a permanent place for that type of organisation in our welfare state. Far-reaching changes to the common agricultural policy have recently been announced and those will affect future food production. Yet, I see in Lord Bethell's recent publication entitled "Why do we sell butter to Russia?" the following figures for over-production in the Common Market:

> "24 per cent. more butter and cheese than we consumed, 27 per cent. more cereals, 12 per cent. more beef and veal, 32 per cent. more sugar."

Those intervention stocks still exist, despite last December's agreement. The same publication goes on to tell us of the Russians:

> "the butter they buy is 18 months old or more and much of it is used industrially, for lubricating machinery"

Which is better, to grease the wheels of Soviet industry or to spread a little bit more happiness among the needy of this country? I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister will be able to persuade his colleagues in Europe to extend the distribution period beyond 31 March. This scheme is not pie in the sky. It is a sensible way of giving help to needy people which I hope will become a permanent feature of our welfare state.

8.22 pm

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): I congratulate the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) on one thing anyway, and that is for livening up a debate which was beginning to die on its feet. The hon. Members for Beckenham (Sir P. Goodhart) and for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) were both pretty quickly becoming eligible for handouts. I shall return to the speech of the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. A more unctuous and self-congratulatory speech I have never heard in this House.

Mr. Tony Banks: Not since his last one.

Mr. Foulkes: As my hon. Friend says, not since the previous speech by the right hon. Gentleman.

One of my colleagues commented, after the Minister had been going on for about 30 minutes, that he was making a meal of it, but I thought that my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) was more on the ball when he said that it was more of a Lord Avebury—I think that he meant a dog's breakfast. I believe that it was my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West who said it.

Mr. Banks: I do not think it was, but it will do.

Mr. Foulkes: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. It was certainly an attempt to take the credit for this exercise. As we have seen with the photographs and with the publicity that the Minister has eked out of this whole exercise, it was yet another attempt to gain publicity and congratulation for himself.

Mr. Banks: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. I shall not intervene in his speech again. However, I should like to set the record straight because it is rather important. I said that it was typical of the Liberals that it would be their thinnest member, Lord Avebury, whom they offered to the Battersea dogs' home rather than the hon. Member for Rochdale (Mr. Smith).

Mr. Foulkes: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend, except that he has lost me half of my audience, with the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food leaving. However, I wish to make a few serious points.

As joint chairman of the all-party pensioners group in the House, and, as I said earlier, a former director of Age Concern Scotland, I have been in touch with my successor at Age Concern Scotland about the operation of this scheme and I have spoken about it with a number of the other people involved. However, I also know that the Opposition spokesmen who deal with EEC affairs, as well as my colleagues on the Front Bench today dealing with agriculture, have pressed the Government for some time to use their influence within the European Community to deal with the enormous surpluses of butter, beef and grain and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West keeps reminding us, of wine.

We have pointed out the huge cost to the European Community budget of the common agricultural policy, which is 70 per cent. of the EEC budget. A large percentage of that which supposedly goes to farmers goes to entrepreneurs and speculators who set up more and more cold stores and grain stores and other stores in the

Community to store the huge surpluses and less and less of it goes to the farmers, and certainly less goes to the consumer.

What we have been arguing for and what we should have had in this case is a carefully planned, comprehensive and, above all, fair distribution of the surpluses, if we are to have them, to help the people in need. Some of my hon. Friends may argue that that is too much to expect from the European Community, and especially too much to expect from this Government. Instead we have had chaos, shambles, a large number of anomalies, delay and abuses. I agree with the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside that these abuses have not taken place because of the charities or, I would argue, because of the individual people at whom he was pointing the finger. However, I shall mention in a few minutes one or two of the abuses.

Mr. Colvin: I did not point the finger at anyone. I merely said that the potential for abuse existed and that there should be some way of preventing it.

Mr. Foulkes: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has pointed that out, because certainly I thought that there was some innuendo in what he said. I am glad that there was not.

The principal reason for chaos is the political dogma of the Government, as represented especially by the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. It was clear to anyone that if we were to have this sort of scheme—we may all have some reservations about it; I certainly have—the most obvious bodies to distribute it effectively, those who have lists of old people and other people in need, those who have the transport ready and available to provide it, and those who have the logistic support were the local authorities. However, it was far too much to expect the Government to do anything that might give any credit to any local authority. The vast majority of local authorities — the number is increasing — are Labour controlled. Conservative Members are always attacking local authorities, undermining them and threatening them, and anything that might give them any credit whatsoever would certainly be ruled out. The social work and social services departments in England, but with the support and the assistance of the voluntary bodies, were the obvious means of distribution.

Mr. Colvin: In the city of Southampton, the local authority, Southampton city council, is responsible for meals on wheels. What does it do? It gives the job to Age Concern.

Mr. Foulkes: I know that that is the case in some places. Where that system is operating, Age Concern can carry on the distribution, but that is not the case everywhere. In many parts of the country the distribution of meals on wheels and the lunch clubs are organised directly by the local authority. The Minister looks astonished, but I can assure him that that is the case.

The social work and social services departments distribute the food with the support and assistance of the voluntary bodies, and that support and assistance, as the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside pointed out, vary from one part of the country to another, according to how much they are involved. But the Government did not want the local authorities to be involved in any way. Therefore, the entire burden has fallen on the voluntary organisations. I know that through my previous connection, which I have already mentioned, and because my mother, who is involved in one of the organisations making the distribution, has told me about the chaos. In some cases, as was said earlier, distributions have been made by the Church of Scotland.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): Is my hon. Friend aware that in my home parish of Hutton food is being distributed to the needy people by the local parish minister of the Church of Scotland, the Rev. Mrs. Geraldine Hope, which might cause some alarm in the breast of the Minister of State but is welcome by people of all denominations in my parish?

Mr. Foulkes: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. It is a pity that the Minister of State—not the Parliamentary Secretary, who I am sure is sensible on this issue—is not present to benefit from my hon. Friend's intervention.

The placing of that extra burden on the voluntary organisations has led to some unfortunate results. The energies of the voluntary organisations have been diverted from activities that they should and want to undertake and that they desperately need to undertake. Some of the services that such organisations should be providing to the old and needy have not been provided because they have been diverted from that task. It would have been much better in my local area for Strathclyde region to have organised the distribution with the assistance of the local authorities.

To compound the difficulties of the local and voluntary organisations, there have been confused messages from the Government. The Minister talked earlier about his meeting at 5 o'clock. He told us three times how quickly he had arranged that meeting, but he did not say that the voluntary organisations were receiving confused messages about the rules and regulations relating to the distribution of the food—that it should be distributed directly to the old person, and, as was later mentioned in relation to beef, that it could be distributed only at cooking centres. It is worrying that we should be going back to the concept which the Minister described as the meat kitchen, which we know better as the soup kitchen, to which old people have to go and, effectively, beg for the distribution of food from the EC.

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman must not quote me incorrectly. I said that France had meat kitchens and used that method. I stressed that Britain has been using its own methods. The hon. Gentleman really must not say that I stressed that we have meat kitchens.

Mr. Foulkes: The Minister will agree that only butter is being given directly to the old people in their homes or at distribution centres. I visited the Dalmellington street wardens who were distributing only butter on Friday morning. Yet originally we were led to believe that food packages would include meat and other foods. That is not the case. My understanding is that meat is available only at cooking centres or at places where cooking takes place for the distribution of meals.

The regulations have been changing throughout the operation of the scheme and have caused much difficulty. That has resulted in a patchwork distribution of butter. Some areas are getting it, but in some areas there has been no distribution. Such anomalies have occurred.

Let me deal with the abuses about which the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside talked. There have

[Mr. Foulkes]

been abuses. People not unconnected with the Conservative party have distributed butter and talked of it being a present from the Government. I suspect that such abuses follow on from the Minister's highly publicised efforts to be seen as the centre of the distribution and taking political credit from it.

I hope that the Minister will specifically deal with abuses in Northern Ireland that have been drawn to his attention.

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman has made an allegation. I hope that he has helped with the distribution in his constituency. Indeed he has mentioned that he was out earlier. Can he give me a single case in which anybody has done other than that? I should like to know and would be happy to look into it.

Mr. Foulkes: I made it clear that I went to see the distribution taking place by the Dalmellington street wardens, not to hand out food myself. However, Conservative Members and people concerned with the Conservative party have been handing out butter and saying, "This is your free butter from the Government." I may be naive in believing that that was not part of the purpose of the exercise in the Minister's mind right from the start.

I know that specific matters in relation to Northern Ireland have been drawn, if not to the Minister's attention, to that of his Department. The right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor), who is also a Member of the European Parliament, alleged at a meeting in Brussels last week, attended by Mr. Tom Megahy, a vice president of the European Parliament, that paramilitaries were distributing butter in Northern Ireland. The hon. Gentleman said that he had 4 tonnes in his office which he was distributing. If that is the case, what action has been taken to stop it? If none has been taken, what action is proposed?

Let me deal with the future. I, and I think all Labour Members, wish that it was unnecessary to make such distributions to anyone. We would prefer not to have pensioners who depend on handouts. They should have an adequate pension, as the Labour party has promised. Conservative Members have not and are not providing an adequate pension. The Labour party will give an immediate increase and restore the link with earnings so that the ratchet effect increases real pensions. We also want to see a drop in the price of butter within the EEC. Then, if the pensioners have the buying power and if the butter is cheap enough, the pensioners can buy it for themselves.

Meanwhile, I hope that the Minister will tell us about the future when he replies. The hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside asked several questions. What is to be the policy? Will there be future distributions of the surpluses? I should like to see the surpluses reduced in this way. Will they include grain, as they should, because that would be helpful? Will they include uncooked beef delivered to the homes of the old people or available to them in packages? Will they include milk powder and other goods in surplus at the moment? I hope that that will be the case if the scheme is to continue.

I look forward to the day when our old people have adequate pensions and when we do not have a large number of needy people who the Government have recognised exist in Britain by the need for this distribution. The only way in which we shall achieve that is by the return of the Labour party.

8.38 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I want to place on record the strong feelings of my constituents about the shambles that the scheme has turned out to be. Over the past three to four weeks, I have had many queries from my constituents about how the scheme was operating in my constituency. I found it extremely difficult to piece together what was happening and to know how best to give my constituents good advice on how they could benefit from the scheme if they qualify for it. I was so concerned last week that I put down a question to the Minister. I hoped that the Minister would give a clear picture of what was happening within the Stockport and Tameside parts of my constituency. In the reply that I received yesterday, the Minister was really saying that he did not have a clue what was going on. He only told me what was happening at a national level.

My constituents are resentful because they believe that the Government have designed the most incompetent rather than the most competent scheme to deal with the distribution. They resent the fact that we have a dear food policy in this country. They recall the period from the 1940s to the 1970s when a cheap food policy operated, ensuring that the consumer paid the lowest possible price, but at the same time the farmer was guaranteed a decent income. They persistently ask why we cannot go back to the type of system that was better for the consumer and benefited the farmer by giving him a guaranteed income. I believe that it is tragic that, because we are tied to the Common Market, we cannot return to a cheap food policy.

My constituents wish to know why the Government did not involve the retail and wholesale trade in the distribution of the surpluses. The benefit books could have been used like ration books. My constituents believe that that would have been the logical approach rather than to leave it to the charities, which already have far too much work to do, to carry out the scheme.

I have no great brief to speak for the supermarkets, but I would certainly speak on behalf of many of the small shops in my constituency. They are especially resentful of the fact that the Government and other Governments within the Community insisted that they could not be involved in the distribution of the food. Corner shops provide a social service for many pensioners and to those on low incomes in my constituency. On many occasions such shops offer credit to people on extremely low incomes and offer a welfare service to pensioners. It is of great resentment to those shopkeepers when pensioners come in to ask them to explain the chaos of the Government scheme and the shopkeeper must point out that he is not involved and has been unable to get accurate information from the charities within the area mainly because those charities' phone numbers are engaged because of the number of people who want to know what is going on.

My constituents resent the fact that the Government have not used the existing distribution system within the country, but have asked the charities to distribute the food. In my constituency, the charities already have more than enough to do because of the social deprivation that the Government have created. The Salvation Army does an extremely good job within the Greater Manchester

area, but it does not have the surplus resources that it can suddenly switch to this type of distribution. Nevertheless, it has done an extremely good job in difficult circumstances.

Age Concern in Stockport and Tameside provides excellent services but it does not just have people waiting to undertake the Government scheme. The resources of that charity have been stretched and it has now discovered that it is being blamed by local people because the scheme has failed and because it has not had adequate resources to cope with the scheme. The charity feels extremely aggrieved that the Government have taken advantage of it rather than using reasonable means to distribute the food within the area.

Is there any evidence to suggest that the Government are getting rid of the existing surpluses rather than creating other surpluses? Certainly, those pensioners I have met are pleased when they have managed to get hold of their butter allocation. However, they point out that they will spend less money on margarine for that week and that, in fact, one is moving from one surplus to another. The best solution would have been to reduce the prices of all food and return the country to a cheap food policy.

I stress to the House the bitter resentment of my constituents who believe that the Government have made a shambles of the whole scheme. In future I hope that the Government will fight extremely hard for a cheap food policy in Europe. If any more surpluses are to be distributed, I hope that the Government will use the existing trade system to carry out that distribution rather than impose a burden on charities which many of them are unable to carry.

8.45 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I will not delay the House long, but I have a constituency interest that I wish to represent. In Stratford, in the London borough of Newham, there are intervention stores of beef and butter. In the past, certainly before this scheme was introduced, I have often argued in the House that the Government should distribute the beef and the butter to the people of Newham because, according to Department of Environment statistics, it is the second most deprived local authority area in the country. Therefore, we have many worthy cases who should receive such food and could make good use of the obscene mountains of food held not only in Stratford but in the rest of the country.

My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) put his finger on the mark when he said that we are not knocking the scheme as such, but what we should be debating is how on earth those huge food mountains developed in the first place. The House is aware that they came about because of the absurdity of the common agricultural policy. I support my hon. Friend in arguing for a return to a system whereby farmers were guaranteed a certain income and the market decided the price of food. When farmers, as a result of their efficiency, produced much more, it meant that consumer prices went down. That is a sensible food policy and the Government should consider returning to that policy.

There have been reforms, but when the Minister replies —*[Interruption.]* I hope that I can attract the Minister's attention. The Minister made great play of the changes that have taken place under the British presidency and the fact that we have a common policy as regards the food mountains. Therefore, I hope that we will not see a continuation of such mountains. I would like a timetable from the Minister that shows when we can expect an end to those huge international stores. Will they be like the poor under Conservative Governments—always with us? When will the obscenity end of these vast quantities of food that people cannot afford?

I am sorry that the Minister found my suggestion that Ministers might like to get to grips with some of the wine rather diverting. My grandmother always liked a little drop of Guinness or gin. I am not aware of the presence of any great gin lakes, but if there are any, I am sure that hon. Members are more than capable of draining them. I feel that we should consider the other food stores that are available in Europe. It may be argued that we are not doing pensioners any favours by lining their arteries with cholesterol-heavy food such as butter and beef. Perhaps we should think about distributing the cereals, because they would be far better for the health of pensioners. However, if the butter and beef is available in Stratford, we will take it.

I am not knocking the distribution of the food, because I have been pushing for that distribution for some time, but I would like to raise some of the points that have been made to me by the charities in the London borough of Newham about the way the system has operated. I am merely acting as a conduit in putting these points forward.

The national organisations are organised locally and there is no co-ordination between them in boroughs such as Newham. No money was provided for distribution. That is important, because I have been told that a number of housebound, disabled pensioners, those on supplementary benefit, missed out on the distribution of food because the food was not taken to them. They had to go to a particular place to collect it. Age Concern in Newham said it would have been far better if the whole thing had been done through local authorities. The local authorities have a great knowledge of the needs of the elderly within the area and through the meals on wheels service they could have made sure that the housebound and disabled got their fair share of the butter and beef.

The Government said that only pensioners on supplementary benefit should receive butter, but a number of organisations, certainly Age Concern in Newham, gave it away to all pensioners who asked for it. It appeared discriminatory between different groups of pensioners to control such distribution and it did cause a great deal of aggravation in the area. Therefore, it was decided to give the butter to any pensioners who came to ask for it.

A number of hon. Members said that it would have been better if the meat had gone out uncooked. I hope that the Minister will discuss that when he replies. One organisation in my area gave the meat out uncooked rather than cooked.

I should like to echo the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) on the publicity stunt element. A number of charitable organisations in the borough of Newham felt that it was more of a publicity stunt than anything else. They said that because Newham is a newly rate-capped borough. It is an amazing irony that the Government are saying, "You can have a pound of butter and a little bit of beef," but are cutting the amount of money given by central Government to local authorities. This means that boroughs such as Newham have to look to meals on wheels, one o'clock clubs and home helps as possibilities for cuts imposed by central Government. As my hon.

[Mr. Tony Banks]

Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley said, instead of the 1 lb of butter and the bit of beef, it would have been far better if the House had realised that there was no substitute for a decent pension which enabled pensioners to choose what they wanted to eat and drink. Perhaps they would choose more healthy foods than the cholesterol-loaded beef and butter. I am afraid that we shall have to wait until there is a Labour Government to give pensioners proper pensions so that they can make a proper choice.

8.50 pm

Mr. Gummer: With permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, may I say to the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Mr. John) that we expect that, by the end of this period, Britain will have spent £30 million of the available £36 million on distribution of food. There is clearly a major programme. I have already spoken to the hon. Gentleman about the problem with the figures. We have carefully considered the ones which he presented, but they do not tally with our direct information on the countries concerned. I assure the hon. Gentleman that I am only going by the best figures that I have. If I turn out to be wrong, I shall be happy to apologise to him.

We tried to give out the food as rapidly as possible, so we started with the larger packages. Butter has always been available in small packs. The hon. Member for Pontypridd is probably overdoing it by suggesting that, if we only had another form of packaging, distribution would have been much better. I do not agree. Distribution has been more difficult than it might have been because butter is stored in a particular way. We have done everything possible to make the butter available in forms that would enable the local charities to distribute it.

Despite everything that the hon. Member for Pontypridd and his hon. Friends said, they did not mention that the charities almost without exception believe that we have done as well as could be done in the time available. The Commission produced its first proposals of any kind on Thursday 15 January. We agreed them at 2 o'clock in the morning of the following Tuesday. We did not even have the regulations at that stage, because these matters are within Commission competence, for the most part. Therefore, all our discussions with the charities were carried out as rapidly as possible. We have tried in every way to keep the charities informed of our information. I did as much directly as I could and I do not believe that we could have done it more rapidly or more effectively, given the circumstances. Of course I agree that, after the scheme has finished, we shall have to ascertain whether there are lessons to be learned. I am sure that there are. It is always true that the next time one does something, one hopes that it will be done better. We shall certainly do that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Sir P. Goodhart) referred to the scheme. The present scheme is all that we have in front of us at the moment. No doubt we shall learn from it. We may decide that it is a sensible approach. It has to be an additional scheme. The trouble with many of the schemes to which my hon. Friend referred is that they were substitution schemes. It is easy for them to be substitution schemes, but I think that my hon. Friend will agree that, even though they do not want to make a huge contribution to reducing surpluses, we want schemes that reduce the food in store rather than merely substitute for foods which would otherwise have been bought.

The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) was less than generous. I say that not because I wanted a pat on the back but because I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman, with his charity, would understand that, if one tries to run a scheme that no one has ever run before and one does so as rapidly as possible, one has to do what one can with the regulations and arrangements to hand. It cannot be gainsaid that more than 20 million packs of butter are either out or on their way to the people who need them. We have what amounts to more than 4 million meals—taking account of the quarter of a pound of beef allocated for each meal—on the way to those who need them. At least one should say that that is good rather than bad.

I felt that there was a good deal of whingeing from the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland. He spoke in a rather miserable way. He may not like the style in which I have introduced the matter, and I agree that one is sometimes led astray by the far-fetched comments of the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley. The hon. Gentleman has an effect on me, just as he has on most spokesmen. He tends to raise the temperature of the debate without perhaps throwing light on it.

On the other hand, I think that it would be reasonable for the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland to get off his high horse, especially in view of his curious comment that he would give us, yet again, the alliance view of the common agricultural policy. I thought that the alliance was not referring to the CAP any more, ever since it was rumbled on this matter. We all now know about the CAP. We know what would happen if the alliance ever formed a Government — it would introduce a policy which would be beneficial to almost every country in the Common Market except Britain. The president of the National Farmers Union knows that. Only the hon. Gentleman appears not to know it.

Mr. Maclennan: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. It is such a rare experience that it seems unusual. I refer him to the article in today's *Financial Times* by Mr. John Cherrington, a notable commentator, who speaks very highly of the alliance's policy for the future of the common agricultural policy. He has recommended that those proposals should be given wider study. I hope that, when the right hon. Gentleman has given them wider study, he will realise that there is a great deal in what we are saying.

Mr. Gummer: Whatever Mr. Cherrington may have said, the president of the National Farmers Union said to the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) that he knew nothing about agriculture and that his proposals in the Bledisloe lecture, to which Mr. Simon Gourlay was listening, would be disastrous to agriculture. I know of no one who has ever said that Mr. Simon Gourlay was unassociated with the sort of ideas put forward by the right hon. Gentleman, but he blasted them to kingdom come. He listened to the lecture and worked out the figures, which show that the alliance would help 80 per cent. of corn growers in the rest of Europe but only 30 per cent. of British growers. What is more, the right hon. Gentleman told the National Farmers Union what can only be described as a "terminological inexactitude"

because he said that the figure of 140 tonnes had never been used. Those were the exact words in the speech of the right hon. Member for Devonport. The hon. Gentleman, when challenged in this House, remained unmoved. I challenge him again. Did he or did he not say that? If so, why did he?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): Order. We are discussing a humanitarian programme — the distribution of food. We really must stick to the subject.

Mr. Maclennan: I am grateful to the Minister for giving me the opportunity of countering the accusation that I told an untruth. The reality, as the Minister well knows, is that the figure of 140 tonnes was prefaced by the word "say", and that, furthermore, it was not put forward as a normative proposal. It was produced as an illustrative proposal to show the amount that would be required to remove the entire surplus from the Community. It was rather like saying, "If one reduces institutional prices by 25 per cent., one will dispose of the surplus." Now that we have set the record straight, perhaps——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I allowed the hon. Gentleman to reply, but he made a 20-minute speech. We should now get on with the matters before the House.

Mr. Gummer: Perhaps it will be more humanitarian if I do not subject the hon. Gentleman to that point any further, although the temptation is enormous.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) made many helpful points which I shall examine and see whether I can help. Publicity is a difficult matter because many of the charities considered that one needs to have an ongoing programme and not to overload them at any time. Certainly, I shall see whether we need anything further of that sort.

The hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley raised many points. It is peculiar to make allegations that do not appear to have any foundation in the mainland part of the United Kingdom. I repeat that I look forward to receiving a letter from him with details of what hon. Members, in what circumstances and at what times he considers were politically motivated. The food has been distributed in Northern Ireland through Age Concern, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Bryson House, the Salvation Army and one other of the six charitable organisations. Any voluntary or welfare group that wishes to distribute food does so, according to the rules, through that group. I can asssure the hon. Gentleman that, as far as I know, there has been no breaking of the rules, but I shall look into the allegations made by Mrs. Janey Buchan on that matter.

The speech by the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) was so absolutely without foundation that it is not worth referring to.

In the plethora of comments made by the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), the only point that he had to make was that his local branch of Age Concern is not as happy as it might be. I do not agree that we should distribute wine. I do not think that the country would want to do that. What we have done is right.

I thank the Ministry officials who have done so much to make this scheme work and, above all, I thank the charities for making it a success.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 114, Noes 160.

Division No. 100] **[9.1 pm**

AYES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'rmline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clelland, David Gordon
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S)*
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Fife Central)*
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley, N)*
Howells, Geraint
John, Brynmor
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
MacKenzie, Rt Hon Gregor
Maclennan, Robert
Madden, Max
Martin, Michael
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Michie, William
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Nellist, David
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pike, Peter
Prescott, John
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Robertson, George
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Sheerman, Barry
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C.*(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Cyril *(Rochdale)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Wainwright, R.
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John McWilliam and
Mr. Lawrence Cunliffe.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Best, Keith
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Budgen, Nick
Butcher, John
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William

Chope, Christopher
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Cope, John
Corrie, John
Couchman, James
Cranborne, Viscount
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Eggar, Tim
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Sir Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Galley, Roy
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gow, Ian
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John S
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(N'folk SW)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayward, Robert
Hicks, Robert
Hind, Kenneth
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Maclean, David John
McLoughlin, Patrick
McQuarrie, Albert
Major, John
Malone, Gerald
Marland, Paul
Maude, Hon Francis
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Neale, Gerrard
Pattie, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rowe, Andrew
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'lch N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Wall, Sir Patrick
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wheeler, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Richard Ryder and
Mr. Michael Portillo.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of the un-numbered explanatory memorandum dated 21st January 1987, submitted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, describing draft Regulations: amending Regulation 1785/81 on the common organisation of the market in sugar; relating to a decision on placing sugar held by the Italian intervention agency at the disposal of charitable organisations for consumption within the Community; on the free transfer to charitable organisations of products processed from cereals held in intervention; and amending Regulation 804/68 on the common organisation of the market in milk and in milk products and Regulation 1842/83 establishing general rules for the granting of milk and certain milk products to students in educational establishments; and endorses the Government's decision to work speedily through charitable organisations to achieve free distribution of beef, milk and certain milk products to the most needy in the United Kingdom.

Appropriation (Northern Ireland)

9.13 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Nicholas Scott): I beg to move,

That the draft Appropriation (Northern Ireland) Order 1987, which was laid before this House on 11th February, be approved.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): It might be helpful if I made it clear that the debate on the Northern Ireland order may cover all matters for which Northern Ireland Departments, as distinct from the Northern Ireland Office, are responsible. Police and the security are the principal excluded subjects.

Mr. Scott: The order is being made under paragraph 1, schedule 1, of the Northern Ireland Act 1974. The draft order has two purposes. The first is to authorise the additional expenditure covered by the 1986-87 spring Supplementary Estimates. That is dealt with in part I of the schedule which sets out the details for a further £99 million required from the Consolidated Fund of Northern Ireland. That is in addition to some £3,256 million which has already been approved by the House for the 1986-87 financial year and thus brings the total Estimates provision for that year to £3,355 million.

Part II of the schedule gives details of the Vote on account of some £1,483 million for 1987-88. That is a normal provision and it is necessary to enable services to continue until the 1987-88 Main Estimates are debated later in the year. Full details of all the provisions sought in the draft order can be found in the spring Supplementary Estimates volume and the "Statements of Sums Required on Account" leaflet. Copies of those two documents have been placed in the Vote Office.

In considering the Supplementary Estimates, particularly those related to industrial development, employment and unemployment, the House will wish to bear in mind the latest economic information about the Province. That represents a somewhat mixed picture. On the positive side, the United Kingdom as a whole is now into its sixth successive year of continuous economic growth. Output in the Province has responded to those developments at national level with total output of the production industries now within almost 8 per cent. of its 1980 level. Also, manufacturing output has almost recovered to its 1980 level. The prospects there are not unencouraging. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer recently outlined in his autumn statement, growth this year is anticipated to be higher than in 1986.

However, there is a negative side too. Increased output has yet to have an appreciable effect on unemployment in Northern Ireland. Nevertheless, seasonally adjusted unemployment has fallen by an average of 700 per month over the past three months. However, unemployment in Northern Ireland remains at what I think the House will agree is an unacceptably high level. In January 1987 the rate of unemployment in Northern Ireland was 19·3 per cent. compared to 11·8 per cent. in Great Britain and 16·9 per cent. in the north of England. I would like to emphasise that the Government remain determined to tackle that problem and substantial resources have been made available to finance the job creation efforts of the Industrial Development Board, Local Enterprise Development Unit and the various training and retraining schemes.

In class I of the Estimates, which covers expenditure on agriculture, fisheries, and forestry, an additional £600,000 is required for Vote 1; £400,000 of that is for agricultural science services and £120,000 is to cover the capital cost of providing accommodation for a computerised system of animal health records. The purpose of that system is to provide a more efficient information base giving the ability to respond faster to any outbreak of animal disease, thus reducing the risk of spread.

There are Supplementary Estimates for three Votes in class II. Vote 1 relates to the activities of the Industrial Development Board. A total of £750,000 is required there. Of that, some £680,000 is directly related to increased administrative costs. In particular I mention the restructuring of the business development division. The strengthening of that division by the addition of 12 staff reflects a change in emphasis by the IDB already outlined in its own strategy document. In future it will take a closer and much more active role in its ongoing relations with Northern Ireland industry in order to encourage the expansion of existing businesses within the Province. That also enables the IDB to develop its sectoral campaigns and, therefore, to concentrate resources on specific areas of industry which show the most potential for development.

For Vote 5, "Functioning of the Labour Market", the additional provision sought is £3·78 million. That is made up of additional expenditure of £6·37 million less savings of £2·59 million. Of the additional expenditure, some £3·43 million is for the action for community employment scheme—ACE. As right hon. and hon. Members will no doubt already be aware, ACE provides temporary jobs for the long-term unemployed. In line with the Government's continuing efforts to respond positively to the special problems of the long-term unemployed it has been possible to increase, during this financial year, the number of jobs provided through this programme. The original target was 5,400. We have increased this by 750 places to 6,150. Increased provision of £1·24 million is also required for expenditure on Government training centres mainly for additional running expenses attached to the setting up of the restart programme for the long-term unemployed, and to carry out necessary maintenance to training centre buildings.

Under the new arrangements for the training on employers' premises scheme, a grant of £65 per week will be paid in respect of each additional eligible employee who is under 25 years of age, or who was unemployed, or unavailable for work, during the previous 12 months. A grant of £52 per week will continue to be paid to all other categories of additional employees eligible under the scheme. This revision to the scheme will cost an extra £200,000 this year and provide assistance at the higher rate to companies during the costly initial training period for new employees. I hope that it will encourage employers to recruit more young people and the longer-term unemployed into new jobs. Also in subhead B4, the new pilot manpower training scheme, which became operative in June 1986, requires £400,000 for this year. This scheme is aimed at developing a cohesive package of training assistance geared to the specific needs of individual Northern Ireland companies operating in the international market place. The early indications are that the scheme will make a positive contribution to the local economy.

A further £678,000 is required for management training. This is a crucial area which is fundamental to the

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economic well-being of the Province. The aim is to improve both the quantity and quality of resource management. The provision now sought will enable Government to maintain and indeed increase activity in this area. Hon. and right hon. Members might wish to note that the Estimates also provide for the introduction of four new employment measures requiring a total provision of £420,000 at subheads C7 to C10 respectively. Of particular interest is the restart programme. Good progress has been made in this programme since its introduction on 1 July 1986. In the first six months some 31,000 people had received a counselling interview and we are on schedule to achieve our target of 60,000 for the year.

Moving on to Vote 6, which covers the administration and miscellaneous services of the Department of Economic Development, a net increase of some £2 million is sought. During the course of the year, my noble Friend, the Secretary of State for Employment announced a number of initiatives aimed at assisting the long-term unemployed such as the provision of in-depth counselling interviews. These initiatives were applied in Northern Ireland at the same time as the rest of the United Kingdom and additional resources were therefore provided to DED to ensure that the long-term unemployed in Northern Ireland benefited to the full extent.

Before moving away from class II, Vote 5, may I draw the attention of the House to one unfortunate typographical error in the provision for subhead A1 in the Estimates volume? The figure of £10,330,000 in respect of YTP trainee allowances should in fact read £10,200,000. I should make it clear that this does not affect the draft order.

Turning to class IV, Vote 1, which covers the Northern Ireland roads service, a net additional provision of £6·9 million is required of which some £1·9 million has been earmarked for capital works and nearly £4 million for essential road maintenance. The sum of £1·5 million relates to the construction package announced by the Secretary of State last October, and the remainder will further assist the construction industry in the Province. The emphasis within the roads programme continues to be placed on the management and maintenance of the road system. This is right and proper, bearing in mind the importance of a well-maintained road network to the economic and social fabric of the Province. In Vote 3, ports, the further provision of £700,000 is required to fund the upgrading and modernisation of port facilities throughout Northern Ireland under the port modernisation schemes.

Moving on to class V, Vote 1—housing services—a token provision of £1,000 is sought to bring hon. Members' attention to additional expenditure of some £5·5 million to finance increased activity on the general housing association programme and to meet the demand for renovation grants. However, this additional expenditure has been more than offset by a combination of additional housing association receipts from equity sales, surplus rental income and by savings on the revenue grant for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. These savings arise mainly from a reduced requirement for maintenance and from closer control of the level of vacant dwellings.

In class VI, Vote 1—water and sewerage services—the net additional provision is £2·5 million. This includes £1·9 million for capital works. In Vote 2—improvement of the environment — additional expenditure of some £5·6 million relates, in the main, to an extra £3 million for the urban development scheme, £800,000 for grants to the National Trust and £600,000 for the repair and maintenance of historic buildings. However, this additional expenditure has been offset by savings within the Vote and by receipts from the sale of land, leaving a net requirement of £600,000.

For Vote 4 — rating, records registrations, surveys and administration — the net increase of some £1·1 million is attributable largely to additional expenditure on computer systems and running costs, which have been partly offset by savings on the purchase of survey equipment and increased receipts.

Class VII has only one Vote, protective sevices, which covers expenditure on the fire service. An additional £500,000 is sought to cover the cost of an increased allowance to operational staff of the Fire Authority for Northern Ireland.

I come now to education, class VIII, where Supplementary Estimates are being sought in Votes 1, 2, 3 and 4. In Vote 1, a net additional £4·2 million is sought, and £4·6 million is required to meet the increased cost of school teachers' salaries arising from the April 1986 salary award and from the balance of the 1985 award. Hon. Members will be aware that it is established practice for Northern Ireland teachers to maintain parity in respect of salaries and conditions of service with their counterparts in England and Wales.

A further £300,000 is required by voluntary grammar schools for books and practice materials for the new general certificate of secondary education examination. There is a saving of £700,000 on capital grants to voluntary schools where progress has been slower than expected on a number of major schemes and on gas conversion work.

In Vote 2, a token estimate of £1,000 is sought to bring hon. Members' attention to increases which relate in the main to capital expenditure. Increases totalling £1·2 million are required to cover equipment and capital grants to the two Northern Ireland universities. Similarly, capital expenditure at the two teacher training colleges, including investment in new information technology equipment, will require an additional £200,000. These additional requirements are offset by savings of about £1·4 million in the recurrent grants to the universities partly as a result of lower than anticipated rates payments by Queens university, and partly following a revision of block grants on the recommendations of the University Grants Committee. The committee advises the Department of Education in Northern Ireland on the level of funding for the Province's universities based on the principle of parity of provision with elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

Under Vote 3 — miscellaneous services and administration—an additional £2·4 million is sought. The additions required cover a wide range of services. In the main they reflect allocations as part of the Belfast urban programme, which were made after the 1986-87 Main Estimates were finalised, and the further measures taken by the Secretary of State in October last to aid the local construction industry.

The final education item is Vote 4, which covers grants to education and library boards. Of the total of £14·9 million sought, £11·5 million is required to cover the cost of a backdated revaluation of the rates on school property.

This follows a recent decision by the Lands Tribunal about the method of assessing schools' rateable value in circumstances where the premises are not fully utilised because of falling enrolments.

Responsibility for the education of mentally handicapped children transfers to the education service on 1 April 1987, and £2 million is required in advance of the transfer to enable boards to carry out essential preparatory work such as the provision of accommodation and the purchase of buses. Increased capital resources of just over £3 million are required for minor works including projects related to the Belfast urban programme, gas conversion and the youth training programme.

Under class IX—health and personal social services—an increase of some £10·6 million is sought in Vote 1. About £6 million of this is for capital expenditure. This substantial increase will enable work to begin on a number of major capital projects, including additional and improved facilities for geriatric patients in Armagh and additional day care provision for mentally handicapped persons in Londonderry and Banbridge. Again, this capital expenditure will have the added benefit of boosting employment in the construction industry. An additional £4·1 million is sought of which £2·3 million is to supplement the provision already made for the pay awards recommended by review bodies for doctors and dentists, nurses and paramedical staff. The balance is to fund service developments at the Belfast City hospital and at Altnagelvin hospital in Londonderry as well as grants to voluntary organisations, and expenditure arising from a major campaign aimed at reducing the incidence of coronary heart disease in Northern Ireland. In Vote 2—family practitioner and other services—a further £3·8 million is sought, mainly to meet the additional cost of dental and pharmaceutical services, where increases in demand as well as in fees and costs have exceeded earlier expectations.

In the social security programme, additional provision of £33·5 million is required in class X, Vote 2, to meet increased expenditure on invalid care allowance, supplementary benefits and housing benefits. The increases are offset by a reduction of £1·7 million in the requirement for severe disablement allowance. I assure the House that I am coming to the end of the extensive list.

In class X, Vote 4—administration and miscellaneous services—an additional £4·7 million is required mainly for salaries and wages and social security adjudication costs. A further £1·7 million is required to accommodate a shortfall in the amounts to be appropriated in aid in respect of administrative costs of the national insurance fund. These increases are offset by a reduction of £768,000 in earlier estimates of requirements, mainly of the amount of the grant to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive for its costs of administering the housing benefits scheme.

And finally, moving on to class XII, Vote 1—office and general accommodation services—provision is being sought for an additional £2 million to cover the purchase of office accommodation in central Belfast.

In these opening remarks I have tried to cover the main features of the draft order and to draw the attention of the House to a number of new items of expenditure. I know that as usual on these occasions right hon. and hon. Members will wish to express their views on both these and other matters. I shall listen with great interest to the points raised and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will reply in due course.

I commend the draft order to the House.

9.33 pm

Mr. Peter Archer (Warley, West): We are grateful to the Minister for that exposition of the Government's requirement. I am not sure that I totally endorse the picture which he seemed to be painting at one time, but it deserved to be addressed to a wider audience of both sides of the House.

I have not attempted to count the number of times I have taken part in debates on appropriation orders and supplementary appropriation orders. It is so many that one merges into another in my mind. I no longer embark on these debates with the same sense of adventure with which I once did. Each time, hon. Members refer to the proposals in class II of the schedule and draw attention to the same unhappy stories, the same depressing statistics, the same human problems. Each time, the Minister responds to such of the points raised as time permits, and each time nothing else changes, except that the stories become more tragic, the statistics more depressing and the human problems greater.

Throughout the United Kingdom, those long-term unemployed to whom the hon. Gentleman referred find that the period since they worked becomes longer, the clothing which they cannot afford to replace becomes more threadbare. But it is true that the actual number unemployed as measured by the Government's 18th method of calculating the figures has not increased in the last 12 months. I hope that the Minister will concede that a 12-month period can be less misleading than a three-month period. Many, admittedly, are participating in schemes designed to keep them off the register, but the number has not increased, except in one region—Northern Ireland, where the number unemployed, on the Government's own method of calculation, has risen in the last year from 17·9 per cent. of the population to 19·3 per cent., and it is not confined to any one kind of work.

Each year the *Financial Times* publishes a league table of universities according to the success of their graduates from the previous year in finding employment. The last annual survey shows that Queen's university, which for many years was well into the top half of the table, is now 40th out of 44 universities. Of its 1985 graduates, 16·4 per cent. had failed to find work in the year following their graduation, against the United Kingdom average of 11·7 per cent.

Those are the figures. They represent a lengthening list of companies where it used to be thought that if one had a job there one was safe for life. Now their names are associated with lay-offs. In the last seven years, 64,000 jobs have gone. Since August of last year, Gallaher records 700 job losses, Hughes Tool 40 job losses, Blue Circle 150 job losses, Harland and Wolff 800 job losses. Metal Box up to 174 job losses, Van Heusen and National Supply Company an unspecified number of job losses. Now, we have reached the point where there are more people officially recorded as unemployed than there are people working—a distinction unique in the whole European Community.

When we speak of the annual subvention to Northern Ireland, it is only fair to point out that the people of Northern Ireland are not allowed to earn the income which would enable them to meet the expenditure of the Province. In 1985, in consequence of the north-south divide in Great Britain, the gross domestic product per

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head in the south was 109·6 per cent. of the United Kingdom average, as against 93·9 per cent. in the north of England. In the other north, the north of Ireland, it was 74·6 per cent. of the United Kingdom average. And there is little comfort for those in work. The earnings of male workers in Northern Ireland were only 89·7 per cent. of the United Kingdom average.

The Minister very fairly referred to the problem of unemployment but, if I may say so without disrespect, he referred to it as one might refer to some natural, unavoidable calamity such as the eruption of a volcano. It might have been thought that, since those 64,000 jobs have been lost in the last seven years, this had something to do with the policies of a Government who were elected eight years ago. But we are always assured in these debates that none of this is the Government's business. Even in the debate on the supplementary appropriation order last year, the hon. Gentleman—I am sure that he will be informed of what I have said, because at the moment his attention is distracted—had this to say:

"The right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West and other hon. Members alluded to the level of unemployment that we must endure in Northern Ireland. We cannot counter unemployment by Government action alone. We need efficient, competitive and innovative employers in Northern Ireland if we are to tackle the problem. I do not see the outlook for employment in Northern Ireland as being particularly encouraging at present. There are still industries under threat and they may have to endure further redundancies."—[*Official Report*, 4 December 1986; Vol. 106, c. 1125.]

It did sound a little as though the hon. Gentleman was saying that, if companies cannot sell their goods, that has nothing to do with the economy; it is the fault of employers. May I try once more to explain to him that, if United Kingdom shipowners have no British goods to carry in their ships, they are not likely to order further ships from Harland and Wolff. If farmers cannot afford to buy so many tractors from Hyster, it will not require castings from James Mackie. If people cannot afford to buy the products of Gallaher, it will not order machinery from Molins. Obviously, no industry should be content to rely wholly on the home market, but it is hard for any industry to survive completely without a home market.

A frequent pattern is for a company to cost its products, taking account of development costs and overheads, so as to make a small profit on the anticipated home demand. The substantial profit, which it is hoped will support futher investment and guarantee the company's future, comes from overseas sales. Unless demand can be generated at home, that process is not possible. Either the company must cost its product at an uncompetitive level or, at best, the price of the exports will simply be swallowed up in the break-even process.

I turn to class V of the schedule. Last year the 15th annual report of the Housing Executive revealed a new and disturbing pattern. A decade ago, it was possible to point to the large number of dwellings which lacked some essential amenity—about a quarter of the total dwellings in Northern Ireland. Now an additional problem is developing. Dwellings which do not lack amenities are nevertheless deteriorating for lack of repair. That is particularly true of houses in owner-occupation. People are finding it increasingly difficut on reduced incomes to provide for the necessary repairs to their houses.

The report indicated that 15·5 per cent. of the housing stock required at least £2,500 to be spent on repairs. If those sums are not spent, the stock of modern, properly equipped houses will be at risk. That expenditure on repairs can be achieved only if the Government are prepared to make money available to owners through repair grants and to the Housing Executive through budgetary provision. The estimated sum is £50 million, but far from increasing the money available by that amount, that was the very sum by which the Government cut the budget of the Housing Executive for 1985-86.

In addition, there is still a great need for public sector building. The Housing Executive has nearly 25,000 families on its waiting list. Assuming there are no additions to the list, at the present rate of building some of them can expect to wait until the year 2000 before they are given accommodation.

This year is designated by the United Nations as International Year of Shelter for the Homeless. The Simon Community estimates that there are 7,500 homeless individuals and families in Northern Ireland. They are not people with defective homes, not people facing the problem of housing repairs and not people who are finding it hard to pay their rent, but people who have no home. There are young couples and families, but in terms of numbers the problem seems to be worst among young single people.

In Northern Ireland there is no legislation which recognises their right to a home and no equivalent of the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 of Great Britain. I hope that the Minister can tell us when he replies that it is proposed to remedy that.

The burden of what I am saying is that one does not provide homes for the homeless simply by writing down some words and calling the paper on which they are written a statute. One can provide homes only by building them. There are construction workers eating their hearts out for funding to bring the two parts of the equation together.

I realise that in Northern Ireland the construction industry has different problems. We know that there are paramilitary organisations which, even if they cannot agree on anything else, agree on how to divide building contracts — either by territorial demarcation or by allocating the bricklaying to one, joinery to another and electrical installations to a third. We have heard that a contractor with his labour force ready to undertake the work is told, "You won't employ those men. We will provide you with a labour force." Unless he is able to resist the pressure, good workers waiting to do a job are laid off so that their work can be done by the protéges of a paramilitary organisation who will hand over a proportion of their earnings to their protectors. We heard recently of ways in which those groups provide themselves with a bonus by organising frauds with tax exemption certificates, the proceeds of which no doubt also find their way into the coffers of those organisations.

The tragedy is that money is desperately needed to build homes for the homeless, to repair houses that are falling into disrepair and to povide amenities for houses that are unfit. I make no comment as to whether those practices should have been addressed earlier. It cannot be easy for officials who are at risk: gathering evidence is never easy, and police manpower is not always available. However, the Opposition support whatever steps are necessary to ensure that the money goes where it is needed.

Mr. Scott: I hope that the right hon. and learned Gentleman will recognise not only the additional measure to help the construction industry that was announced by my right hon. Friend towards the end of last year, but the fact that, in much of what I announced today in terms of additional provision, there is a substantial construction element that will help to reduce unemployment in the construction industry.

I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman for his support on the issue of paramilitary activity. I am under no illusion that it will be possible instantly to choke the paramilitary exploitation of rackets on building sites or elsewhere. However, I can give him an absolute undertaking that the Government are determined to do their best, recognising that, as we choke one channel, the paramilitaries will seek other sources of finance. However, I am grateful for his expression of support for our efforts to prevent them from using existing rackets for their own purposes.

Mr. Archer: I, in turn, am grateful to the Minister for his comments. I recognise that some of the funds that we are discussing tonight will assist the construction industry. We must be grateful, I suppose, for a crust, even if we cannot have half a loaf. I hope that he will forgive me if I say that there is still a great deal to be done on both sides of that equation.

One effect of the housing problems that arise from underfunding is that more people need advice about housing problems. Giving people rights is futile unless we also give them the help that they need to understand their rights and make them effective. Last year Shelter (Northern Ireland) asked for help to fund a housing aid service. It applied to the Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Wiltshire, North (Mr. Needham), who replied that it was not necessary because the Housing Executive already operated a mobile housing advice unit for its tenants. That strikes me as a rather naive answer. First, it is not only the tenants of the Housing Executive who need advice—more to the point, advice sought by the tenants of the Housing Executive is about their rights relating to the Housing Executive.

It implies no criticism of the Housing Executive to say that public confidence in any advisory service is not enhanced when it is perceived to be operated by the very authority whose obligations may be in question. In fact, part of the problem of what is sometimes called alienation is the feeling that one cannot get past "them". Even if one asks for advice as to how one can, one finds "them" there, because only "they" can advise one. Perhaps the Under-Secretary will think again about his response.

Still in the context of employment I invite the Minister to pay attention to class IV(2). Does it include any provision for any phase of the York road-Central station link that would make an important difference to the comfort and convenience of travellers and to the efficiency of industry and commerce? It would also offer employment to a substantial number of people who are now unemployed.

On class VIII, there is no time this evening to embark on a debate on whether the Government are providing more or fewer resources for education, given the additional expenditure arising from salary settlements. I simply invite the Minister to turn to the evidence which is there for all to see. No figures and statistics are persuasive to school crossing patrol personnel, school cleaners and meals helpers when they are told that they will lose their jobs. Teachers also have been threatened with job losses. Across the public and voluntary sectors, the figure of 300 teaching posts has been canvassed—187 in the control sector. That will not contribute to high morale among the teaching force. There is no greater sense of optimism among university teachers or among university technicians and library staff and those who offer similar services.

I understand that it sometimes makes sense to take a synoptic view of the services provided to the students and to research in a particular geographical area by the universities as a whole. The Chilver report did not meet with a great deal of opposition when it suggested that there should be a body with the knowledge and resources to co-ordinate and help to plan higher education in Northern Ireland.

There can be no complaint that the Butler working party was given the limit that it was. It is fair to say, too, that the universities were represented on the working party. There is a feeling among teaching staff generally, and among those doing other work in the two universities concerned, that representation by distinguished academics does not necessarily constitute representation of all the interests involved. If animals are represented by the cat, the mice may feel that their view could possibly have been overlooked. It is hardly surprising that such a working group should tend to reflect the establishment. I make no complaint about that. I understand that the working group received written evidence from the trade unions involved, and that there is a feeling that there was no discussion with those interest groups and no meeting of minds before the interim report was published.

I hope that there will be fuller consultation at the next stage. However, even that will not allay all the fears, if the recommendations in the interim report are intended to close a range of options, and if they themselves are now regarded as beyond further discussion.

Finally, I turn to another service which raises, yet again, the question of employment which I understand is included in the provision for the Department of Economic Development, class II. Item 5 of class II makes provision for schemes that are centred on and directly benefit and are part of local communities. At the same time it provides employment for those with something to offer the community who would otherwise be denied the chance to offer it.

On 12 February 1987, during Northern Ireland questions, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) asked about the funding for Action for Community Employment schemes and the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers), seized the opportunity to say how popular ACE schemes had been. He was quite right to say that. He was then asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Ladywood and by the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) and myself about six ACE workers at St. Matthew's community centre in Short Strand whose funding had been withdrawn. The only reason given by the Government was that it was not in the public interest.

The Under-Secretary of State reminded us of the statement of the then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on 27 June. I hope that he will forgive me. He said 25 June, but he meant 27 June 1985. That statement referred to groups having

"sufficiently close links with paramilitary organisations to give rise to a grave risk that to give support to those groups

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would have the effect of improving the standing and furthering the aims of a paramilitary organisation". — [*Official Report*, 27 June 1985; Vol. 81, c. 449.]

I doubt whether that will ever be awarded a Nobel prize for literature, but it is clear that that form of words was obviously very carefully formulated. Clearly, no one wishes to see public funds used to benefit paramilitary organisations, except possibly the paramilitary organisations themselves.

The problem is that a reference to that formula gives no indication to those who manage the groups or the scheme what is alleged against them. They cannot defend themselves or explain anything which may admit of explanation or correct any mistakes because they do not know what the Government have against them.

On the face of things, it is startling that an Irish language nursery school should be regarded as a back-up for paramilitaries. It seems that a scheme can simultaneously benefit from the Belfast area needs programme and be refused funds by the Department of Economic Development.

The nursery school in question is housed in premises provided by the Belfast area needs programme. That is not all. It has been told by the Government that its funding will be terminated unless it moves from that accommodation and transfers to other accommodation. The Government funding is dependent on the nursery school leaving the premises provided by Government funding. There are no other premises in that locality, even if it were somehow possible to raise additional funding to rent them.

But even that is not all. The very vagueness of the Government's reasons leads to further problems. When it becomes known that Government funding has been withdrawn under that formula, others may believe that there is no smoke without fire. Other sources of funding will dry up and teachers will find it impossible to obtain other employment.

I understand that the Government cannot always give details of sources of information in these matters, but does it have to be left that the Government's reasons are completely beyond challenge for those at the receiving end and completely beyond scrutiny by anyone? Will a Minister at least visit the area and meet some of the people concerned, or is this another instance of people being left to feel that there is no redress or even a listening ear within the constitutional process?

Mr. Scott: In the Committee discussing the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Bill we have been debating paramilitary finances and the introduction of a scheme of certification to prevent money from flowing to paramilitary organisations through bogus security firms. I think that in our discussions there the right hon. and learned Gentleman accepted that there could be no appeal and that that had to be an act of the Executive. That was what the then Secretary of State was setting out in his statement in another context. I hope that the right hon. and learned Gentleman will take it from me that, as the Minister who was responsible for bringing the Bunscoile Gailge in Belfast into the state system, I can say that there is no hostility to the concept of people being taught through the medium of Irish at any level in Northern Ireland. I can also say that, if the representatives of the nursery schools are prepared to have informal conversations with officials within the Northern Ireland Office, they will get the best advice that is available to them as to the way in which they can rectify their position.

Mr. Archer: I am grateful for that intervention. I do not suggest that the Government have some political prejudice against the Irish language school. I am not sure that I accepted in Committee—I am still reflecting on it—that it is not possible to build in some way of taking further a refusal by the Executive. But that is not quite what I was suggesting at this stage in this place. I was hoping that someone would listen. I should be grateful if officials would listen. I am not for one moment saying anything against the dedication and open-mindedness of officials, but it would appear to those concerned to be better if a Minister would listen and perhaps even visit the premises and show them what is going on, which is something that I hope to do myself in the fairly near future. I only invite the Minister to reflect on that and I shall not seek to take it further this evening.

I suspect that when the Minister replies he will accuse me of moaning. The purpose of appropriation debates is for hon. Members to have a moan. They are based on the principle of redress of grievances before supply and this is an opportunity to express the grievances of those who have approached us. I draw these matters to the attention of the House because in a parliamentary democracy that is the proper forum to discuss the redress of grievances. If discussion in the House does not lead to their redress, there will be those quick enough to argue that there is no future within constitutional politics and to suggest to the susceptible that other methods may be better. That is why I beg the Government to listen to the debate with an open mind and to demonstrate that it really can lead to change.

9.59 pm

Sir John Biggs-Davison (Epping Forest): The House will be relieved to know that I do not propose to follow the right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer) in his wide-ranging and agreeable speech, but I shall respond to his invitation to have a moan. It is a moan that I have indulged in before now. I do that in relation to class VIII, paragraph 3 — expenditure by the Department of Education on various services including sports and allied services. The sum involved is £2,387,000. I am not sure what is meant by "allied services", but perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister will enlighten me when he replies.

I presume that that sum includes grants paid by the Northern Ireland Sports Council through district councils to the Gaelic Athletic Association in Northern Ireland. I have periodically queried that expenditure but not out of any prejudice against its sports. The Government and the House are right to encourage the Irish language, and the House will have noted what the right hon. and learned Gentleman had to say about that and the Minister's response in his intervention. It is right to encourage the Irish language, the Gaelic culture and Gaelic sport in Northern Ireland.

Unionists as well as nationalists used to play a part in the old Gaelic league until it became biased towards one political opinion. I tabled an early-day motion applauding the opening of the BBC's Irish programmes. I join the Opposition in congratulating the Gaelic Athletic Association on its centenary. More recently, at the

instance of Sir Oliver Flanagan, T. D., with whom I had the pleasure of being associated briefly in the Council of Europe, I raised the vexed matter of the Gaelic Athletic Association's field at Crossmaglen with my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), who was then Secretary of State for Defence.

In 1981, I first raised the offensive rule 15 under which the Gaelic Athletic Association bans from membership those who serve or have served in the British Army, Navy or police. The rule is too antique to have taken any account of the Royal Air Force. When I attempted to correspond with the hierarchy of the Gaelic Athletic Association in Dublin, I received no reply. I am not the only person to complain of its attitude. There are those in the Republic who have questioned the bigoted behaviour of people at the top of the Gaelic Athletic Association. Attempts have been made to change the rules, but in vain. It has made no difference that Mr. Peter Barry has appealed to Northern Ireland Catholics to join the Royal Ulster Constabulary and that members of the SDLP have praised that gallant force. In *The Irish Times* of 16 January an article by Mr. Michael Finlan entitled, "Has the GAA got a persecution complex?" described the Gaelic Athletic Association as "prickly".

As my hon. Friend the Minister knows, I referred this abuse to the Northern Ireland standing advisory commission on human rights. The commission has not yet reported on this and the other instances of discrimination which are before it. I understand that the grants made in Northern Ireland are on a reduced scale precisely because of that discrimination. I ask whether the grants should be continued at all, unless the Gaelic Athletic Association can give an assurance that steps will be taken to lift this unjust and bigoted ban in respect of Northern Ireland.

10.3 pm

Mr. Michael Fallon (Darlington): It is a shame that there are not more hon. Members present to scrutinise these formidable powers which have been delegated for some years by the House in the matter of expenditure to the Northern Ireland departments. There is the formidable spending power in total under the territorial block formula and a quite formidable administrative power within that total to switch resources between departments.

I want to raise three points. If my hon. Friend the Minister does not wish to reply, I should be happy for him to comment later. First, what is the overall expenditure policy of the Northern Ireland departments? My hon. Friend the Minister of State confirmed the other day that public expenditure in Northern Ireland is well over 70 per cent. of the Province's gross domestic product — probably nearly twice the Great Britain figure.

Secondly, in terms of public spending per head, according to the latest territorial analysis, spending in Northern Ireland is now 52 per cent. higher than it is in England. The higher figure of 52 per cent. suggests that, within that total, there are huge differences.

I am aware that spending on industrial support, energy trade and employment is now 340 per cent. higher per head in Northern Ireland than it is in England. Spending on housing is 362 per cent. higher in Northern Ireland than in England. For that reason I was rather puzzled by the remark of the right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer) that Northern Ireland had to be grateful for the crusts that it received. If those figures represent crusts, I believe that there are those in England who would be grateful for a few crumbs.

The figure of expenditure of 300 per cent. has increased in the past five years—in 1982 the figure was only 200 per cent. How does the territorial block formula work for Northern Ireland? Are such huge differences accounted for simply by the automatic operation of the formula or are they bargained for, quite correctly and fairly, by Northern Ireland Ministers on the basis of genuine need?

Thirdly, in relation to part II of the order, what compensatory arrangements will be made in the allocation of expenditure between Departments for the financial years in which the international fund for Ireland begins to operate? I understand that at least two of the three purposes of the fund may be classified as purposes of public expenditure. Therefore, I wonder whether we will see from the Northern Ireland departments compensatory reductions in the appropriations that are prescribed under the departmental headings in those two categories.

10.6 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Peter Viggers): The nature of an appropriation debate tends to be wide-ranging; and tonight's debate has been no exception. Whilst its purpose is to approve the Supplementary Estimate of £99 million for this financial year and a further £1,483 million on account for the next financial year, it affords the opportunity for the House to discuss a wide range of subjects related to Government expenditure.

Public expenditure in Northern Ireland is, of course, high in comparison with the rest of the United Kingdom. That has been noted by my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon). That expenditure reflects the special needs of the Province and must also be recognised as a tangible sign of the Government's commitment to Northern Ireland.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State, in opening the debate, spoke briefly about the state of the economy, productivity and employment. As the Minister responsible for industry and in the light of the speech made by the right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer), may I add some comments on our strategy in approaching the economic challenge. We are, of course, seeking to reduce unemployment, but that is only one aspect of our work and by itself it is a negative concept.

If we were to restrict ourselves to that mode of thinking we would be condemning Northern Ireland to continued economic vulnerability, in danger from fluctuation in world trade and in need of continued dependence, on a long-term basis, upon the crutch of Government support.

We shall, of course, continue to alleviate unemployment, and greater resources have been made available to expand the restart and the ACE schemes. However, in a fast changing world, the reduction of unemployment cannot be an end in itself, nor does it constitute a complete and sufficient policy. To be successful in the long term we need a much bolder and more determined approach.

Our industrial policies in Northern Ireland are much more ambitious and much more positive. Our policy is to go for further growth in areas of expansion and to do that by the pursuit of excellence in products and services. That requires a comprehensive approach with many components. I will give only some examples.

[Mr. Peter Viggers]

We must look for engines of growth through new technology and growth multipliers through better marketing. We need to promote stronger links between education and industry to encourage the entrepreneurial spirit and harness scientific skills to industry. It is fundamental to competitiveness that products should be well designed for economic manufacture and to international standards. There must be a firm insistence on quality and total consistency. We must get out and pursue world markets and make sure that our products are market-orientated.

Increasingly, our policies and schemes are shaped to achieve these aims. We have put greater emphasis on training and re-training to keep the Province's work force tuned to the requirements of local and incoming industry. Government want to help industry to help itself, not simply through financial support but by working with industry and the financial and educational institutions to identify key factors for success and to help strengthen the Province's performance in such areas.

I give some examples of the practical application of these general policy objectives. The Industrial Development Board has launched its quality initiative which has been well received by industry. Similarly, we recently announced a design competition in schools, because design and high quality are essential if Northern Ireland goods are to penetrate export markets. To encourage the development of marketing, the IDB has the 40/30 marketing plan which, in the past 15 months, proved so successful that 65 per cent. of its client companies have taken it up. Innovation in industry is being promoted by IDB's research and development scheme and by the establishment of the Northern Ireland Technology Board. Bright young graduates are being encouraged to go into industry and to start up their own businesses through the graduate attachment scheme and the graduate enterprise scheme. In a similar vein, IDB has established a master in business administration course in industrial development —a unique course—to encourage graduates to address their skills towards the opportunities for economic regeneration. Through the efforts of the Local Enterprise Development Unit and the opportunities afforded by the enterprise allowance scheme, the economy is being renewed by the constant growth of new small companies, many of which will not only survive but grow. The local enterprise programme povides a vehicle for small community-based groups to offer premises and advice for small businesses. LEDU's enterprise grant scheme produced 441 business start-ups in the last financial year.

In parallel with all these Government initiatives I am able to report some significant successes for Northern Ireland through industrial investment. Recently, Lucas Stability in Antrim set up Northern Ireland's first silicon chip factory, providing 200 extra jobs. BIS/Beecom has set up a hi-tech operation in the new science park at Antrim. The Province now has two Japanese manufacturing companies, which will employ almost 300 people at Ballcymoney and Mallusk. RFD, a manufacturer of marine rescue equipment, has moved its headquarters to Northern Ireland. Shorts has won major contracts for its aeroplanes and for its high technology Javelin and Star Streak missiles. Temtech, in Bangor, in conjunction with Medphone of the United States, has recently successfully carried out the world's first heart defibrillation by telephone.

They are just some examples, but important ones, and there are many more to show that Northern Ireland's economy should not be viewed in negative terms. I accept the points made by the right hon. and learned Gentleman that unemployment is a serious problem in Northern Ireland—of course it is—and that this matter should be grasped, but I should like him to balance that judgment with the points that I have made.

The economy of Northern Ireland has endured a great deal over the past years, but there are grounds for optimism that the future could be much brighter.

A number of points were mentioned during the debate, and I shall try to deal with all the specific points that were raised. The right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West commented on housing expenditure in Northern Ireland and the unfitness of housing. I shall give some examples, in addition to those that have already been given by my hon. Friend in opening the debate, and some facts to put with those that the right hon. and learned Gentleman put before the House.

It is a fact that unfitness levels have continued to fall and now stand at a little over 10 per cent. compared with over 14 per cent. five years ago. The proportion of dwellings that lack basic amenities was halved in the same period and the urgent waiting list for housing was reduced by over one third since 1981.

Private housebuilding as soared to about 2·5 times its 1981 level, reaching record levels in 1983 and 1984 and maintaining its buoyancy in 1985 and 1986. Spending on the improvement of the public housing stock has increased three times since 1981, while grant aid for the improvement and repair of private dwellings in 1986-87 is twice the 1980-81 level. Similarly, expenditure by housing associations in 1986-87 is three times the 1980-81 level. These changes have been made possible by levels of funding for the housing programme that have enabled gross expenditure to rise to a level that is 60 per cent. over the 1981 level. I ask the right hon. and learned Gentleman to put these facts with those that he put before the House.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman also asked about improvement and repair grants. Meeting the demand for 6,000 improvement grants and 6,000 repair grants on the worst of the private stock, which is either unfit or otherwise likely to deteriorate, was part of the 1986 strategy review for housing, and that has been fulfilled.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman asked specifically about the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977. I can give him some assurance about that. Following a review of the situation in the Province by the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Government accepted its recommendation that Northern Ireland should have legislation that will place a statutory duty on the Housing Executive to secure accommodation for certain categories of genuinely homeless people. It is intended to publish a proposal for a draft housing order about mid-1987. It will contain homelessness legislation that will be broadly similar to that for Great Britain, and it will include a number of miscellaneous provisions derived from the Housing Act 1985 and the Housing and Planning Act 1986. It is the Government's intention to bring the legislation into operation early in 1988. I hope that the right hon. and learned Gentleman will accept that assurance.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman pressed again his point about the funding of the Irish language nursery school that is run by the St. Matthew's tenants association. It is extremely difficult for Ministers to comment on specific cases, but I understand why he commented on the very straight bat that I played to questions at Question Time the other day. My hon. Friend the Minister of State intervened and made some points about consultation. There has been consultation. There is an open door, in terms of discussing the difficulties.

However, the decision that has been taken about the St. Matthew's tenants association has nothing to do with the teaching of the Irish language. At present the Government provide support through the action for community employment programme for eight Irish language nursery schools, located in different parts of the Province, including West Belfast, Omagh and Londonderry. I cannot say more on that subject at the moment.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman asked about the advice given to tenants and owner-occupiers and specifically about the Housing Executive and the Belfast Housing Aid Society. It provides a service to people with a wide range of housing problems. It is particularly effective in the private rented sector by representing the tenants at rent assessment panel hearings. The Department annually contributes 90 per cent. of the approved running costs of the society, and in the current year has also given a capital grant towards the cost of the society's move to new premises. Similarly, the tenants' participation advisory service that was set up in December 1984 provides an information and advisory service to landlords and tenants in the public and private housing sectors and encourages and develops tenant participation in housing management. The Department has agreed to grant aid 100 per cent. of the cost of the service for a three-year trial period.

Nevertheless, despite these facts, which I hope will be found to be reassuring, the point made by the right hon. and learned Gentleman about the lack of opportunity for Shelter to provide advice was new to me. As he has raised that point in the debate, I think that it would be right for me to draw that part of the debate to the attention of the Under Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Wiltshire, North (Mr. Needham) who has responsibility for housing matters. I am sure that he will do his best to take account of the representations made by the right hon. and learned Gentleman.

The right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West asked about job losses in the education sector. My hon. Friend the Minister of State, who opened the debate, referred to job losses in education and the general level of available resources. There can be no question about the Government's commitment to the education service in Northern Ireland, which is receiving its highest level of funding at more than £670 million this year. The effective deployment of those resources may sometimes lead to the need for rationalisation in certain activities. That is a matter for the providing bodies, especially the education and library boards.

The reductions in the number of teachers have been considerably less than those that would have been created by the rate of decline in school enrolments. As a result, pupil-teacher ratios have improved significantly from 19:1 in 1979-80 to 18·5:1 now. Examination results also bear testimony to the quality of education in Northern Ireland, something about which we can be very proud. A higher proportion of pupils gain A-level passes than in England.

My hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Sir J. Biggs-Davison) raised an important issue.

Mr. Archer: At the risk of being tiresome, is the Under-Secretary of State able to respond to my point about the York road—Central station rail link? If he is not able to do so, can he write to me later.

Mr. Viggers: I will do that immediately. I am advised that consultants are undertaking a review of the present transportation strategy for Belfast as an integral part of the preparation of the Belfast urban area plan. The review, among other things, is re-appraising the position on the York road—Central station rail link.

My hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest raised the issue of grants to the Gaelic Athletic Association. The Government have frequently voiced their abhorrence in this House of the Gaelic Athletic Association's rule 15, which inhibits the admission of certain individuals, chiefly members of Her Majesty's security services. Let me once again stress that the Government take account of that in assessing the level of grants and the Gaelic Athletic Association receives a significantly lower level of grant on that account. We continue to hope that wiser and more moderate counsels will soon prevail within the association and it is fair to say that there are already signs of that within the association.

My hon. Friend the Member for Darlington raised a number of very wide points about the funding of the Northern Ireland exchequer. He was kind enough to say that it would be agreeable to him if I wrote to him on those subjects. As the points that my hon. Friend raised were so completely fundamental to the issue of Government funding for Northern Ireland, that would be a sensible idea and perhaps we can have discussions outside the Chamber. However, I can tell my hon. Friend that the funding of the Northern Ireland exchequer is a matter for discussion between Ministers at the Treasury and the Northern Ireland Office. Matters are not decided on a formula basis and are always under review.

Within my limitations, I have tried to answer the points that have been raised during the debate. In commending the order to the House, may I thank the House for its patience in allowing me to make this, my maiden speech, from the Dispatch Box.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Appropriation (Northern Ireland) Order 1987, which was laid before this House on 11th February, be approved.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments &c.)

CONSUMER PROTECTION

That the draft Nightwear (Safety) (Amendment) Regulations 1987, which were laid before this House on 30th January, be approved.—*[Mr. Portillo.]*

Question agreed to.

REVERTER OF SITES BILL *[LORDS]*

Order for Second Reading read.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 90(6) (Second Reading Committees), That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Question agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 42 (Committal of Bills).

Prefabricated Concrete Houses (Thurrock)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Portillo.]*

10.23 pm

Dr. Oonagh McDonald (Thurrock): Thurrock has about 500 of the 1·5 million prefabricated concrete houses and flats which were built during the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. More than 200 of them have been sold to tenants and about 300 are still owned by Thurrock borough council. The types of concrete house involved include Airey, Cornish unit, Lecaplan, Stent, Unity, Wates and others.

The problem with concrete houses, as the Minister well knows, is that the concrete gradually crumbles away, steel reinforcement erodes and cracks appear. The pre-1960 houses are, of course, deteriorating rapidly. The Housing Defects Act 1984, now part of the Housing Act 1985, was supposed to deal with those problems, but from the start the Labour party asked for extra money to be given to councils to enable them to assist owner-occupiers and council tenants, for whom the Government did not allow in the legislation.

Councils such as Thurrock are struggling to meet their obligations to owner-occupiers under the legislation. First, to give some indication of the problems, I want to refer to a letter sent by the council's consultants, M. Dysons Associates, to the council's housing committee on 20 January this year. Tenders had been requested for the repair and reinstatement of Wates houses at South Ockendon. There are approximately 40 houses and the cost of repairs varies from just over £800,000 to just under £1 million depending upon the tender. In fact, the highest tender, curiously enough, came from Wates Ltd. for the structural reinstatement for Wates houses and comes to just under £1 million.

The grant applications based on one of the tenders, the cheapest in fact, mean that the council anticipates grant applications of the order of £23,000 per basic house. That is above the nominal £20,000 expenditure limit and the reinstatement costs of some houses would cause a further increase. There are two reasons for that. First, the houses are in Essex where the highest prices in the country are being obtained as a result of the volume of work available to contractors in the area. Secondly, the party wall construction of this variant of the Wates houses is the most expensive to deal with. Comparisons are made with similar Wates houses in the north midlands area and the cost there comes to just over £20,000 for repairs.

According to M. Dysons Associates, a 15 per cent. loading for work in Essex seems in proportion. The facts on the tenders received by M. Dysons Associates on behalf of the council for 15 contracts for Wates house repairs throughout the country have been reported to the Department of the Environment. Therefore, hopefully the Minister will have information available about the fact that the cost of reinstatement, even at the expenditure limit of £20,000 per house, is sufficient to cause the borough council considerable struggle. However, the costs in terms of the tenders submitted in the Essex area are above the expenditure limit, and that merely makes the problems even worse.

Some notion of the extent of the problems is given again in the state of applications given by the borough council

as of January this year. A total of 42 Cornish unit style concrete houses are the first to be reinstated. The value of the potential grants is estimated by the council to be £522,000. The Minister may well say that the cost of reinstatement was taken into account in the housing investment programme allocation last year, which was £606,000 above the previous year.

When one looks at the costs of reinstating 42 of the houses. The addition made last year was insufficient to meet Thurrock's problems. The council made clear that the total costs of all potential grants to the owners of concrete houses in Thurrock is over £4 million. The inclusive amount of the council's HIP allocation for 1987-88 is £2 million, which takes account of the 20 per cent. cut on last year's allocation which the Government have just announced. The chief executive of the council said in a letter to the regional controller of the Department of the Environment:

"My council faces a substantial problem in complying with the legislation to PRC dwellings. There are 240 such dwellings in the borough eligible for reinstatement grants"

and these will lead to potential grants to the owners in excess of £4 million. Obviously, with the kind of HIP allocation of Thurrock borough council and the costs of reinstating these dwellings, it will be a long time before people have their houses repaired and are able to sell them again.

I am well aware that the Government have requested bids for a share of the extra £14 million from local authorities set aside for the repair of concrete houses and that these bids should come in by the end of this month. Thurrock will put in its bid. I have already indicated the scale of the problem that Thurrock faces, as do many other district housing authorities. The sum of £14 million will not go far in dealing with essential repairs. If Thurrock council would like £4 million, that would leave only £10 million for other authorities which have similar and even more extensive problems in some cases.

The first Government statement about the state of these houses was made in November 1983. Many eligible owner-occupiers have been waiting for more than three years for their properties to be repaired, placing many of them in an extremely difficult position. They need to sell those houses and they cannot expect to sell them because would-be buyers would not ba able to get mortgages on them.

I refer to a different problem concerning Lecaplan and other large panel concrete houses which are not covered by the Housing Defects Act. A letter I have received from the Building Research Establishment says that

"there is no presumption that these large panel systems are faulty but rather that any remedial needs should be assessed on the basis of a proper understanding of the issues and the best available information."

Lecaplan houses are not necessarily faulty.

The problem is that we are still waiting for the BRE report. As long ago as 1985 I received a letter from the Building Societies Association saying that it would be extremely helpful if that report was published as soon as possible. The report is to be published, I understand, in early summer. Therefore, the delays go on and we are still waiting for this extremely important report which will make it easier for us to press building societies to lend on these properties.

My constituents tell me that a number of major building societies will not lend on these properties. Constituents have had difficulties locally in selling these houses because would-be buyers have been unable to obtain mortgages from the Abbey National, the Leeds, Nationwide, Woolwich, Town and Country and the Halifax building societies. Leading building societies will not lend on such properties. My constituents who live in them and other similar properties, however, are waiting for repairs and suffering greatly. The Government are supposed to favour owner-occupiers, but these owner-occupiers are in a miserable and desperate situation.

Many of my constituents have invested their life savings in houses which they are unable to sell. Repairs cannot be carried out because the Government will not make money available or allow councils to spend their capital receipts, despite requests from Thurrock to do so. They have also received requests for more flexibility in parliamentary questions that I have tabled.

This matter has been raised with the Minister in debates before, but he has failed to give a satisfactory answer. All that the Government have done so far is to pass a law and fail to provide the money necessary to meet the responsibilities which it implied local authorities should take on. They desperately need additional funding for such responsibilities.

It is plainly impossible for Thurrock council to assist my constituents out of its funds for housing. It needs more money. My constituents need to be able to sell their homes and move, either to get a job or for personal reasons. Their inability to do that puts a great strain on them — so much so that some couples tell me that their marriages are under stress as a result. That is intolerable.

I want to hear three things from the Minister. First, I want to know whether the Building Research Establishment report on large panel houses will be brought forward quickly. Secondly, will the Minister ensure, as far as it is possible for him to do so, that building societies understand that these types of house are not necessarily faulty and that they should be willing to lend on them? Thirdly, will the Minister say what money will be made available so that Wates houses and other concrete houses in my constituency can be repaired as soon as possible?

10.37 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Richard Tracey): I commend the hon. Member for Thurrock (Dr. McDonald) on giving the House the opportunity to discuss these important topics. I would like tonight to cover three aspects which I know are of particular concern to her — first, the Housing Defects Act 1984 and how it is working in Thurrock; secondly, the position of owners living in properties not designated under that Act but who are concerned about saleability and mortgageability; and, thirdly, repair work for properties remaining in Thurrock's rented stock, and the overall resources available.

I should like to repeat two basic but very important points about the Housing Defects Act which, as the House will know, is now consolidated into part XVI of the Housing Act 1985. First, the Act attracted all-party support when we took it through Parliament in 1984. We must not lose sight of that fact when we discuss any problems that may have arisen since. It was always accepted that we would need a reasonable period to carry out the assistance programme. That is why the designations allow 10 years for owners to obtain assistance. I must remind the House that well over seven years still remain, so no one need feel that they are running out of time.

[Mr. Richard Tracey]

Thurrock district council, along with certain other authorities, has quite a variety of different designated prefabricated reinforced concrete types—Airey, Cornish Unit, Stent, Unity and Wates. The good news is that there are now National House Building Council approved repair methods for all those types—and others, too. In fact, PRC Homes Ltd.—the NHBC's subsidiary, set up to approve repair methods and provide a warranty—has now approved 28 repair methods for eight different PRC types; and these cover over 60 per cent. of all designated properties. More proposed repair methods are in the pipeline. So, once again, we are making progress.

The hon. Lady has described some of the difficulties in her constituency. I do not think that it would be appropriate tonight to get into the details of particular cases, though I will of course respond in writing to the points which the hon. Lady made and to any other points she wishes to put. What I would like to stress is that the Act allows the local authority, the owners and the repairers a reasonable degree of flexibility, for example, on the procedures for getting repairs done. My Department has issued guidance on this, first in 1984, when the Act first came into force, and then again last summer, when we put out a circular explaining how local authorities and owners might tackle reinstatement and how this meshed in with the NHBC approval and warranty procedure. But I must stress that final decisions on how to implement the legislation—and therefore on the handling of particular cases—must rest with the local authority concerned.

I am aware of problems concerning the repair of Wates houses in Thurrock and, in particular, that there are differing views on an appropriate repair method. Under the Act the council has to specify the works to be done and the amount eligible for grant. We look to authorities and owners to reach sensible understandings on actual repair methods to be used: if the council has in mind any particular repair methods—especially one not approved by PRC Homes Ltd—it will need to be satisfied that it meets the requirement of subsequent mortgageability. I understand that in the cases she mentioned of the Wates homes we may be approaching agreement.

We look to authorities to operate the Act in a reasonable way; and we look to owners to be patient. One approach worth serious consideration, particularly where resources are tight—as I acknowledge they may be—is for the council, owners, and indeed repairers, to achieve an understanding on a likely timetable for assistance, spread over a reasonable period. This allows everyone to plan sensibly and to know where they stand. Obviously, any hardship cases can be dealt with quickly, through repurchase as necessary, as provided in the Act itself. Beyond that, where owners would like repair—and I know many do—a sensible understanding on how it is to be spread over time can be a great help to everyone.

I should like to turn now to the position of those owners whose properties are not designated under the housing defects legislation. I know that the hon. Lady is concerned on behalf of the owners of the Lecaplan large panel houses. As the hon. Lady knows, properties can be designated under the housing defects legislation only if they are inherently defective by design or construction and if there has been a substantial fall in value by virtue of that fact becoming generally known. Designation is therefore a major step and not one to embark upon lightly. Indeed, many owners do not look forward to the notion of their house being declared as defective, even if there is a scheme of assistance to follow. So far as Lecaplan is concerned, I can reassure the House that we have no current plans to designate.

What we have done—as the hon. Lady knows and has mentioned—is to commission our Building Research Establishment to carry put a thorough study of large panel buildings generally. Lecaplan is of this large panel type. This research is going well and a major report, which includes structural appraisal, should be complete by early this summer. The hon. Lady has said that originally we had a somewhat earlier date in mind, but it has, quite understandably, taken BRE a bit longer to assemble all the important material it needs. I am sure that the House would agree that we want a thorough and helpful report and that it is sensible to take the time needed to achieve that.

That report should be valuable to all large panel owners, both local authorities and, of course, their tenants, and owner-occupiers. Also—and this is very important—it will be useful for building societies and other lending institutions when they are deciding whether to offer a mortgage advance. One of the problems we have seen following the PRC issue is very regrettable widespead blight on non-traditional properites in general, even of types that bear little or no relation to those designated under the housing defects legislation. We are concerned in the Department to see this blight removed wherever possible. Good research and the resulting increased understanding all round certainly helps, but we are also talking directly to the Building Societies Association on this matter: and I understand that it expects to issue further guidance to its members in the near future. I hope that that will reassure the hon. Lady to some extent, as that was one of the points she mentioned.

Again, I have to stress that individual societies or other lending institutions must decide on and take responsibility for their own lending policies. That cannot be a matter for the Government. But I would certainly encourage owners who are having difficulties with the mortgageability of their properties to shop around. Not all societies, or indeed banks or other lending institutions, take the same view.

If there are technical problems or uncertainties, the local authorities may be able to help with information. They usually commissioned the properties and have maintained the rented ones ever since, so they will have a great deal of local knowledge, which may be very valuable both to owners and to local building societies.

I hope that what I have said is helpful to the hon. Lady and, of course, to her constituents in Thurrock. My hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and I would be extremely grateful if she could keep us informed of any developments on Lecaplan in her constituency, because we realise that the owners have genuine concerns.

I turn now to another area of great interest to the hon. Lady and that is the question of Thurrock's rented stock and HIP resources. The Government are concerned about the condition of local authority rented housing. That is why we commissioned the 1985 stock condition inquiry. Indeed, we were the first Government to conduct such a systematic survey, which helped to give individual authorities a better picture of their property. That is why we initiated Estate Action, previously called the Urban Housing Renewal Unit, to work up specific projects for some of our worst affected urban estates. As the House

will know, we have made available £75 million for such projects in 1987-88, which is a 50 per cent. increase on 1986-87.

Indeed, local authorities generally are spending an increasing proportion of their resources on renovation. National expenditure is now running at some £2½ billion a year, which is split broadly 50:50 between capital and revenue. These are large sums in anyone's language, and we must not forget the role of the private sector. Authorities need to be willing to tap private sector expertise and resources.

For 1987-88 we have increased the gross housing expenditure provision by £390 million and we expect to see even greater spending on renovation. Obviously, we have to operate within the constraints of the existing capital control system. For example, we must acknowledge the large spending power that has accumulated nationally through capital receipts. Our decision on the overall resources available for HIP distribution had to recognise that fact. Nevertheless, we were able to honour the assurance given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his predecessors that allocations for 1987-88 would not be less than 80 per cent. of those for 1985-86. I am sure that the hon. Lady will agree that we were absolutely right to do that. Moreover, we have retained, in addition to the £75 million for Estate Action, a national reserve of £14 million for authorities facing particular difficulties with housing defects obligations. We have asked for bids by the end of this month and hope to make the additional allocations by the end of April.

I hope that I have answered some of the hon. Lady's points. This is only a short debate and we do not have time for much detail. I should like to close on the thought that, whether it be the Housing Defects Act 1984, non-traditional dwellings or local authority rented stock, we are making progress. With patience and good will, that will certainly continue.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at seven minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 25 February 1987

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

COUNTY OF CLEVELAND BILL *[Lords]*
Considered; to be read the Third Time.

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Industrial Knowledge (Security)

2. **Mr. Neil Thorne** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress his Department has made in providing for the secure storage of industrial knowledge in the event of war.

The Minister for Information Technology (Mr. Geoffrey Pattie): The secure storage of industrial knowledge is a matter for the companies possessing it.

Mr. Thorne: As the Government consider it prudent to spend over £17,000 million a year on defence, would it not be advisable seriously to consider the need to preserve industrial knowledge so that if the worst were to happen we would have something to fall back on, and not have to rely on other countries which are taking these precautions to preserve this knowledge for us?

Mr. Pattie: It rather depends on what my hon. Friend means by "industrial knowledge". The House is aware that an inter-departmental study led by my Department is currently under way to identify the military and civil needs for industrial products in times of crisis and industry's ability to meet them. It may be that my hon. Friend has that in mind, in which case I can tell him that the study is currently in train.

Mr. James Lamond: If the worst were to happen, as the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Thorne) said, surely that would mean the complete annihilation not only of the industrial buildings but of the people of this country? There would be little need, if any, for industrial knowledge following that.

Mr. Pattie: The hon. Gentleman is taking a particular view of certain future events. It is perfectly in order for my hon. Friend to ask his question to see whether contingencies are being worked on.

Steel Industry

3. **Mr. Hardy** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his estimate of the likely reduction in the capacity of the steel industry in the United Kingdom during 1987 and 1988; and what measures he plans to adopt to meet European Economic Community proposals during or after 1989.

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and President of the Board of Trade (Mr. Paul Channon): I have made no such estimates. There are no European Community proposals concerning steel capacity for 1989 or beyond.

Mr. Hardy: Has not Britain borne, since 1979, a most unfair share of the cuts in Community steel capacity while we have watched other member states pursuing policies and making arrangements which are clearly unfair? Does he accept that there is an obligation that Britain shall maintain its present capacity in steel and special steels industries, and will he offer the House a firm commitment that the Government accept that obligation?

Mr. Channon: I agree with part of what the hon. Gentleman has said. Any reductions that ever took place would have to be within the context of statements that have been made within the framework of a strategy agreed with the Government and announced in August 1985.

Mr. Holt: Is not the way to increase and maintain our share of steel capacity the way that it is being done in Redcar and Skinningrove, in my constituency, where there is record output? Would that not be much helped by proceeding with the Channel tunnel, which will bring work to the steel industry for many years ahead?

Mr. Channon: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend on both those points.

Mr. Crowther: Is the Secretary of State aware that in recent weeks a study by Anthony Bird Associates came to the conclusion that demand for steel in Europe is likely to increase up to 1990 at least? Another study by the American analyst Payne Webber reached the conclusion that the BSC is now producing the cheapest steel in Europe. In view of that, would not further capacity cuts in Britain be nonsense? Is it not in our interest for the quota system to be ended so that British industry can use its competitive strength?

Mr. Channon: I am not sure about the hon. Gentleman's last point, but I agree that the British Steel Corporation is highly competitive. As I said, any future reductions must be within the framework of that strategy.

Mr. Hickmet: Is not the BSC the most profitable steel business in Europe? In that context, if there have to be capacity cuts, to pursue the point made by the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. Crowther), are we not the best placed in Europe to compete against the European steel producers? Accordingly, we should not go along the lines of the Eurofer proposals. Let us do away with quotas and price restraints. We are more competitive than the European steel producers and we can beat the pants off them. Why should we cut capacity when the Italian, French and German industries are almost bankrupt and are inefficient?

Mr. Channon: My hon. Friend makes many important points. The Eurofer proposals have not yet been presented in their final form. There is an advantage to the United Kingdom having as stable a market as possible, and I agree with my hon. Friend about the great success of the BSC over the past years. I am grateful for his robust support.

Mr. Williams: Will the Secretary of State bear in mind that it is no reassurance for him to say that anything done will be done within the context of the strategy already agreed, because within that we have Ravenscraig, which has a guarantee that runs out next year? Therefore, if there were to be cuts on the scale that is envisaged, Ravenscraig would be vulnerable. Will he give us an assurance here and now, so that it can be understood in Brussels, that if figures of the magnitude being talked about in the press and in Brussels come forward, they will have to be without any co-operation from this country and we shall not accept any share of them?

Mr. Channon: I have already tried to explain that Eurofer has not yet put forward proposals. It has been invited to submit more detailed proposals by the beginning of March, in co-operation with the independent producers, as appropriate. Any contribution that the BSC has to make would have to be consistent with the present strategy, and it cannot prejudice any subsequent strategy agreed between it and the Government.

Caterpillar Co., Uddingston

4. **Mr. Fatchett** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on what action the Government propose to take as a result of the announcement of the proposed closure of the Caterpillar factory at Uddingston.

15. **Mr. Stan Thorne** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when his Department was informed about the proposed closure of the Caterpillar factory in Scotland.

17. **Mr. Wareing** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when any representative of his Department last met any representative of the Caterpillar Co. Ltd. to discuss the future of the company.

The Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry (Mr. Giles Shaw): My Department was informed on 13 January. I attended the meeting between my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and the president of Caterpillar on 20 January. DTI officials, together with Scottish Office officials, last met senior representatives of the company on 2 February. While I greatly regret the decision, and the manner in which it was taken, it is ultimately a commercial issue for the company to resolve. I have no plans at present for further discussions with Caterpillar, but in the time available before the planned closure takes place the possibilities for maintaining manufacturing operations and employment at Uddingston will be urgently explored. To this end, my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland has put in hand a study of the facility and its marketability.

Mr. Fatchett: While it is possible to understand the desire of Trade and Industry Ministers to hide behind the embarrassment of the Secretary of State for Scotland, is it not about time that the Minister did something in these circumstances and took some action? Is this another case of the Department washing its hands of British manufacturing industry, and a further sign of the Government's planned retreat from manufacture?

Mr. Shaw: No, Sir. I robustly deny those accusations. I make it clear that we stand solidly behind the actions of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, in seeking to persuade the company to review and reverse its decision. It is not just my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland but my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister who has written to the Caterpillar company on this issue, seeking a review of the decision. As the hon. Gentleman fully understands, at the end of the day the company has to arrive at a decision in relation to its assets.

Mr. Thorne: What public funds were put into this company and how were they used?

Mr. Shaw: There is another question on the Order Paper which relates to that. The hon. Member will be aware that when public funds are invested in a company and when closure takes place, rules apply for the recovery of such funds as are then extant.

Mr. Wareing: Is the Minister aware that it is less than four months since the executive vice-president of Caterpillar promised that there would be a £1 billion funding of schemes at all of the company's 30 sites throughout the world, and that that included a £62 million investment at Uddington? Is it not an absolute shambles when the Government are prepared to be a doormat for the Americans and to resign their public responsibility? Are we now to see all such machinery imported into this country? Do the Government not have a responsibility, if only for the balance of payments implications?

Mr. Shaw: I cannot agree with the hon. Gentleman. I must remind him that there is massive investment in Britain by American companies to provide jobs in most important parts of our manufacturing industry. In this case the company took a decision to make the investment in good faith last Sepetember and then apparently reviewed again its worldwide capacity. That is what gave rise to a change in the decision that the company announced. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland rightly took the view that the company's review of capacity was hardly compatible with the decision about the investment. I wholly share that view.

Sir Hector Monro: In this serious situation created by Caterpillar, will my hon. Friend bear in mind that, proportionately, some areas where there are factories supplying major components to Caterpillar are equally severely hit? Will he extend the area of the inquiry by his hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland to those areas as well?

Mr. Shaw: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that observation, and I shall certainly pass it to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland.

Mr. James Hamilton: As the Minister has correctly said, he met the president of Caterpillar in London about the proposed closure. Since that meeting has he made any overtures to the Americans, because there is no possible chance of anything happening if he does business with the local management? Their jobs are also on the line. Does the hon. Gentleman not think that at this stage the Government should try every possible way to get a meeting with the Americans to try to persuade them to keep the factory open in the interests of the 1,221 workers who are employed there?

Mr. Shaw: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that in response to the pressure applied by the Secretary of State for Scotland there was a meeting with the president and a team from Peoria who came over here for these discussions. He will be further aware that as a result of that meeting the company was asked to review and reverse its decision. That request was backed up by a letter from the Prime Minister. The company reviewed the matter but, unfortunately, it decided to confirm the decision. As far as I am aware, no further meetings are planned at the sort of level to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Mr. Hirst: Does my hon. Friend agree that Caterpillar has behaved dishonourably and deplorably, first in accepting a generous offer of financial support for its major investment programme and, secondly, in abruptly cancelling the programme and announcing the closure of the plant? Bearing in mind that no Government can oblige a multinational company to remain in the United Kingdom, will my hon. Friend remind the Opposition that Ministers from the Prime Minister down have done all that they possibly can to persuade Caterpillar to change its mind, and that the Government have acted with commendable speed in putting in contingency plans to maintain manufacturing operations and employment at Uddingston?

Mr. Shaw: There is no doubt that my hon. Friend makes an eloquent case, and by raising the matter recently on the Adjournment he demonstrated his commitment to this issue. I can assure him that my right hon. and hon. Friends at the Scottish Office and others have played a significant part in trying to reverse the Caterpillar decision. As my hon. Friend says, this is ultimately a matter for the company. Having met, in company with my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, representatives of the Caterpillar work force who came to the Ravenscraig plant on Monday, I can quite understand the real anger that they have been evincing.

Mr. Wilson: Does the Minister not fully understand the utter outrage and lack of comprehension in Scotland about the fact that this factory, which was supposed to have been boosted by a £62 million investment programme and which is already very modern, is now to be closed? Does he not realise that this may well be a consequence of the cut in regional development grant affecting Scotland? Furthermore, as there is now a Scotland-England divide in terms of unemployment, will the Government do something to prevent yet another plug being pulled on the Scottish economy?

Mr. Shaw: I understand the hon. Gentleman's intemperance on these issues, but he will know that much of the last part of his question is a matter not for me but for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland. With regard to his first comments, there has been a full discussion of the issues involved in this case and there is no question but that this issue has raised a very real question mark over the extent to which such investments can be guaranteed by those who are making the decision. However, it is a fact that manufacturing industry in this country is subject to major competitive pressures, and certainly the manufacture of heavy equipment such as this is not exempt from those pressures. The review of worldwide capacity has nothing to do with regional grant policy in Scotland.

Mr. John Smith: Does the Minister believe for one moment that an assessment of worldwide capacity changed so dramatically in a matter of weeks? Does he not appreciate that the Caterpillar company has deceived the Government, the unions, the work force and the local management in a wholly calculating and ruthless manner? Surely it is not tolerable for a multinational company to abandon the interests of a work force and community which has given 30 years' service to that company. Does the Minister not understand that only a week or so ago the Secretary of State for Scotland was assuring Scottish Members that the decision was not accepted by the Government, and that only yesterday the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland confirmed that? The hon. Gentleman appears to be taking a different line today. What is the Government's policy, and what action do the Government propose to take in the face of a company which has deliberately and calculatingly deceived them and this country?

Mr. Shaw: I note the right hon. and learned Gentleman's comments. I take it that he is making an extremely strong attack upon the way in which the investment was made and the consequences in the light of the decision that the company has taken. I feel that I should warn the right hon. and learned Gentleman about whether those remarks will have a beneficial effect on American investment in Scotland. There are very real issues at stake. The fact is that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland does not believe that the end of the road is nigh. He has not been persuaded of the company's statement that ultimately it has to close. Not many people can be persuaded of that. However, the realism has to be faced. The company has taken that decision, it has been asked to review it, has reviewed it and has confirmed it. In the statement issued by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland he makes it clear that while my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State remains unpersuaded regarding the company's decision to close at Uddingston, it is most important now to use the time available before the planned closure takes place to explore all possibilities for maintaining manufacturing operations and employment at the Uddingston facility. That is the policy being pursued, and it is the correct policy.

Civil Protection

5. **Mr. Gerald Bowden** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make it his policy to promote the formation of a consultative body consisting of representatives of the trade unions, industry and his Department to co-ordinate the role of industry in civil protection.

Mr. Pattie: No, Sir.

Mr. Bowden: I must confess to being somewhat disappointed with my right hon. Friend's reply. Does he not recognise the importance of the fact that all parties to industry should be prepared for emergencies and should plan for disasters. Against the background of the new responsibility of so many local authorities, is it not right that my hon. Friend's Department should give some lead in those consultations?

Mr. Pattie: What my hon. Friend asks is not to deny that the civil contingencies unit exists and that the Government engage in planning for the sort of eventuality

that he describes. In response to the second part of his question, I should say that information that enables worthwhile civil contingencies plans to be drawn up is not made any easier by the fact that certain local authorities seem to decide that they will not co-operate in the provision of the necessary information.

Rover Group

6. **Mrs. Clwyd** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions he has had with the trade unions concerning the recently announced redundancies at Rover.

Mr. Channon: I met a delegation including trade union representatives from Leyland Trucks yesterday, led by my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins).

Mrs. Clwyd: Does the Minister not realise that contrary to the announcement made three weeks ago by Mr. Graham Day and the Government that 1,265 staff jobs were to be lost through voluntary redundancy only 300 people have volunteered so far? Does he not realise the anxiety and distress that will be caused to families in Oxford and Birmingham if compulsory redundancies have to be forced through?

Mr. Channon: Of course I understand that, and the hon. Lady is right to say that those are the facts. However, we are less than four weeks into the 90-day period allowed for responding and the company tells me that it will continue to work hard to achieve the total by voluntary means. I hope that that will be possible. The hon. Lady will be encouraged by the fact that the week before last 500 extra people were taken on at Cowley, so there is good news as well as bad.

Mr. Robert Atkins: Is my right hon. Friend aware that I am particularly grateful, as are the members of the delegation who came to see him yesterday, for the way in which he received them and heard their representations? Does he recognise that it is a continuing cry of many trade union leaders that the consultation they receive from the top of Leyland vehicles is perhaps not as good as it should be? Therefore, I am grateful to him, on their behalf as well as mine, for the fact that we have been able to arrange a meeting with Graham Day tomorrow, so that the trade unions may put their case to him. Which will be beneficial for future consultations on the future of the company.

Mr. Channon: Consultation is a matter for the company and the unions to resolve under the normal consultation procedures, but I am pleased that a delegation is to be received tomorrow and I am certain that that point will be debated.

Mr. Norris: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the evidence of 400 redundancies to be called for among white-collar workers at Cowley, followed by the announcement of 500 new production jobs there, is evidence of a company which is at last coming to terms with its management costs and production effectiveness? Does he agree that that is an encouraging sign for future prospects?

Mr. Channon: My hon. Friend has a point. It has been extremely encouraging to see since Christmas an important improvement in the Rover Group's market share. That is encouraging and bodes well for the future of the company.

Mr. Wrigglesworth: When the Secretary of State next meets the trade unions, will he reaffirm the Government's commitment to sustain the Rover Group as a volume producer on into the future? With that in mind, will he give a clear commitment to support the company's plans to introduce the AR6 Metro replacement, which will be a vital component in retaining the Rover Group as a volume producer?

Mr. Channon: I think that the hon. Gentleman was present last week when I announced the acceptance of the Rover Group's corporate plan in its totality, so I can assure him that I am backing that company. I also answered questions on that detailed point last week. We are doing exactly what the Rover company has asked us.

Mr. Roger King: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the delight and satisfaction of the trade unions within the west midlands area at his statement last week, which gives them the confidence on which to build a successful business in liaison with DAF trucks and as part of the Rover Group?

Mr. Channon: The Government have done everything in their power to help the Rover Group and now it is up to it to win its share in the market place. I see no reason why it should not do so.

Mr. Terry Davis: If the Government and Mr. Graham Day want to improve the quality of Austin Rover vehicles, does it make sense to sack engineering and technical staff?

Mr. Channon: That must be a matter for the company. It must decide on the best commercial prospects for it and the best way to realise them. The hon. Gentleman will not expect me to run the company; it is for the management to run it. If he has a detailed point that he wants to raise, perhaps he will be good enough to write to me.

Mr. John Mark Taylor: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it would also be constructive and sympathetic to the original question to point out that in the midlands there are additionally in the private sector 700 jobs available at Jaguar, which is released from the Leyland Group?

Mr. Channon: That is a very good point. I notice that we do not hear so much about Jaguar from the Opposition Benches. I never quite understand why.

Securities and Investments Board

7. **Mr. Cash** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has received any representations concerning the Securities and Investments Board's application to be the designated regulatory body for the financial services sector referred to in his answer on 10 February, *Official Report*, column *165*, to the hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson).

10. **Mr. Hanley** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson) on 10 February, *Official Report*, column *165*, if he is now in a position to make a statement on progress on his consideration of the Securities and Investments Board's application to be considered as the designated agency for the regulation of the financial services sector.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Michael Howard): My right hon. Friend received the SIB's request for transfer of powers on 10

February. As required by the Financial Services Act, my right hon. Friend has sent to the Director General of Fair Trading a copy of the material submitted by the SIB. My right hon. Friend and I have received a number of letters concerning the SIB's proposals, which will be fully considered. If, after considering the Director General's report and any other points put to him, my right hon. Friend is satisfied that the requirements of the Act have been met, he will lay the necessary order as soon as possible.

Mr. Cash: Will my hon. and learned Friend confirm that important questions on competition arise in relation to these rules? Will he confirm that it is the intention that the smaller bodies, those which do not necessarily come within the more recognised activities but which nevertheless are important, should be maintained and need to have a fair opportunity to get into the financial services sector? Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that we should do nothing that would in any way discriminate against those bodies and that we should make sure that they have a fair deal together with everybody else?

Mr. Howard: Yes. These are matters which, no doubt, the Director General of Fair Trading will look at in the context of competition. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will consider his report carefully, paying particular attention to the considerations to which my hon. Friend has referred.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: How does the Minister distinguish between the powers of the Securities and Investments Board, the powers of Department of Trade and Industry inspectors and the powers of the fraud squad? Why does the hon. and learned Gentleman not let the fraud squad go into Guinness to sort it out? Is it that the Government are deliberately trying to duck a full investigation into what is going on in that company?

Mr. Howard: It is difficult to see how this matter arises out of the Securities and Investments Board's proposals. The position on Guinness is that, as soon as it is appropriate for the fraud squad to be involved in criminal aspects of the investigation, it will be.

Mr. Hanley: Does my hon. and learned Friend agree with the article in *The Guardian* on 9 February to the effect that the SEC's embarrassment over the Boesky affair shows that no matter what form of legal framework one has, and no matter what sort of sophisticated computers one uses, what is needed is not that sort of framework but political will? Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that the Financial Services Act contains that political will? Will he assure the House that the Act will be implemented as quickly as possible?

Mr. Howard: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I can certainly give him that assurance. The article in *The Guardian* to which he referred was particularly interesting. After an analysis of the differences between our system and the SEC, it concluded:

"None of this seems terribly encouraging for advocates in Britain of an SEC."

Mr. Nelson: I welcome the proposal to transfer these powers to the SIB. Will my hon. and learned Friend confirm that all the additional powers which were enabled to be transferred to the SIB will, in fact, be transferred and that the SIB will be a watchdog that is able to bite as well as to bark? In particular, following the whingeing of some of the major banks about how they will be prejudicially affected by the polarisation issues, will my hon. and learned Friend give an assurance, as requested by my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash), that the smaller entrants, especially the independent intermediaries, will not be prejudicially affected by any such order?

Mr. Howard: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will, of course, carefully consider all the applications which have been made by the SIB for the transfer of particular powers in the Act. Of course, my right hon. Friend will have full regard to the interests of the intermediaries, to which my hon. Friend referred, in the light of such considerations as may be drawn to his attention by the Director General of Fair Trading.

Mr. Robin Cook: Does the Minister never read the business pages? Against the background of the City scandals which have dominated those pages, does the hon. and learned Gentleman really intend to ask the House to approve the desgination of a board which will not comprise public servants, the only formal status of which is as a private company limited by guarantee, whose only income will be from the City that it is supposed to police, and which will have no powers over the takeover panel or Lloyd's insurance, where the worst scandals have occurred? Why do the Government now insist that trade unions need an independent statutory commission, but say that regulation of the City can be left to self-regulation by their friends there? Why do the Government not accept that the City needs a system of supervision at least as tough as the system that they are imposing on the trade union movement?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that to characterise the system under the Financial Services Act 1986 as self-regulation is a gross misnomer. He knows that a firm and tough statutory framework is provided by the Act. When I invited the hon. Gentleman in the last debate that we had on this matter in the House to identify a single power that resided in the SEC that was not in the possession of the SIB, the only power that he rose to mention was a power that the SEC does not possess.

Research and Development (Departmental Expenditure)

8. **Mr. Brandon-Bravo** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received concerning spending by his Department on support for research and development in the current year.

Mr. Channon: My Department has received a number of representatives, including from the technology requirements board which was set up to advise me on the development and implementation of policy for industrial research and development.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: I know my right hon. Friend will agree that no one underestimates, or should underestimate, the role of research and development. Can he give us any figures today on how current R and D compares with the position five or 10 years ago? Can he also comment on the co-ordination that exists in R and D between his Department of State and others? I am sure that my right hon. Friend will agree that there can be no more vital a subject for the welfare of the nation.

Mr. Channon: I agree with my hon. Friend. There is frequent co-ordination and the very closest collaboration between my Department and other Departments involved in research and development. That collaboration has never been greater than it is at present. With regard to the first part of my hon. Friend's question, my Department's support for R and D has trebled in cash terms and doubled in real terms since 1979. It will further increase from £383 million in the current year to £445 million in 1989-90.

Mr. Cyril Smith: Can the Secretary of State explain why his Department refused to finance research and development into the oil and gas engine industry, especially when that development would lead to the creation of a new manufacturing base in the north of England for the next 50 years? Is he aware that the information that he has been given by his departmental officers is wrong and that, as a consequence of his Department refusing to finance that R and D, the Japanese are willing to finance it provided that the manufacturing base is created in Japan and not in this country? Why does the Minister refuse to meet me on this matter? Why does he refuse to meet my constituents who have an interest in this issue?

Mr. Channon: I think that there is a misunderstanding here. I am sorry if the hon. Gentleman feels that we have not offered to meet him. We suggested that when the matters have been clarified—and I have written to the hon. Gentleman and the company about these matters —we shall be delighted to have a meeting at which either one of my hon. Friends or I will discuss the matter with the hon. Gentleman. The hon. Gentleman will understand that the project to which he has referred must offer exceptional national benefits, and the evidence from boiler and burner manufacturers is now being provided. When that arrives, we shall be delighted to look at the matter again.

Viscount Cranborne: Would not British industry be more likely to produce more saleable goods if the Government encouraged it to do a little more of its own research and development instead of relying purely on Government sources?

Mr. Channon: We need both, and my hon. Friend made a good point when he said that expenditure by industry on research and development is, with many shining exceptions, nevertheless still inadequate. I believe that more should be done.

Mr. O'Brien: Will the Secretary of State take note of the representations that he has received from the west Yorkshire area about the need for more research and development following the rundown of the textile and clothing industry and the mining industry? Will he also take note of the representations that he has received, especially from the Wakefield and Dewsbury travel-to-work area, which covers my constituency, where unemployment is now in the region of 16 per cent.? Will he accept that there is a need for further research and development, and will he act to ensure that there is an industrial base in the area to ensure job opportunities?

Mr. Channon: I shall certainly consider the points that the hon. Gentleman has referred to, and any others that he may care to raise with me. It is common ground on both sides of the House that there should be more expenditure by industry on research and development.

Dr. Hampson: Is my right hon. Friend aware that because of the decline of traditional industries in the Yorkshire and Humberside region there has been a fall of about 35 per cent. in employment in six years, whereas the business expansion scheme seems to have gone to service industries in London and the south-east to the tune of more than 60 per cent.? Will he give an undertaking that his Department will look at the impact of the various schemes on the north and its industries at and particularly the eligibility of Yorkshire and Humberside for the new EEC Comett scheme — the Community action programme for education and training in technology?

Mr. Channon: Of course I shall look at that, as my hon. Friend asks me to do so. I have seen the figures for the amount of money going to the south as opposed to the north. One must also consider what applications have been received. This is a complex matter which we are studying in detail.

Mr. Williams: Does the Secretary of State accept that not only do we have a smaller GDP than Japan, Germany and the United States of America, but that we spend a smaller proportion of it on research and development, with the inevitable and inexorable result that we are slipping further behind in our competitiveness in high technology? Does he also accept that an even more insidious and dangerous consequence is the accelerating brain drain, which is demonstrated by the fact that 20 per cent. of elected fellows of the Royal Society who were educated in Britain are permanently resident abroad?

Mr. Channon: I am extremely surprised that any member of the Labour party dares to talk about the brain drain. The Labour Government's policies of high taxation, which the party promises to introduce, caused the brain drain of the past. If the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) had his way, the brain drain would become a brain flood. That must be common ground.

As for the proportion of national output spent on research and development, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave some specific examples of this in questions last Thursday. It is more complex than the right hon. Gentleman suggests.

Takeover Bids (Costs)

9. **Mr. Peter Bruinvels** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will introduce legislation to empower the Monopolies and Mergers Commission to order a company whose takeover bid has been judged to be against the public interest to reimburse any reasonable costs incurred by the company or companies which were the subject of that takeover bid; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: I have noted my hon. Friend's suggestion, which will be considered in the work of the Department's present review of law and policy on mergers and restrictive trade practices.

Mr. Bruinvels: Does my hon. and learned Friend accept that there has been a substantial increase in the number of takeover bids, both hostile and against the public interest? Does he agree that something must be done to help companies which are fighting hostile bids and which are

cramped in their style in terms of taking on staff or of promoting their products because they must fight back through the national media? I cite especially Allied-Lyons.

Mr. Howard: There has been an increase in contested bids, although they are not necessarily against the public interest. My hon. Friend's point will be taken into account in the context of the review, but it is important not to overlook the advantages that can follow takeovers.

Dr. Godman: Would it not be a good idea to recover some of the costs from the predator? For example, now that the Secretary of State has rejected Ferruzzi's bid for the British Sugar Corporation, why should not that Italian company pay some of the costs of its predatory activities in Britain?

Mr. Howard: This point will be considered in the context of the review. When we talk about proposed takeovers of British companies by foreign companies, we should remember that companies from Britain are frequently engaged in similar activities overseas.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Will my hon. and learned Friend confirm that I have written to him in connection with the future of the Manchester Ship Canal Company and the hostile bid for that company from Highams and Mr. John Whittaker, who in my view are involved in unacceptable commerical practices, not least share splitting, in seeking to overrule the long-established articles of association of the company, which were set down to aid and promote the long-term interests of the small shareholder? Will he treat this matter with great urgency, bearing in mind the fact that Highams has sought an extraordinary general meeting on Friday to oust the directors of the Manchester Ship Canal Company and to impose its own? It has little or no interest in the long-term future of the company as a whole, only in its land and assets.

Mr. Howard: I certainly confirm that my hon. Friend has written to me on this matter. Indeed, I hope that by now he has received my reply. I am happy to assure him that the matter is the subject of urgent consideration in my Department.

Mr. John Smith: Does the Minister not yet fully understand that the spate of takeovers that have been permitted in recent months and years has led to chronic "short-termitis" in British industry, which means that companies will not make long-term commitments to capital development, research and development or education and training? Despite all this evidence, why do the Government stick to only one criterion — that of competition? Why do we have to keep reviewing policy? Should it not simply be changed to take account of the industrial realities of Britain today?

Mr. Howard: I do not accept that the consequences of takeovers are as the right hon. and learned Gentleman suggested. It is important not to overlook the beneficial consequences that can flow from takeovers, which can frequently lead to sleepy management being given a shake-up and the assets of the target company being used more productively than would otherwise be the case. Nor is it correct to say that competition is the only criterion on which references are made to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. However, these matters are under review and all aspects are being considered in the context of that review.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that a hostile takeover that concludes in an unsatisfactory manner, which may be unlawful and against the rules of the takeover panel, must eventually, if it damages the locality, be against the public interest? Is that not an area that is new to us and one that we must examine carefully?

Mr. Howard: I agree with my hon. Friend that these matters must be carefully examined, but I am not certain that I can accept his proposition that such a situation will always necessarily be against the public interest.

Counter Trade Agreements

11. **Mr. Kirkwood** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his Department's policy towards counter trade agreements with developing nations.

The Minister for Trade (Mr. Alan Clark): The Government's policy is to support the further development of an open cash-based multilateral trading system. However, counter trade is a requirement in certain markets and I hope that British exporters will consider carefully the commercial opportunities that exist.

Mr. Kirkwood: Does the Minister accept that some Third world countries are obliged to resort to counter trade because they are starved of hard currency? What steps will the Government take against the failure of the Baker proposals, the burgeoning problems of international debt and the lack of financial liquidity in the Third world to promote the open, multilateral cash-based system that he seeks to achieve?

Mr. Clark: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that those offers are most prevalent in Third world, developing countries that are suffering from currency difficulties. My Department offers advice, information and general guidance. We publish an annual guide to counter trade and we also have a list of specialist counter traders to whom the inquirer can refer for further information.

Mr. Robin Cook: Can the Minister confirm that the developing countries are among the few nations with which we have a healthy trade surplus? Will he also confirm that this month's figures show that our deficit with the European Community trebled last year and that our deficit with Japan increased by one fifth? Does his Department have any policy to counter our ballooning trade gap, other than praying that the Prime Minister calls a general election as soon as possible?

Mr. Clark: An election fever-type general question does not sit happily with a detailed, thoughtful, constructive question about counter trade. Were it possible for us to correct some of the imbalances in our internal trade with the European Community by recourse to counter trade, no one would be happier than me.

Mr. Gow: Will my hon. Friend reaffirm the Government's commitment to a policy of free trade? What journeys does my hon. Friend have it in mind to make in these coming months to promote the Government's excellent trade record and enhance his own high reputation?

Mr. Clark: Certainly, on whatever journeys I make, I am always keen to explore all trading opportunities,

especially those in the area of counter trade. That is a growing sector and one in which, as the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) said, the United Kingdom has a favourable balance.

Caterpillar Company Ltd., Uddingston

12. **Mr. Maxton** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much money has been received by the Caterpillar Company Ltd. in Government support since it was established.

Mr. Giles Shaw: It is not customary to provide details of the Department's grants to individual companies beyond the limited information published in "British Business on Regional Development Grants" and certain support schemes under the Industrial Development Act 1982 and its predecessor. This shows that, since 1975, individual direct payments to the Caterpillar Company of sums of over £25,000 of regional development grant have totalled £4·7 million. Offers of selective financial assistance to Caterpillar UK under sections 7 and 8 of the Act, in respect of which some payment has been made, amount to £3 million for investment at Glasgow and Leicester.

Mr. Maxton: In view of the figures and the humiliating defeat for the Secretary of State for Scotland in this matter, what action does the Minister intend to take to try to get some of that money back from Caterpillar? How will he spend that money to ensure that the tragic loss of jobs in Scotland is at least alleviated in some way?

Mr. Shaw: I understand the hon. Gentleman's fair supplementary question. If the company proceeds with its closure, the recovery of earlier grant in respect of the Glasgow plant is a matter for which my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland will be responsible. There are rules regarding repayments, as I said in response to an earlier question. They will indeed be followed.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The House will be reassured by what my hon. Friend has said. In the light of the serious economic consequences for the area if the regrettable closure decision is confirmed, will his Department, with the Scottish Office, sympathetically and urgently review any applications for selective financial assistance for the area that have been turned down in the past few months?

Mr. Shaw: My hon. Friend will be aware that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland is looking urgently at the marketability of the Caterpillar site for the continuation of manufacturing and employment. Obviously, if opportunities attract regional grant I have no doubt that they will be most urgently considered.

Mr. Maclennan: Why were the Government so completely out of touch with the corporate thinking of a company which is so heavily assisted by the Government? Will the Minister comment on the disturbing statements that were made yesterday by the chairman of the company about the future of the Leicestershire plant?

Mr. Shaw: I do not understand the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question. Had he been present earlier when the matter was fully discussed, he may have gained the information that he seeks. If I have misunderstood him, I know that he will write a pertinent letter to me on the issue.

I can confirm that information has been sought and received from the chairman of Caterpillar, which confirms that the commitment to the Leicestershire plant is total. The remarks reported in yesterday's edition of the *Financial Times* about the supposed devaluation of the dollar were made off-the-cuff in reply to a hypothetical question in Las Vegas. It does not appear to me that currency speculation in Las Vegas is always a true record of what takes place.

Manufacturing Output

13. **Mr. Knox** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the most recent figure for output in manufacturing industry; and what was the comparable figure for the same month seven years ago.

Mr. Pattie: The hon. Member will appreciate that monthly data can be erratic. However, since the trough of the recession in 1981 manufacturing output has increased by 14 per cent. to reach a level of 106·0 in December 1986, based on 1980 equal to 100. This was some 5 per cent. lower than the level of output in December 1979. Productivity, however, is now 31 per cent. higher than the 1979 figure.

Mr. Knox: Does my right hon. Friend consider that the present figure and that for seven years ago show that manufacturing industry has made satisfactory progress in the past seven years?

Mr. Pattie: The recent trends show that it is doing so. For the past eight months up to and including December 1986 we have seen consecutive growth in each month in manufacturing output. Indeed, if the forecast in the autumn statement of 4 per cent. growth, which has been confirmed as a forecast by many outside observers, is achieved in 1987 it will be the best year for manufacturing output and growth since 1973.

Mr. Hoyle: Does the Minister agree that he should compare the figure with that of 1979? Is not productivity still below that year's figure? Indeed, if we had an economic recovery, we could not meet the output needed in the steel industry and other basic industries. Is it not once more a case of measuring from a small base, the decline of which must be attributed to the Government?

Mr. Pattie: I said in my first answer, which I am sure the hon. Gentleman heard, that the figures I gave were 5 per cent. lower than the level of output in December 1979. It is somewhat disingenuous of the hon. Gentleman to suggest that what happened in the 18-month period from May 1979 was anything other than the consequence of the Labour Government.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the companies which have come through the trauma of the recession are now more competitive and have better prospects than before? In particular, the companies which have kept themselves to the forefront of technology have prospered. In Lincoln, in the past seven years Marconi has doubled its employment and has more than doubled the value of its output.

Mr. Pattie: There are many examples, like those that my hon. Friend adduced. We can all express satisfaction about GEC's record in Lincoln.

Airbus Project

Mr. Allen Adams asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received about Government support for the Airbus project.

Mr. Channon: My Department has received representations about the provision of Government support for the Airbus A330/A340 project from a number of hon. Members, from trades union representatives and from others with an interest in these projects, including Airbus Industrie and British Aerospace.

Mr. Adams: Following the successful launch last week of the A320, will the Secretary of State assure the House of the Government's continuing financial support for the A330 and the A340? Will he also assure the House that the Government will continue to resist American pressure—pressure that seems to be absolutely determined to destroy, once and for all, the British aircraft industry?

Mr. Channon: Yes, on the latter point I can certainly give the hon. Gentleman that assurance. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Information Technology met American trade officials on 2 February and made that absolutely clear. As to the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question, I think the House knows that the Government are considering an application at this time, and I shall bear the hon. Gentleman's views in mind.

Mr. Sackville: Does my right hon. Friend agree that among the many reasons why the A330 and the A340 should be supported is the fact that they will end the Boeing monopoly on the long-haul airliner market, a monopoly that Boeing abused, to the detriment of the aerospace industry in Britain and in Europe?

Mr. Channon: I shall certainly bear that point of view in mind, too.

Mr. Pike: In dealing with the application this time, will the Secretary of State not be quite so slow as the Government were about the Airbus 320, which is already proving to be such a major success? The A330 and the A340 are vital to the aerospace industries in this country. The whole country is waiting for a favourable decision—for the Government to say yes and to allow British Aerospace and all the other companies to go ahead.

Mr. Channon: I assure the hon. Gentleman that we shall reach a decision within a reasonable time scale. This is a very big decision. It involves a great deal of money. The taxpayers' interests are involved. It is very important that it should be considered very carefully, but there will be no undue delay.

Mr. Warren: Having visited Airbus in Toulouse yesterday, may I tell my right hon. Friend that a decision by Her Majesty's Government is long overdue and that the whole project is very vulnerable, unless the British Government go ahead? If they do not, the Germans and the French will not pursue either of those projects. Secondly, will my right hon. Friend bring into his consideration the fact that the British equipment industry is not at the moment included in the proposals and that it looks forward to some initiative from Her Majesty's Government to support it?

Mr. Channon: I am sorry to have to disagree with my hon. Friend, but the decision is not overdue. We are acting at the moment in parallel with the decision-making timetables of the French and German Governments and with the collaboration of Airbus Industrie and its partners towards fulfilling the desired conditions for the launch. The A340 specification was changed as recently as December, so I do not think that there has been any undue delay.

Mr. Terry Davis: Given that the uncertainty is causing some damage to the prospects, and given also that the Government are bound to support Airbus and British Aerospace, why will the Secretary of State not stop dithering and announce a decision?

Mr. Channon: I do not know what the hon. Gentleman is talking about. It is causing no damaging uncertainty at all. There is no uncertainty; there is no damage. I am extremely surprised that the House should not wish me to consider carefully an application for the spending of several hundred million pounds of taxpayers' money. It seems to me to be only right that the matter should be very carefully considered. That is what we shall do. We shall announce the Government's decision within a reasonable time.

Statutory Auditors (Education and Training)

16. **Mr. Hirst** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to announce his response to the representations which he has received on his Department's consultative document on the European Community's eighth directive.

Mr. Howard: I shall make an announcement as soon as possible. My hon. Friend will appreciate, though, that it may take some time to complete our analysis of the many responses to the consultative document and carry out such further consultations with the accountancy profession and other representative bodies as may be desirable before decisions on future policy can be taken.

Mr. Hirst: I am grateful to my hon. and learned Friend for his reply. However, will he confirm that the overwhelming consensus of the representations that he has received through his Department's consultation paper have confirmed that there should not be a rotation of auditors and, moreover, that there should not be any ban on accounting firms being able to offer a range of professional services to their clients?

Mr. Howard: As the analysis is not yet complete, I am not sure that I can accede to my hon. Friend's question in quite the terms that he puts it. However, I can tell him that the suggestions to which he has referred have proved to be somewhat less than universally popular.

North of England (Economic and Industrial Expansion)

18. **Mr. Lawler** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures are being taken by the Government to foster economic growth and industrial expansion in the north of England.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Recognising its problems, we redesignated many parts of the north of England as assisted areas following the 1984 review of regional industrial policy. Taking the north as the north-east, north-west and Yorkshire and Humberside regions, 70 per cent. of its working population are within assisted areas.

Since 1979 firms in the north have benefited from nearly £2 billion of regional assistance, creating or safeguarding around 219,000 jobs.

Mr. Lawler: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that answer, which shows that he is only too well aware of the problems in the northern cities. Does he agree that constant talk of the north as a depressed region only perpetuates its negative image? Instead, will he support Bradford's approach, which, through its "Bradford's Bouncing Back" campaign, highlights the positive aspects of economic life in that city?

Mr. Shaw: I totally agree with my hon. Friend. It is ridiculous that we should, as it were, attempt to paint the north as an area where there are clogs and cloth caps and nothing else. "Bradford's Bouncing Back" is assuredly an exceptionally fine slogan. If Bradford bounces back, Pudsey will prosper too.

Mr. Gordon Brown: Given the catastrophic fall in the real value of manufacturing investment in the north of 41 per cent. since 1979, what is the sense of the 50 per cent. cut over the coming year in the value of regional development grants, especially as they have been halved since 1979? If the Minister will not support the Labour party's proposals for a northern development agency, will he at least listen to the proposals from the unholy alliance of the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) and the right hon. and learned Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Brittan), who now support, outside the Cabinet, proposals for development agencies which they did not support when they were in the Cabinet?

Mr. Shaw: I cannot disagree more with the hon. Gentleman. It is a fact that we are engaged in developing a number of agencies which can promote beneficial investment in the regions. As the Northern Development Company is one of those, he will be aware that it is a substantial recipient of Government funds. The budget proposition made by the company is currently under discussion and I hope to make an announcement very soon.

Cancer Screening and AIDS Research

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Social Services (Mr. Norman Fowler): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a statement on health developments in cancer screening and AIDS research.

The Government attach particular importance to reducing death from breast cancer and cervical cancer. In both cases early detection can lead to successful treatment. Breast cancer is the commonest form of cancer among women in this country. Each year there are something like 24,000 new cases, and 15,000 deaths, from the disease. In July 1985, the Government appointed a working group under the chairmanship of Sir Patrick Forrest to consider the position. I am today publishing its final report and I would like to express the Government's thanks to the group for its work.

The report has concluded that screening by mammography—X-ray of the breasts—will enable us to reduce deaths from breast cancer. The Government accept the proposals made in the report and accordingly have decided to implement a national breast cancer screening service. This will provide for screening every three years for all women between 50 and 64 throughout the United Kingdom. My colleagues, the Secretaries of State for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, will be putting into effect proposals broadly similar to those I am announcing. We are determined that breast cancer screening should be implemented as efficiently, as effectively and as quickly as possible. This will need careful planning to ensure that all the necessary back-up facilities, as well as the screening centres, are available. It will mean assessment and diagnostic facilities, treatment facilities, counselling and after-care and training for key groups of staff. We have, therefore, decided to provide additional funds for each regional health authority to have at least one centre in operation within the next 12 months. The funds will also enable four of these centres to provide a training facility for the whole country. We shall expect the locations of the first centres to be announced by May of this year. An extra £6 million will be provided in 1987-88 for the first centres.

In addition, I shall shortly be sending to the professions and to health authorities a draft circular containing my detailed proposals for implementing breast cancer screening in England. I shall be calling for plans before the end of this year from each region to extend the service over the next three years to cover all women in the age groups concerned. The report envisages that up to 100 centres are likely to be needed in England. I shall also be setting up an advisory committee to advise on the development of screening and to monitor its effectiveness and efficiency. Breast cancer is a major scourge. We believe that these measures will achieve a substantial reduction in the mortality from this disease among women of this age group.

Cervical cancer kills 2,000 women each year and we are no less committed to reducing that figure. The great majority of those 2,000 deaths are among women who have never had a cervical smear under the existing screening programme. We have already taken urgent steps to increase the effectiveness of that programme and, in particular, to increase the proportion of the population at risk who are being screened. Computerised call and recall systems should be operating in 109 health authorities in England by next month and in the remaining 82 over the next 12 months. They will enable women to be sent personal screening invitations, usually from their own general practitioners.

Our first priority is to persuade more women to come forward for screening. We shall closely monitor the success of the system and we shall keep under review ways of making further improvements. In addition, I shall be asking health authorities to make two specific changes. First, since the number of cases among younger women has been increasing, health authorities should rationalise existing arrangements for screening women under 35 by ensuring that the call and recall system begins at the age of 20. Second, I shall be asking each health authority to make a specific named individual responsible and accountable for the organisation and effectiveness of screening.

Our proposals for both breast and cervical cancer screening take account of the wide range of evidence available from other countries. I am convinced that these proposals will make a substantial contribution to the cause of women's health, which is a key priority for the Government.

On AIDS research, as the House is aware, there is at present no vaccine against the virus or cure for AIDS. It is for that reason that the Government have mounted their major public education campaign. It is also important, in addition, that we in this country should make an effective contribution to the international effort to develop a vaccine and a cure.

In recognition of that need, the Medical Research Council has recommended a new directed research programme aimed both at developing a vaccine that will prevent infection and also at new anti-viral drugs to treat people who are already infected. The research would be directed from the centre by two scientific steering committees, which will consist of some of the country's leading scientists. There will be two specially appointed full-time directors and the programme will be built up by letting specific contracts to the most appropriate laboratory — public or private. That proposal goes beyond the usual approach of research initiated by the investigator.

The Government are extremely grateful to the MRC for taking a lead in formulating those proposals, which are based on wide consultations among outstanding British scientists by Sir James Gowans, the secretary of the MRC, with Sir David Phillips, the chairman of the Advisory Board for the Research Councils. This country has scientific strengths that should enable it to make a distinctive contribution to those important lines of research. The Government commend the readiness of the scientific community to collaborate in tackling this major problem.

Accordingly, the Government welcome the proposal and accept it in full. We will, therefore, launch in 1987-88, through the Medical Research Council, a new directed research programme on the lines that the council has proposed. For this purpose my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science will increase the grant in aid to the MRC by £14½ million over the next three yeas. The grant in aid will go up by £2·5 million in 1987-88, by £5 million in 1988-89 and by £7 million in 1989-90. The programme will be closely monitored by the council, with my Department and the Department of Education and Science. This will enable us to review

[Mr. Norman Fowler]

progress against results. I should make it clear that the directed research programme will not affect or hinder any research initiatives by pharmaceutical companies.

The new programme should not be seen as an isolated venture. It is not. It will be part of an international research effort. We will build on the work already done, especially in the United States, and in turn contribute to the international body of research information that is being built up. In the United States, all the medical scientists whom I met in my recent visit were unanimous in their view that the United Kingdom could indeed make a distinctive contribution to AIDS reseach.

The House will appreciate that it is impossible to predict the progress of that research. In earlier statements I have made it clear that we cannot expect a vaccine or cure to be generally available within five years. But this programme will help us to make progress in three ways. It will enable this country to make a full contribution to AIDS research; it will mean that we are better placed to collaborate with, and benefit from, work that is being done in other countries; and it will increase the chances of developing a vaccine and finding a cure. I hope that the House will welcome the new proposals.

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): Is the Secretary of State aware that, while we certainly welcome the increase in AIDS research moneys now being made available, even with that new input, it is still far, far less than other countries—*[Interruption.]*—it is still far, far less than other countries are allocating for this purpose, and also far, far less as a proportion of the health budget than public concern demands in this country? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the United States is currently spending over $340 million on AIDS research, while his own parliamentary answer to me a week ago said that AIDS research so far in this country totalled precisely £¼ million?

Is the Secretary of State aware that, even after today's increase, expenditure on AIDS research in this country will still constitute less than one 20th of 1 per cent. of the health budget, which is far, far less than the priority allocated to it in other countries? Is he aware that the Medical Research Council has stated that £20 million funding is required to find a vaccine and to develop new drugs, and that the MRC's budget could not cope with that? Will he give an assurance that the extra funding for AIDS announced today will not have any knock-on effect in reducing medical research in other areas?

What positive action are the Government taking to develop and distribute the drug AZT, where some promising trials have halted virus replication? What other specific research will be directed at a therapy to regenerate the damaged immune system? Will the right hon. Gentleman also say what action the Government propose to take to overcome the reluctance of drug companies to undertake the necessary research work because of the dangers of litigation if the vaccine has unforeseen effects?

On breast cancer screening, is the Secretary of State aware that the extra funds announced today, again very welcome as they are, will fund only about seven new centres to add to the present two? Is he aware that that is a grossly inadequate response to the Forrest report, when 5,000 women have died of breast cancer while the Government have been sitting on that report since last year? Is the right hon. Gentleman further aware that when one in 12 women get breast cancer, and when it is the leading cause of death among 35 to 54-year-olds, the £6 million announced today will fund only a very small part of what a potential effective screening programme could achieve? What specific commitment is the right hon. Gentleman making today for the vast bulk of the extra funds that will be needed.

Is the Secretary of State aware that the £6 million announced today will not even fund screening for all women over 50 when the success rate from screening is as high as 40 per cent? Is the right hon. Gentleman further aware that one third of the mammogram machines in this country are obsolete, and the Government currently provide only one 10th of German provision? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the £6 million cannot possibly fund the training and employment of the extra radiographers, the doctors to analyse the X-rays, the laboratory staff to test the tissue, and the female counsellors needed?

Is the Secretary of State aware that when, six years ago, the Government instructed district health authorities to set up call and recall systems for cervical cancer but failed fully to fund the development, by last year only one-sixth of those authorities had done so? Is it not clear that underfunding today will have the same tragic consequences?

Mr. Fowler: That was a disappointing and grudging response. The hon. Gentleman will not have the support of any informed commentator outside the House for what he said about AIDS and breast cancer, and some of the charges that he made are simply untrue and misleading. If the hon. Gentleman reads the Forrest report, he will find that what we are doing is exctly in line with what the Forrest committee has proposed. I shall take the hon. Gentleman's points, such as they were, in turn.

The hon. Gentleman asked about finance. We are making available £14·5 million over the next three years. That is additional money for the Medical Research Council, which is exactly what it has asked for. In other words, we are responding in full to its request. If the hon. Gentleman wants to challenge that, I suggest that he checks with the Medical Research Council. He is misleading himself and the House.

The United States has a bigger overall research budget, but a comparatively small percentage of that budget is going into vaccine development. In other words, gaps in the programme have been identified, not least by medical scientists in the United States. My announcement today will put Britain in a leading position in Europe. I would have expected the Opposition to have welcomed that rather than criticised it.

The Committee on Safety of Medicines will be taking a decision on AZT shortly—in the next few days—and we will then make our position clear.

The overall research budget of the private pharmaceutical industry is about £500 million. Not all of that figure, but an increasing percentage of it, will be spent on AIDS research.

With regard to breast cancer, I repeat that we are meeting in full what the Forrest committee has put to us. In 1987-88, £6 million will be available. In 1988-89, a further £13 million will be required. In 1989-90, £22 million will be required. Those resources will be made available so that we can have a screening service

throughout the country. I ask the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) to understand that what we are announcing is a major step forward for millions of women in Britian. The hon. Gentleman's response to both parts of the statement was inadequate and totally worthless.

Dame Jill Knight (Birmingham, Edgbaston): Will my right hon. Friend tell the House a little more about the sum that is to be spent—I think that he said it was £14·5 million over three years — on AIDS research? He mentioned international co-operation. Will he tell us whether, and to what extent, there is international co-ordination, or will we be spending part of that £14·5 million on carrying out the same research that is being done in other countries?

Mr. Fowler: There is co-ordination between the World Health Organisation, Governments and organisations in different countries. On medical vaccine, we will want to keep closely in touch — as will the Medical Research Council—with the World Health Organisation on what is happening inside the United States. We will take every precaution to prevent duplication of research.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell (South Down): Is the Secretary of State in a position to tell us when and in what form parallel statements about cancer screening in other parts of the United Kingdom will be made?

Mr. Fowler: I understand that my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Northern Ireland will make announcements, probably in the form of written answers, which will be based on what I have announced on the Floor of the House.

Mr. Roger Sims (Chislehurst): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, in contrast to the churlish response from the Opposition Front Bench, his announcement was welcomed on this side of the House on all three fronts? Is he further aware that in my constituency there is some concern at the delay in results from cervical smear tests? To what extent will what he has told us help to accelerate the results of those tests for women who spend an anxious time waiting for the outcome? Is my right hon. Friend aware of the work done by the organisation Quest for a test for cancer, which has developed an automated form of testing? To what extent, if any, will what he has announced this afternoon assist that organisation, either directly or through the MRC, in evaluating that test?

Mr. Fowler: I would need to give consideration to my hon. Friend's last point. On the first point, I accept the backlogs to which he refers as being one of the problems that we have had to encounter. The backlogs are being tackled by the districts, and they are recruiting more staff. The latest information that we have appears to show that the backlogs are decreasing. Clearly that is important. The priority must be not only to increase the numbers coming for tests but to improve the cervical cancer screening system overall so that we get a better system. It is worth remembering that annual deaths from cervical cancer have reduced by almost 10 per cent. since 1978. That is an improvement, but we want to decrease the number of deaths still further.

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): Any advance in cervical and breast cancer screening is welcome and overdue. Is the Secretary of State aware that the other major killer of women is lung cancer? He will be aware that most cigarette advertising is aimed at women. When will he move to ban all cigarette advertising?

Yesterday I had a letter from a haemophiliac man in Birmingham saying that he and three members of his family, who are also haemophiliacs, are AIDS-positive. Is research or action needed better to protect haemophiliacs who are being given AIDS by contaminated factor 8? We have known this for a long time, so why cannot action be taken to prevent it from continuing?

Mr. Fowler: Action has been taken, and the tragic cases, which everybody regrets, are resulting from what has happened in the past. Action has been taken to ensure that factor 8 is heat treated. There is no evidence of new cases through infection over the past few months.

I share the hon. Lady's anxiety about lung cancer, and her concern that we should try to dissuade people from smoking. The way that we and successive Governments have tackled this is the best way. There has been no compulsory ban on advertising but a sensible agreement between the cigarette industry and the Government on what kind of advertising can be permitted and in what form.

Sir David Price (Eastleigh): Both aspects of my right hon. Friend's statement are welcome by practically every hon. Member, and certainly by all those in the health and caring professions. What my right hon. Friend has announced about cervical cancer screening is a further step towards turning the National Health Service from being a sickness service into being a genuine health service in which prevention plays a much bigger part than it has in the past. Is not the ability of the MRC to come forward with this ambitious programme on AIDS due to the immense strength of our basic life sciences in our universities, particularly in molecular biology? Will my right hon. Friend talk with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science to ensure that we maintain that standard in our universities?

Mr. Fowler: I strongly agree with my hon. Friend's last point and certainly I shall talk to my right hon. Friend about that. In addition, I pay tribute to Sir James Gowans who has taken a leading role in this field.

My hon. Friend asked about health education. I hope that it is common ground that the Health Service should concentrate more and more on health education. That is precisely what we are trying to do through the kind of preventative measures that I have announced.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): On behalf of my alliance colleagues, I welcome entirely and unreservedly the Minister's statement. However, I should like to ask one or two questions.

First, can the right hon. Gentleman tell the House by how much his Department's budget and the Department of Education and Science budget will be increased to pay for these necessary preventative campaigns and courses of action? Secondly, will we see proper co-ordination between the work of the academics and that of the clinicians so that there can be maximum immediate use? Finally, in order to ensure a quick take-up by the maximum number of women of the tests for cervical and breast cancer, can the right hon. Gentleman assure the House that the Health Education Council and others will

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

be given adequate budgets immediately to make sure that all women are aware of the opportunities as soon as they are available?

Mr. Fowler: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the way in which he has responded generally to the statement about AIDS and breast cancer. The £14·5 million for AIDS will be in addition to what the Medical Research Council has already been promised. The £6 million for regional health authorities will also be in addition to what has already been promised.

The hon. Gentleman asked about co-operation. I hope that I can assure him on that point. In health education generally, one of our purposes must be to try to increase the numbers coming forward. To some extent, that has quite a lot to do with the computerised systems that we are putting in the family practitioner system.

Already 109 districts have computerised systems, and we hope that over the next 12 months the remainder of the districts will have them. In that way we will be in a much better position than previously to bring in people who were missed in previous years. Too many of the people who died in the past were missed in the screening process, and that is why I aim to improve the system.

Mr. Roy Galley (Halifax): My right hon. Friend has made an excellent statement which signals a major advance in the good health of the nation. The mean-minded carping by the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) is not justified by the statement. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that when the breast cancer screening facilities are fully operational we can look to the possibility of saving 2,000 to 3,000 lives a year? Will he also tell the House that, where possible, he will encourage the provision of screening facilities in the community rather than having them entirely hospital based?

Mr. Fowler: I certainly agree with my hon. Friend's first point. He asked about breast cancer screening. Some 1·5 million women will be invited to use the system each year as soon as it has been developed. We are obviously aiming for maximum take-up, but Forrest estimates that the mortality rate in the 50 to 64 age group should be reduced by about one third.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): How many extra staff in pathology and other paramedical specialties does the Secretary of State think will be covered by the £6 million for cancer screening? Is he not aware that in some areas where staffs have been cut administrative staffs have been cut by as much as 30 per cent? How does he envisage that it will be possible to designate people solely to deal with a subject of such urgency? Do we not urgently require a training programme now?

Mr. Fowler: That is precisely what we are doing. One of the reasons why we are having to do this by stages is to build up the trained staff, not only the surgical staff and pathologists to whom the hon. Lady referred, but radiographers and radiologists. Obviously the system will need equipment and premises. I should emphasise that Forrest envisages a build-up of that sort and we are following it exactly in formulating our plans.

Mr. Fred Silvester (Manchester, Withington): Does my right hon. Friend's announcement mean that research institutes involved in vaccine research may now submit new projects to the Medical Research Council? Does his statement on cervical cancer include any resources for getting rid of the backlog, which in some parts of the country is now severe?

Mr. Fowler: We have sought to tackle the backlog through the district health authorities by recruiting more staff, and clearly that remains a priority. On the matter of research, it is important to underline what the concept of directed research is. The usual approach is for the investigator to initiate the proposal and submit it to the Medical Research Council. Under this proposal the Medical Research Council will initiate and decide which are the most promising areas for research. That is a method used with great success in the United States, but it has been used rarely in the medical research area since the war, but it underlines the importance that the Government attach to medical research on AIDS.

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): Can the Minister be more specific about laboratory staff? He has been asked several questions on it this afternoon and has been vague in his answers. Can he tell us how, when and where the laboratory staff will be increased, because in parts of Wales we are having to wait for up to three months for the results of cervical cancer tests? That is intolerable because it means that people will be dying unnecessarily because of that sort of delay.

Mr. Fowler: It is not a question of being vague. There are two issues involved. On the matter of cervical cancer, the district health authorities are reducing the backlogs in the districts by recruiting more staff. That is taking place now and that is presumably what the hon. Lady wants.

On breast cancer, there is a need to train staff. I cannot give the exact figures for all 14 regions, but obviously, as the programme goes forward, we will be in a position to do that. The resources are being made available to the regions so that they can provide at least 14 centres by next March and then we will go forward over the following two years to provide 100 centres throughout England.

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): I think that the whole House, other than one hon. Member, welcomes the statement and would like to congratulate the Secretary of State on it. Does he recognise that, as some 4,000 deaths from AIDS are likely to occur by 1990, it is as serious as cervical cancer? Will he say that, in addition to the £14 million being spent in directed research from the Medical Research Council, it will increase the percentage it is giving in response to applications, which I gather is only £2·5 million out of a budget out of £150 million?

Mr. Fowler: So far £2·5 million has been spent on more than 20 projects through the Medical Research Council. Indeed, until the autumn the Medical Research Council was basically saying that no worthwhile project had been turned away. The Medical Research Council then asked us for an extra £1 million. That was made available immediately. In addition, these extra resources for directed research are being made available. I emphasise that I believe that the series of measures that have been taken, particularly over the past few months, gives us the opportunity to take a leading position in Europe on AIDS research.

Mr. Laurie Pavitt (Brent, South): I welcome the provisions being made, but, like Oliver Twist, I hope that as the five years pass, there will be better funding. I should

like to ask about mammography and cervical smears. Does the Secretary of State recall that we had a nationwide mobile system for the screening of tuberculosis, which only a few years ago most regional health authorities put into dry dock? Will his Department examine, as a means of easy provision of the facilities for screening, what the cost would be to resurrect that scheme which was, in its day, very effective?

Is the Secretary of State aware that, especially after the menopause, there is a tremendous impact of carcinoma, apart from cancer of the cervix, in the pelvic area? Will he look further at the possibility of screening, not just the priority groups, which he has mentioned and must obviously have in mind, but a much wider range, certainly up to the age of 65? Those women could be helped.

On the matter of AIDS research, has the Secretary of State noticed the bonanza that has been taking place on the stock exchange on the pharmaceutical companies' share prices? As there is heavy competition to hit the jackpot between each of the major companies, will he take steps to ensure that there is an exchange of information, not only with the Medical Research Council and the Secretary of State's Department, but within the pharmaceutical industry itself so that there is maximum knowledge?

Mr. Fowler: On the first two points raised by the hon. Gentleman, I shall certainly consider the implications of what he is proposing. It needs to be said that the private sector of the pharmaceutical industry is doing a great deal of research in this area, and that should be welcomed on both sides of the House. An increasing percentage of research on AIDS is taking place. One of the benefits of a strong private pharmaceutical industry is that the research is taking place.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I must have regard to the fact that this is an Opposition day. I will allow questions to go on for a further 10 minutes. If hon. Members ask brief questions, they may all be called.

Mr. Tim Yeo (Suffolk, South): I warmly congratulate my right hon. Friend on his swift and generous response to the request of the MRC. Will he assure the House that there will be no let-up in the Government's efforts to educate the public about the ways in which the AIDS virus can be contracted? Does he agree that in the short term responsible attitudes towards sex can play the biggest part in reducing the number of deaths from AIDS?

Mr. Fowler: My hon. Friend has made an important point, which I mentioned in my statement but which should be underlined. There is no immediate prospect of a breakthrough in that area and everything we say on public education still holds good and, indeed, should be underlined. I am glad to make that absolutely clear.

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): As someone who lost a close relative from cervical cancer, I welcome any measure that will help alleviate the problem. Many women do shift work in the catering industry and various other industries. May I ask the Secretary of State to give every encouragement to employers to ensure that those women are allowed time off for screening?

Mr. Fowler: That is a very important point. We will consider what further we can do to encourage exactly that.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): I add my warm welcome to my right hon. Friend's statement. Will he consider again the possibility of giving an absolute priority in breast and cervical screening to the backlog cases, since I feel sure that one of the problems in this desirable area is that of public and patient expectation? One way of dealing adequately with that problem would be to deal with the backlog as a priority before moving on to the new and extended schemes.

Mr. Fowler: Certainly, on the matter of cervical cancer, I agree with what my hon. Friend says. The priority must be to ensure that the system that we have now works well, and that obviously means tackling the backlog.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): I vigorously and positively congratulate the Secretary of State on bringing in the money for AIDS research. His visit to America was obviously most remunerative. Will he make a simple statement at the Dispatch Box that the budget for AIDS will never be cut and that whatever is needed will be found?

Mr. Fowler: We will certainly seek to meet that sort of challenge. The best way of answering that question is by looking at what the Government have already done. We have made massive new amounts available for public education and we are now making new resources available for research as well. That underlines the importance given to AIDS policy, not only by the Government but by both sides of the House.

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): May I join right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House in welcoming the statement and the way in which it rises to the challenge — something which the Opposition Front Bench seems too churlish to recognise? Can my right hon. Friend assure me that the £14·5 million towards research is in addition to the moneys which are already being spent or will be spent by the pharmaceutical industry in the same cause? Will he stress once again how important it is that we give higher priority even than this to education and prevention because they are the most important factors in dealing with AIDS in the short term?

Mr. Fowler: I confirm both points. First, this is additional money for the MRC and it is certainly additional to anything that the pharmaceutical industry is spending in this area. Secondly, I stress the importance of public health education. Indeed, at the end of this week we shall see a major campaign by the television companies, both the British Broadcasting Corporation and the independent television companies. I take this opportunity to welcome their initiative. Not everything can be done by the Government or through advertising.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Is not the question hanging over the statement how much the Government are willing to spend to prevent death? Although the statement is welcome, does the Secretary of State understand that large numbers of people will consider that the money for cervical cancer screening is too late and too little? Is it not cautionary to remember that the total sum that he has mentioned is less than what was spent on selling the gas industry to Sid and a tiny fraction of the tax handouts given to the rich in the past seven years? Can the right hon. Gentleman say specifically when the age groups of women for screening will be extended both to a lower and to a higher age group? What additional resources are to be

[Mr. Max Madden]

given to local health authorities, including my authority in Bradford, to deal with unbudgeted expenditure on AIDS care? Will additional resources be made available?

Mr. Fowler: If the hon. Gentleman is rehearsing his constituency speech on the Floor of the House, he has chosen the wrong issue to do it on. We have responded in full to what the MRC has asked for on AIDS. On breast cancer, again we are implementing the Forrest report. In 1987-88 the cost will be £6 million, which, again, will be in addition to the budget. It is not remotely a question of being too little; it is what the bodies have sought and asked for and the Government are responding to it.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Berkshire, East): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, while many of us warmly congratulate him on his announcement of funding for AIDS research, we all agree that there must be further public education? Is he aware that we would like him perhaps to have a word with the television authorities on the timing of the AIDS programmes and request them to delay the programmes for a couple of hours, from 5 pm to 7 pm, to avoid young children seeing them and their parents being embarrassed? Could he give some guidance to the television authorities on that point?

Mr. Fowler: I am sure that the broadcasting organisations will have heard what my hon. Friend has said. I understand his point. However, I must say that both the BBC and independent television have responded magnificently to the challenge of AIDS. They have responded exceptionally, and I praise their action, which has been invaluable.

Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South): My right hon. Friend can be assured of the warm welcome of all reasonable people inside and outside this place and he has been most kind to consider some papers on AIDS research from a British team recently. In his busy day, will either he or one of his junior colleagues agree to meet members of that team to ensure that this encouraging opportunity is not missed and the British team receives the fullest possible support?

Mr. Fowler: My hon. Friend has indeed left me with papers on this matter. It is essentially a matter for the MRC, but perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister for Health and I can consider that.

Mr. Tom Sackville (Bolton, West): May I add my congratulations to my right hon. Friend on his statement and point out that in Bolton, where a breast scanner was bought last year following a successful charitable appeal and where there is wide experience and expertise among the local medical profession, his announcement of a national screening programme will be extremely welcome?

Mr. Fowler: I am grateful to my hon. Friend; I know that he has a close interest in this area. He has raised the issue as it affects Bolton in an Adjournment debate and, certainly, I hope that Bolton will benefit in the same way as the rest of the country.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Will my right hon. Friend do something about the dreadful AIDS advertisement that starts with the words, "Gay or straight", which seem to invite any adolescent who may read it to an equality of choice? Does he agree that, while he, as I, might like to be looked on in our private and public life as being straight in our dealings with people, in our sexual proclivities we would rather be looked on as being normal? Should not the sensibilities of the majority be more important than those of the minority?

Mr. Fowler: That takes us a little onwards from the issue of AIDS research, but I take my hon. Friend's point. However, I must say that the advertising must get its message over as directly as possible, not only to the general public but to the high-risk groups. Obviously, I regret it if any advertising offends individuals and the public generally, but the greater need and demand is to get the message over to the public.

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): In joining the applause for the significant steps forward in research and preventive medicine announced by my right hon. Friend, may I invite him to remind those, such as the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours), who call for unlimited research expenditure on AIDS, that there are other extremely debilitating, terminal diseases which are not self-inflicted and for which cures are desperately needed?

What are the reasons for the age limit between 50 and 64 for breast screening? Does the report conclude that the incidence of the onset of breast cancer before that age is so insignificant as not to deserve the full scheme? If so, is there not in any case some opportunity for those who would nevertheless like to have the breast screening service to have it on demand?

Mr. Fowler: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that important point. Obviously, the MRC has health and medical priorities other than AIDS. The Forrest report proposes an age range between 50 and 64 for breast cancer screening. One third of the 15,000 deaths are among women between the ages of 50 and 64 and research has shown that screening that group would be by far the most effective measure. Forrest proposes more research in the 40 age group and we accept that. Screening is also available on demand for those over 65. That, too, is proposed by Forrest and, again, we accept that.

Hinkley Point Power Station

4.18 pm

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent attention, namely,

"the need for an independent inquiry into the safety of continued operation of Hinkley Point nuclear power station."

The matter was highlighted today in the front page piece of *The Guardian* written by Mr. Paul Brown. The issue is specific because it refers to admissions of falsification of quality assurance records for welds in pressure pipework at a nuclear establishment. Non-destructive testing is the best means yet developed to ascertain the integrity of butt-weld joints. The reliability of recording such procedures is crucial and has been called into question, not for the first time, but on this occasion with a specific and verifiable history.

The issue is important because if these admissions are substantiated they call into question similar procedures applied during the construction of similar establishments throughout the United Kingdom and elsewhere. Having worked in the industry, I can state emphatically and without fear of contradiction that, although actions of a kind similar to those of Mr. Brookes were not commonplace, they are by no means unique. What is unique in this instance is that we have an individual who has summoned up the courage to lay aside the threat of revenge and the fear of intimidation to square his maturing conscience with a threatened community.

The matter should be given urgent attention because there are three needs. First, there is the need for a truly independent inquiry conducted without prejudice of any kind. To highlight that, I can do no better than refer to the second paragraph of Mr. Brookes' letter to the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate. He stated:

"I am concerned that you do not intend to involve your department directly in the investigation and I am sure that the public will be equally concerned. You are after all the independent body whose concern is meant to be for the safety of the industry. It would appear from your letter that your primary concern is merely to investigate the possibility of bringing a prosecution against me."

That brings me to the second need for urgency—the need to grant to Mr. Brookes immunity from prosecution. If we can do that for supergrasses, can we not do it for infra welders?

The third reason why we need urgency is to offer amnesty to others who live with a similar burden of conscience. We need to do that not only to liberate them from personal guilt but to allow them to identify approximate times and locations where such malpractices may have planted the timebombs of flawed technology in reservoirs of nuclear spite.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter which he believes should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the need for an independent inquiry into the safety of the continued operation of Hinkley Point nuclear power station."

I have listened with the greatest care to the hon. Member, but I regret that I do not consider that the matter which he has raised is appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 20. Therefore, I cannot submit his application to the House.

Love Lane Bus Depot, Liverpool

4.21 pm

Mr. Robert Parry (Liverpool, Riverside): I seek leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the closure of the Love Lane bus depot and the sacking of"—*[Laughter.]* Instead of laughing, Conservative Members should listen. The purpose of the debate is to discuss a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the closure of the Love Lane bus depot and the sacking of 270 transport workers by the Crossville bus company, Liverpool."

The matter is specific because it deals with the sacking of 270 workers, many of them long-serving employees, and the closure of a bus depot in my constituency, which has the highest unemployment level on the British mainland.

The matter is important because more than 150 of the sacked workers have between 10 and 25 years' service. One has more than 30 years' service and is only two years off retirement age. None of these workers has received or will receive a penny in redundancy pay. That is an absolute disgrace.

The matter should receive urgent consideration because the sacking follows a strike of bus drivers who refused to drive old second-hand buses—some 14 years old with no power steering. Crossville's action may encourage other bus companies to follow its scandalous lead, thus endangering the lives of not only bus drivers and passengers but pedestrians and road users. I hope, for those reasons, that you will grant my application, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he believes should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the closure of the Love Lane bus depot and the sacking of 270 transport workers by the Crossville bus company, Liverpool."

I regret that I have to give the hon. Member the same answer that I gave the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook). I regret that I do not consider that the matter which he has raised as being appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 20, and I cannot, therefore, submit his application to the House.

High Court Injunction (Mr. Speaker's Order)

4.23 pm

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I refer you to your order of 22 January preventing me and other colleagues in the House from viewing the Zircon film which was the subject of a court injunction. You will be aware that you specifically stated that you made your ruling in order that the injunction should be observed within our precincts.

This morning, Her Majesty's Government did not defend an application by Mr. Campbell in the High Court for the injunction to be withdrawn. Accordingly, it no longer exists. The Government have been unable to find any basis for a prosecution arising from the film. They face the prospect of a substantial claim for damages from the BBC, which has obtained a legal opinion from the dean of the Faculty of Advocates in Scotland that the raid of the Glasgow office was almost certainly unlawful, and have been unable to find a legal basis to defend the action for withdrawal of the injunction.

It would be inappropriate for me to invite you, Mr. Speaker, to reconcile last month's campaign to muzzle the press with this month's climb-down by the Government, but it would be entirely appropriate for me——

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): The hon. Gentleman is making a political speech. He should keep to the point of order.

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is a very important matter which is being addressed to me.

Mr. Cook: I think that you will agree, Sir, that in all these matters I have shown respect for the Chair.

I think that it would be appropriate for me to ask you to reconsider your ruling, which was clearly given on the basis that an injunction was in force. Now that that injunction is no longer in force, hon. Members may see in the House a film which many of our constituents have already seen in some of the largest cities in the land.

Mr. Speaker: As the House knows, on 27 January I made the following statement:

"I can confirm that, if the House decides to refer the matter"—

my order of 22 January—

"to the Committee of Privileges, my instructions . . . will remain in force until the House itself can make a decision following the report of the Committee of Privileges, so long, that is, as the present injunction remains in force." — [*Official Report*, 27 January 1987; Vol. 109, c. 273.]

I have now been informed, as the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) has said, that the injunction is no longer in force and, accordingly, my order of 22 January ceases to have effect as from now.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am sure that the House will welcome your statement not only because it so promptly and exactly fits what you promised the House on 27 January but because of the increasing absurdity felt by right hon. and hon. Members at finding themselves in the position where a film has been banned from being shown in the precincts of the House while it has been freely available to audiences in Cardiff, London, Glasgow, Coventry and elsewhere.

However, Mr. Speaker, given the most urgent promptings of Ministers to you directly, and later in the form of a motion before the House, that this film should be banned, surely it is right that, now that the policy has been totally reversed within 28 days, we should have an explanation by a responsible Minister as to why the Government dropped the injunction proceedings. I should like to know whether you, Sir, have been informed by any Minister of the Government's intention to make a statement and, if not, why not.

Mr. Speaker: I heard only today that the injunction had been dropped. I have been given no indication that there will be a statement.

BALLOT FOR NOTICES OF MOTIONS FOR FRIDAY 13 MARCH

Members successful in the ballot were:

Mr. Michael J. Martin
Mr. Peter Lilley
Sir Geoffrey Finsberg

Landlord and Tenant

4.28 pm

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to extend the existing right to buy to tenants in properties where the landlord's title to ownership is defective; to enable landlords to obtain fair market value for properties which are compulsorily purchased; and for connected purposes.

I believe that such a Bill will not be considered contentious. It is my objective to cut red tape and to be helpful to both house owners and tenants in certain housing matters where an element of injustice has arisen. The injustices are not inherent in the conception of the original housing legislation. However, they have arisen in the margin in some special cases.

Members on both sides of the House have, I believe, now accepted the right of home ownership—admittedly with varying degrees of enthusiasm from the Opposition Benches. The Housing Act 1980 gave secure council tenants a clear right to obtain the ownership of their homes. However, in Bolton many applications have been refused on the grounds of technical defects or uncertainty in the title.

Last year, the responsible Minister singled out Bolton as the worst council which still persistently denied the right to buy on the pretext of defective title. The defective title usually arises from compulsory purchase orders on long leasehold land of which Lancashire has more than most counties. Because of the difficulty in tracking down all those with reversionary interests, the council does not always have complete title. Although the council has powers to perfect the title, it has made a political decision to use this flimsy pretext to prevent a sale. The reason given by the council is a shortage of funds or personnel available to investigate the history of the title to its ultimate. Another excuse is that the Greater Manchester Council residuary body still has an interest, despite the fact that the council has the power to purchase that interest.

That obstruction is against the spirit of current housing policy where maximum incentives to home ownership are being provided. If such a situation arose in the private sector, a form of indemnity would be worked out to cover the vendor against action from people coming forward subsequently with claims to a legal interest in the site or property. I understand that that can be covered by an insurance policy.

I have been involved in mountainous correspondence with Ministers for many months on behalf of numerous unhappy constituents caught in this sad web of circumstances, not of their own making. I have suggested that a provision should be available whereby a purchaser could indemnify the vendor against such claims. However, on political grounds, that was not accepted by Bolton's Labour-controlled council. I have now been told that Wigan council has used this system and in Norwich, where there used to be a similar problem, the council is now co-operating with its tenants. Why is Bolton council not doing that? Must tenants consider bringing a court action to get justice?

Last year, with the guidance of a distinguished former Solicitor-General, I tabled amendments to the Housing and Planning Bill. I was informed by the Government that those amendments raised possible legal complexities which needed thorough examination. However, I believe that Government legislation could be successfully introduced so that the landlord is deemed to have sufficient interest to sell. Anyone with interest in the land could then claim compensation from the landlord. Such a requirement would no doubt involve amendments to right-to-buy, land registration and compulsory purchase legislation. That would cause much work for the parliamentary draftsmen in the Department of the Environment where I believe that there is already a shortage of draftsmen.

I believe that the matter can wait no longer and that the nettle must now be grasped. I am therefore including these provisions in my proposed Bill which sets out in tablets of stone that council tenants who qualify under normal circumstances shall have the inalienable right to exercise their right to buy. Councils will be deemed to have sufficient interest to sell and will be given full compulsory powers against claimants. It is understood that if claimants have a proven case, they should be compensated fairly.

The other injustice which I wish to tackle in the second part of my Bill is the unhappy situation that arises where property is compulsorily purchased, but is classified as unfit or otherwise does not qualify for fair market value compensation, including cases where the property is empty or not owner-occupied. The effect is to reduce from market value to site value the compensation payable. In Bolton, that could mean the difference between £15,000 and a mere £1,200.

Definitions of fitness for the purpose of slum clearance are set out in section 604 of the Housing Act 1985. Experts in housing law explain that, despite attempts to set out guidelines for assessing unfitness, the definitions are still variable and imprecise.

There is an additional unfairness in this form of virtual confiscation because properties in a clearance area are scheduled for demolition in any case. Therefore, owners are less inclined to maintain them fully or occupy those houses. Not to pay a fair price is a combination of institutionalised meanness and bullyboy bureaucracy. The problem was well recognised in the Government Green Paper, "Home Improvements, a New Approach."

To return to my original theme, the first part of my Bill is a humble attempt to help those who think that they have the opportunity to join the property owning democracy, but find that that opportunity is removed at the last moment. Their hopes are dashed and their spirits crushed. With very little effort, we can bring them the happiness that they deserve.

In the second part of my Bill, I show how we can provide justice for the house owner whose property may have become classified as not being owner-occupied or as being technically unfit because he could not afford to maintain it.

I understand that the Government are sympathetic to the objectives of my Bill even if they have had some reservations about what are believed to be legislative complexities. I believe that those can be overcome and that it would be a fine achievement in one Bill to bring relief to both tenant and house owner in this way.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Peter Thurnham, Sir Ian Percival, Sir George Young, Sir John Farr, Mr. Ian Gow, Mr. Tom Sackville, Mr. Michael Brown, Mr. Michael Latham, Mr. Malcolm Thornton, Mr. Richard Ottaway, Mr. Sydney Chapman, Mr. John Heddle and Mr. John Powley.

Landlord and Tenant

Mr. Peter Thurnham accordingly presented a Bill to extend the existing right to buy to tenants in properties where the landlord's title to ownership is defective; to enable landlords to obtain fair market value for properties which are compulsorily purchased: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 24 April and to be printed. [Bill 89.]

Opposition Day

[9th Allotted Day]

Priorities for the Elderly

4.36 pm

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): I beg to move,

That this House, noting that more than a quarter of pensioners now live in poverty at or below the supplementary benefit level, that the living standards of pensioners have fallen by an average of about 21 per cent. compared with the rest of the community since 1979, that pensioners are the main victims of the £650 million cuts in housing benefit and that pensioners have been badly hit by the large and increasing cuts in community services and in hospital beds, calls upon the Government to reverse its policy of reducing the resources devoted to the needs of elderly people and to accord pensioners the priority which they deserve and which the nation would wish them to have, not only in terms of income, but also in the range of community services they need for personal independence, security and dignity.

Mr. Speaker: I must tell the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

Mr. Meacher: The Opposition have chosen the title for this debate—"Priorities for the Elderly"—with care and precision. It is our view, as I shall explain——

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Would it be in order to delay the debate for a little while, while the Opposition assemble their Members?

Mr. Speaker: That has patently nothing to do with me.

Mr. Meacher: It is our view, as I shall explain, that in one area after another the elderly have been accorded a distinctly low priority by the Government. With 26 per cent. of people over retirement age now living in poverty at or below the supplementary benefit level——

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: I will not give way.

With pensions every year falling further and further behind living standards of the rest of the community, with huge cuts in housing benefit, a growing shortage of community services and hospital beds and a gross misallocation of resources in the development of residential and domiciliary care, one thing is certain: the elderly in Britain need a new deal.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: I shall not give way. I intend to make some progress with my speech, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will listen.

The first and most important point that I want to make concerns the pension. The Government like to consider themselves as the defenders of choice. I wonder how much choice Ministers believe that pensioners get on £39·80 a week. However, the Government have decreased, not increased, the consumer choice of pensioners. Their buying power relative to that of the rest of the community has gone down sharply over the past eight years. Over that period the pension has trailed no less than 21 per cent. behind the growth of average earnings.

Mr. Nicholls: Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Mr. Meacher: No, I will not.

That is the effect of one of the first things that the Government did when they came to power in 1979.

Mr. Marlow: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You are very experienced and have been in the House for a very long time. Will you draw on your experience and tell the House whether you have ever been in the Chamber during a major and important debate on the elderly when there have been only five Back-Bench Labour Members——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): Order. The hon. Gentleman has been here long enough to know that that is not a point of order.

Mr. Meacher: The hon. Gentleman has also been here long enough to accuse one of my hon. Friends of a bogus point of order when he has just made two of the most bogus points of order that I have ever heard.

In 1979, the Government broke the links with earnings which Labour had established in the uprating of pensions. As a result, the single pension has been cut by £7·20 a week and a married pension by £11·40 a week compared with what would have been paid if Labour's formula had been retained.

Mr. David Maclean (Penrith and The Border): The hon. Gentleman said that the Government broke the link which the Labour Government had established. How many times between 1976 and 1979 did they keep to their formula?

Mr. Meacher: I will tell the hon. Gentleman that during the five years when the Labour Government were in power the real value of the pension increased by 20 per cent., whereas under the seven and a half years of Tory rule that we have just experienced, the real value of the pension has increased by only 2·5 per cent. Labour did eight times better.

Mr. Maclean: Answer my question.

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I hope that this will be taken as a serious debate. In the few minutes during which my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) has been speaking, there has been constant uproar in the House. It is a disgrace.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: There is no need for sedentary interjections. They simply delay a debate. This is a very short debate and many hon. Members feel strongly about the subject and want to speak in it. Sedentary interruptions from either side do not help.

Mr. Meacher: The loss for a married couple in retirement as a result of breaking the link with earnings, which is now about £600 a year, would be enough to take thousands of pensioners out of poverty, to ensure adequate heating throughout the winter, to improve the quality of diet most days of the week, to enable more trips to see children or friends, or to buy a holiday abroad. Those may be small matters to those who take them in their stride, but to be deprived of them is to be shut out from the quality of life which others take for granted, and that is what hurts.

Mr. Nicholls: Although the hon. Gentleman will not answer the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean), does he deny the historical fact that in three years out of five the Government of which he was a member and which had passed legislation for an earnings link failed to follow it?

Mr. Meacher: That is a very silly point. What matters to pensioners is the amount by which their pensions increase relative to prices. I am glad to see the Minister for Social Security and the Disabled nodding. Under the Labour Government, it increased by 20 per cent. above prices——

Mr. Nicholls: Will you deny it?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must realise that I have nothing to deny. Sedentary interventions are holding up the debate. We must get on with it.

Mr. Meacher: I shall indeed get on with it.

It is a cynical philosophy to pay people the going market rate so long as they are in economic employment but as soon as they are uneconomic or unproductive after a lifetime of work to discard them on the scrap heap of retirement. We know that pensioners today are being discarded when we consider that the basic retirement pension has fallen to only 18 per cent. of average earnings whereas in Germany the figure is 50 per cent. and in France no less than 60 to 70 per cent. We know that pensioners are being discarded when the Government Actuary has estimated that under current Government policies the basic state pension will fall during the next 40 years to only 9 per cent. of average earnings. Pensioners are being discarded because, in March this year, the Chancellor will dispense, in one way or another, up to £4 billion of largesse, but all that pensioners will get is an extra 80p a week.

What is almost harder to accept is the fact that Government policies not only condemn millions of people to a miserable subsistence income, but have blocked any future escape route from poverty for millions of workers on below average pay. SERPS offered the one high road out of poverty in old age for the lower paid.

Mr. Forth: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: No, I will not.

The Government's emasculation of that scheme, plus the worsening relative value of the basic pension and each successive uprating under the Government's price indexing policies, mean that up to a quarter of today's working population will spend their retirement in poverty.

The significance of the Government's assault on SERPS is brought home by a written answer that I received on 12 January. It shows that the additional earnings-related pension received by someone retiring on average earnings this year is slightly over £20 a week. SERPS is already providing a 50 per cent. topping-up of the basic state pension. By 1992, the SERPS addition will have increased to more than £40 a week—more than the entire basic pension today—and by 1998 it will have grown to £78 a week, according to Government figures. For half the population, SERPS offers the best pension scheme that Britain has ever produced. It would for ever break the cycle of poverty in retirement.

The Government repudiated the scheme because they said that it could not be afforded, yet it offers pensions no bigger than the state pensions being paid by the Germans and the French. If they can afford those pensions, why

[Mr. Meacher]

cannot we? The Government's stated intention to whittle down SERPS is the biggest attack by far on the living standards of the poorer half of the population. The Government, who have heralded six or even seven-figure salaries among their City acolytes, are stretching poverty level retirement far into the 21st century for a large section of today's work force.

Mr. Forth: The hon. Gentleman has used the word "poverty" many times in his remarks so far. Where does he get his figures and on what does he base his repeated assertion that there is poverty among this group?

Mr. Meacher: Does the hon. Gentleman differ from the conventional view, which I certainly share, that anyone who must subsist on supplementary benefit is living in poverty? Could he live on £45 a week compared with his salary which, like mine, is more than £300 a week? That is an exceedingly low standard of living compared with average earnings of £200 a week. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will have the goodness to share my view that that is a disgracefully low standard of living. The fact that the number of people on supplementary benefit has doubled under this Government is an indictment of their disgraceful policies.

If tomorrow's pensioners are not much of a priority with this Government, nor are today's. In one year's time, the Fowler social security pack—if it is not repealed by a new Government after the election—will drastically worsen the position of many pensioners. According to the Government's figures, 2,250,000 pensioners will lose money, including 820,000 who will lose more than £2 a week and 120,000 who will lose more than £5 a week. They may be small amounts to grinning Conservative Members, but they represent substantial losses when the entire pension is only £40 a week.

In particular, pensioners will be the main victims of the £450 million cut in housing benefit, which comes on top of the £200 million cut made recently in housing benefit and which also hits mainly pensioners. They will probably be the main sufferers from the abolition of single payments and the introduction of the social fund in a year's time.

Mr. Marlow *rose*——

Mr. Meacher: I shall not give way. The hon. Gentleman needs to learn a few manners and then I may give way.

It is surely cruel to expect pensioners on low incomes to repay loans towards essential items. The likely effect of that Government policy must be that even more pensioners will refuse to ask for help. Indigence will once again be the price of self-respect. It is also harsh that loans will not be available to those with savings of more than £500, who will be penalised for setting aside money for funeral costs. It cannot be justified to end lump sum grants to meet exceptional circumstances such as high fuel bills and draught proofing, for which elderly people are unlikely to take up loans. The abolition of the death grant cheats generations of people who have paid insurance contributions all their lives.

Even if pensioners' incomes and benefits were cut, that would not matter so acutely if the essential services on which they rely were increased. In fact, the reverse has happened after the scythe of rate support grant cuts and rate capping has hacked its way through so many local authority services. Of all groups in the population, it is the over-75s for whom community health and social services are critical. On average, they use them four and a half times more extensively than the general population. Yet services have not kept up with the growth in the number of people over 75—some 17 per cent. since 1979. For example, the number of geriatric beds in hospitals has been virtually static—an increase of less than 0·5 per cent.

The Audit Commission report published two months ago, which I recommend, has an excellent analysis of Government policy called "Making a Reality of Community Care". It states:

> "There has been no increase per person aged 75 or over in community based services central to supporting elderly people: home helps and meals-on-wheels."

Mr. Forth: I know that the hon. Gentleman wants to be fair when making his arguments. Does he agree that the number of consultant geriatricians has increased under the Government by at least 34 per cent.? That one figure provides some balance to what the hon. Gentleman is suggesting. Does he acknowledge that a balance should be struck in all these things and that great achievements have been made in some significant areas under this Government?

Mr. Meacher: There has been a welcome shift in medical personnel towards geriatric, psychiatric and mental handicap. All Governments support that; we did so and I am glad that it has been continued and developed further. I am only sad that, although there are more consultant geriatricians and a considerable increase in the numbers needing their care, there has not been an increase in the number of beds available in hospitals. That is a great pity. The Audit Commission's report is a stunning indictment of Government policies which, it concludes, represent a fundamental misallocation of a total £6 billion budget between the National Health Service, social services and social security, devoted to the case of the elderly, the mentally handicapped and the mentally ill. It found that domiciliary care averages a cost of about £95 a week for an elderly person, while a residential home place costs about £135 a week and a bed in a National Health Service geriatric ward costs about £295 a week. However, because the paraphernalia of Government financial controls has decimated local authority social services, we have the absurd paradox that thousands of elderly people are now cared for in institutional settings, costing up to £300 a week, when they could be receiving more appropriate care in the community at a total cost to public funds of only about £100 a week.

The Audit Commission endorsed a view that the Opposition have repeatedly expressed, that it is a ridiculous perversion of priorities that local authority social services, which are determined by need, have been continually eroded by Government financial cuts, while supplementary benefit moneys, to the tune of no less than £600 million a year, are now being channelled through the board and lodging regulations into a virtually open-ended subsidy of the private sector, with no test of the need.

There is another nonsense in the system because it produces a strong financial bias in favour of residential care at the expense of domiciliary care in the community, although the latter is generally preferable wherever it is possible. The truth is that community care, for all the rhetoric that we have heard from the Government, is grossly neglected. Most social service departments are now

not achieving even the 2 per cent. growth that the Government consider necessary simply to maintain existing standards. The DHSS guideline published 10 years ago, laying down that there should be 12 home helps per thousand people over 65, has, frankly, become a distant dream in most areas. Certainly, the number of home helps, the most crucial arm—I am sure it will be agreed—of all social services, has not kept pace. The average has now fallen to about six per thousand, half of the level set 10 years ago.

In practice, that means that in many areas today an elderly person who is confused, incontinent and liable to fall, now has a home help for perhaps only two hours a week and, in many areas, has to pay a significant fee for a limited service.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would not dream of misleading the House. He will be aware that the number of home helps has increased by more than 14 per cent. since 1978 and that there has been a substantial increase—some 15 per cent.—in the number of day centres. The hon. Gentleman should not be so churlish.

Mr. Meacher: The hon. Gentleman should not accuse me, but should look at the Audit Commission's report. That is entirely independent and states that there has been no increase per person for those aged over 75 in the essential — *[Interruption.]* I prefer the Audit Commission's report to the figures given by Conservative Central Office, largely because it is a great deal more accurate. I suggest that Conservative Members read official sources and not biased and partisan notes from their party.

In the face of that neglect, because we accord a much higher priority to the needs of the elderly, the Labour party is proposing a five point plan of community care. The first point is an audit of social need, to be carried out on a regular basis by each social services department, which would match the audit of health needs to be carried out in parallel by each health authority. The establishment of unmet needs is, I strongly suggest, the foundation of community care, and it is a huge omission that, for all the talk, that has never been done comprehensively by the Government during the past eight years. Only when needs are systematically known can services be realistically planned.

Secondly, we propose community-based assessment teams to work closely with elderly and disabled people and their carers to draw up care plans tailor made for each individual, after consultation with them. We also propose that a named person be appointed to help each elderly and disabled person negotiate the maze of different agencies that must be tackled to obtain such services as rehabilitation, chiropody, day care, temporary respite care or whatever.

Thirdly, we intend to produce a much better balanced distribution of services throughout the country. The Audit Commission makes a radical criticism of existing policies and states:

> "A very uneven pattern of local authority services has developed, with the care that people receive as much dependent on where they live as on what they need."

There could scarcely be a more fundamental contradiction of a proper national service than that. *[Interruption.]* Perhaps hon. Members will wait to hear what I am about to say.

At present, home help provision varies by a factor of about 7:1, according to where one is in the country. Sunderland, for example, provides 70 hours home help per person each year, while Surrey provides only 11. It is noteworthy that, of the top 30 local authorities providing the most home help, all but three are Labour controlled, while the bottom 30 local authorities providing the least home help are Tory controlled. Such huge inequalities of service provision to meet the same needs in different parts of the country are unacceptable, and therefore we shall ensure that minimum standards are met.

Fourthly, we propose a charter for carers. Current Government policies of neglect and cuts impose an intolerable burden on a great many of the 3·25 million women who provide essential part-time and full-time care for elderly or disabled relatives. Although many perform full-time caring duties, almost without relief, for 20 or 30 years, into their seventies or even older, often to the point of physical or mental breakdown, their unrecognised needs surely make them one of the most neglected groups in today's welfare state. Therefore, we propose a flexible respite care system. Carers need support, especially night sitting services, hospital nursing, holiday care, a more flexible home help arrangement, short-stay residential accommodation for members of their family, and self-help centres for counselling and support, because they are often isolated. To pioneer and carry through this new approach, we shall appoint a carers liaison officer in each local authority, who will be responsible for identifying carers and providing, as far as possible, the range of support services that are needed——

Mr. Forth: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: No, I shall not give way again.

Fifthly, and most important, in developing community care we recognise that choice is crucially important. If service means anything, it must mean that elderly people can voice their views and be confident of a response that takes them into account. That is why we support a statutory right for an elderly or disabled person to be represented by another person in meetings with local authorities or other officials, and an appeal system that can challenge unfavourable local authority decisions.

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: No. The hon. Gentleman has not been in the Chamber. I shall not give way—*[Interruption.]*

That is why we support a pluralistic approach, including elderly——

Mr. Carlisle: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will withdraw his remark. I have been in the Chamber for all of his speech, although it has been painful to listen to it. I hope that he will withdraw his remark and apologise.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That matter is for the hon. Gentleman to decide.

Mr. Meacher: If the hon. Gentleman has been in the Chamber for the course of the debate, I apologise to him. I did not see him. Indeed, I shall now give way to him.

Mr. Carlisle: The hon. Gentleman has listed many admirable points. In fact, many Conservative Members will rather look forward to getting old if we can enjoy the

[Mr. Carlisle]

various services that he will provide should his party come to office. Will he give hon. Members the exact cost of the programme that he has outlined?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is the seventh intervention, during a 20-minute speech, made by hon. Members who are waiting to catch my eye. They are prejudicing their own chances.

Mr. Meacher: As there is a gross misallocation of resources in favour of institutional care, the provision of domiciliary care, although it will not be much cheaper, may work out at some significant saving. Of course, what we are proposing is highly labour-intensive, but it is wholly accommodated within the £6 billion budget for jobs by which we intend to put — we shall do so — 1 million people back to work, including, probably, over 100,000 of them in the area to which I referred.

At the root of the programme is a better allocation of public spending. The Audit Commission speaks of a

"serious distortion of public expenditure priorities."

It adds:

"the social security policies of the Government appear to be working in a way directly opposing community care policies."

At present, there is a fundamental misallocation in favour of residential care and against domiciliary services. There is a fundamental misallocation in favour of the private sector that is not based on need, and against local authority services that are based on need. There is a fundamental misallocation, which is characteristic of the Government, in favour of tax cuts for the better-off and against the interests of the pensioner. We shall reverse all of that. That is why we propose an immediate £5 a week increase in the pension for single pensioners and an £8 a week increase for married couples to be paid for by recouping the £3·5 billion in tax relief handed out since 1979 to the richest 5 per cent. of the population.

Mr. Derek Conway (Shrewsbury and Atcham): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: No, I shall not give way.

That is why we propose to restore the link with earnings in the uprating of the pension so that, once again, pensioners will share in rising living standards with the rest of the community. That is why we shall repeal the provisions of the Fowler Social Security Act 1986, which undermines SERPS as the high road out of poverty in old age. That is why we shall sweep away the piffling and fragmentary severe weather payments scheme, which is so pitted with holes, and replace it by a proper £5-a-week special winter fuel premium for each week throughout the winter to all pensioners on supplementary benefit and to a further million living in the margins of poverty only just above the supplementary benefit line. That is why we have published major plans for the development of community care which offer a charter of liberation for the elderly, the disabled and their carers.

Those are all priorities for the elderly, and they are our priorities, too. Because they are the priorities for millions of families for whom the care of the elderly is a fundamental concern, they will be one of the central issues that will sweep away the Government in the forthcoming election and bring to power a party that believes in and shares such priorities and principles.

5.5 pm

The Minister for Social Security (Mr. John Major): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

'believes that pensioners deserve a good standard of living in retirement, whether their incomes come from state benefits, occupational pensions or savings, notes with approval that the Government's economic policies have reversed the previous sharp decline in the value of pensioners' savings; welcomes the higher level of expenditure on benefits for elderly people even after taking account of provision for one million additional pensioners since 1978; and congratulates the Government on its success in improving pensioners' living standards in both absolute and relative terms.'.

I assume from the remarks made by the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) that the substance of the Opposition's motion is largely — and inaccurately — drawn either from the low income figures published last summer, which are now nearly four years out of date, or from parliamentary questions based on them. That is clear from the hon. Gentleman's response to the intervention from my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth), and it is frankly astonishing.

The hon. Gentleman should know — the House has been told — that the statisticians who compile the figures that he has used so casually asked for a technical review of them because of their shortcomings. He should also know that the base line for including pensioners in those figures is 25 per cent. higher than for everybody else and that the heating additions, worth between £2·20 and £5·55 per week for pensioners, are excluded from those figures, as are all other additional requirements. Not one of these facts found a mention in the false and sweeping allegations that formed the foundation of the hon. Gentleman's remarks.

The hon. Gentleman defined poverty as the supplementary benefit level and said that he had always regarded that as the level. That was in sharp contrast to the views expressed by the right hon. Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) who, as Minister for Social Security, on a series of occasions expressly rejected that precise proposition. I shall refer to the details of poverty and matters of that sort a little later, as I have some accurate figures — not the fantasy figures that the hon. Gentleman used — that he may find rather unpleasant. They are not Government figures and the hon. Gentleman will be wise to wait to hear them as they will be enlightening to him and, I suspect, to many others as well.

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend spoke of enlightening the House. Has it escaped his notice that, on this Opposition day, at this stage of the debate there are only five Labour Back Benchers, one Liberal Member and one SDP Member present? Is he not surprised at the lack of interest in the figures that he is about to give and worried that his message will not get across to enough Opposition Members?

Mr. Major: My hon. Friend is a perceptive mathematician, but from the flurry on the Opposition Benches I fancy that he neglected to mention that 50 per cent. of Plaid Cymru is also present on this occasion.

The claim of the hon. Member for Oldham, West that the living standards of pensioners have fallen by 21 per cent. compared with the rest of the community would be greeted with alarm on this side of the House if there were a grain of truth in it, but there is not. Adult full-time earnings have risen in real terms by 21 per cent. since 1978

—itself a tribute to the success of the Government's economic policies—but the hon. Gentleman ought not to mislead others as he should know that adult full-time earnings are in no way a reliable guide to the growth in incomes among the non-pensioner community. I shall come shortly to what is a reliable guide. Nor is the growth in the basic state retirement pension a guide to the growth in living standards of pensioners. Had the hon. Gentleman done his homework properly, he would know that the true position is precisely and absolutely the reverse of that which he has stated to the House in the last few minutes.

Since 1979, pensioner living standards have risen by nearly one fifth — twice as fast as those of the community as a whole. The hon. Gentleman totally overlooked the dramatic impact of occupational pensions, investment income, the growth in disability benefits and the aggregation of the additional component of pensions that comes from the state earnings-related pension scheme. None of those matters found a mention when he talked so misleadingly about poverty levels.

Mr. Nick Raynsford (Fulham): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Major: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman a little later.

I do not intend to spend too much time on misleading and irrelevant figures. I propose to deal with facts that are based on clear statistical methods, not on the unreliable facts that the hon. Member for Oldham, West chose to use.

This debate is concerned with priorities for the elderly, so I shall deal immediately with those priorities, as revealed by the latest information from the family expenditure survey. I hope that nobody doubts its veracity as the family expenditure survey data are published, well known and well respected and the facts are unchallengable. If we look at the 1985 data, which the hon. Gentleman has clearly failed to do, some interesting comparisons can be made. These are the latest available data. We find, for example, that in real terms pensioners' incomes from retirement pensions and income related benefits increased at much the same annual rate between 1974 and 1979 as they did between 1979 and 1985, but since 1979 the reduction of inflation has meant that, on average, pensioners' incomes from savings have increased by 7·3 per cent. per year compared with a reduction of 3·4 per cent. per year between 1974 and 1979. That is a sharp and welcome improvement, but that is not all.

Occupational pensions have also spurted ahead quite substantially, and in constant prices now add, on average, about £18·60 per week to pensioners' incomes, compared with £12·30 in 1979. These various increases mean that under the present Government pensioners' total average net incomes—net of tax and national insurance, where applicable—have grown by no less than 2·7 per cent. per year in real terms since 1979, compared with 0·6 per cent. between 1974 and 1979. I should make it clear that the net disposable income available to pensioners is rising four and a half times faster now than it did during the period of the last Labour Government. That fact is revealed by the family expenditure survey and the comparison should make not just the hon. Member for Oldham, West but his right hon. Friend the Shadow Chancellor think very deeply about their proposed policies on social security and the economy. I will, however, make a concession to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Meacher: Since those figures, which we shall have to look at very closely, are heavily dependent not on the basic pension but on the state earnings-related pension scheme and occupational pension schemes, why have the Government done their best to undermine both by whittling down SERPS and by replacing good occupational final salary schemes with personal portable pensions that are much worse?

Mr. Major: We have done nothing whatever to damage occupational pension schemes. We have opened up a substantial opportunity for the 11 million people who do not have an occupational pension scheme to have one in the form of a personal portable pension, and we have made that pension transferable. The hon. Gentleman should know, but apparently he does not, that none of the SERPS changes will in any way affect anybody who retires this side of the year 2000. By that time, as the hon. Gentleman will see if he studies the family expenditure survey, the difference will be more than adequately made up by the growth in the other factors that I have just mentioned.

What is important to pensioners is the amount of net disposable income that they have to spend.

Mr. Raynsford: The Minister has said a great deal about income. Will he now please consider outgoings? Will he tell us what has been the impact on pensioners of the changes in housing costs brought about by the Government? What proportion of pensioners' incomes is now swallowed up by housing costs? And what has been the impact of the progressive cuts in housing benefits, upon which so many pensioners depend?

Mr. Major: These are net disposable spending figures, as I tried to explain a few moments ago.

Mr. Raynsford: Answer the question.

Mr. Major: The hon. Gentleman will know that the vast majority of people who are on very low incomes still receive a very high level of standard rate housing benefit, both for housing costs and for rates. He should know that as well as any right hon. or hon. Member, but I fear that he sometimes forgets it.

Mr. Raynsford: The Minister is dodging the question.

Mr. Major: I make this concession to the hon. Member for Oldham, West. Percentage growth rates can be confusing for him and for others, so I will set out the points that I have just made in terms of actual pounds in the pocket—a phrase that Opposition Members may conceivably remember. I see one or two of them wriggling, so they clearly do remember it.

At 1985 prices, pensioners had an average net income of £68·50 in 1974. By 1979, it had crawled up by £2·10 per week to reach £70·60, but between 1979 and 1985 it rose by no less than £12·50 to £83·10. That represents a rate of growth over those six years well over twice the rate of growth in incomes of the population as a whole. I shall repeat that in case Opposition Members have not heard me clearly enough. Under this Government, pensioners' total incomes—I emphasise "total incomes"—from all sources have risen, in real terms, more than twice as fast as the incomes of the whole population. When one looks at priorities for pensioners, that is the reality.

Mr. Raynsford: Now will the Minister answer my question?

Mr. Major: The Opposition occasionally accuse us of being uncaring and harsh towards pensioners. Frankly, that is both spiteful and ludicrous. I hope that the hon. Member for Oldham, West, who is always a fair man, will study carefully the family expenditure survey so that he may draw the conclusions that we have reached after having looked carefully at these matters in recent weeks.

The state pension is not, of course, the only element in pensioner incomes. It tends, however, to be all that the Opposition ever choose to mention. Beyond that, to put it mildly, their view seems a little blinkered. Other elements, such as occupational pensions and income from savings, have been growing and will continue to grow. Occupational pensions now go to nearly one half of all pensioners and to as many as 70 per cent. of new pensioners. Of the remainder, many will have an additional component to their basic pension. That is entirely as it should be and entirely in line with the philosophy of Beveridge. Beveridge envisaged the state pension as providing a level of maintenance, topped up by savings and income from other sources. He never envisaged it—as sometimes I get the flavour that the Opposition do — as the sole source of pensioners' incomes, and it is a perversion of his ideals to suggest that. It is the Conservative side of the House that follows the Beveridge principles, and it does so in a fashion that the Opposition can never begin to comprehend.

For the future, I believe that we can now look forward to a prospect that would have been unbelievable some years ago. We can now anticipate not merely the two-pension family with one state and one occupational pension, but also the four-pension family. Far more married women now work, and the abolition of the reduced rate married woman's national insurance contribution means that increasing numbers of women will have entitlement to a state basic pension in their own right, probably with an earnings-related supplement, as well as an occupational pension. Those trends mean that the steady improvement in pensioner incomes which we have seen over the past seven years should continue as the whole House hopes. That is our priority for pensioners — independence, security and choice — and that is what they have been getting since 1979.

Let us now consider the Opposition's propositions. The hon. Member for Oldham, West again mentioned the increase of £5 for single pensioners and £8 for married couples that he proposes to make in Labour's first year of office, should that be achieved by the principal Opposition party. That may seem a clear-cut promise, but it is not. For one thing, despite repeated challenges and opportunities, the hon. Gentleman still has not clarified whether the full value of this pledged increase will go to the poorest pensioners through an increase in supplementary benefit scale rates and housing benefit needs allowances. Without this, the full benefit of any increase will go only to the better-off pensioners. I am glad to say that there are more of those around now than there were eight years ago, but it is extraordinary that the Opposition's policy is still apparently to help the better-off pensioner and to ignore the poorest. This is, after all, a debate on priorities for the elderly. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Fulham (Mr. Raynsford) scoffs; perhaps he can answer this question. The Opposition have not made it clear whether the long-term sick and disabled and widows are to be included in their proposals. At present they get the same as retirement pensioners. The reason the Opposition have been so coy is simple. Because of the cost, the poorest will be ignored in the electoral bribe that the Labour party will offer the people in the coming months.

We have been told repeatedly that the Opposition expect to raise about £3·6 billion from tax increases. I stress again, for the umpteenth time, that unless the Labour party denies help to the poorest, to widows and to the disabled, the price of its pledges is not £3·6 billion, or even £4·6 billion, but £5·6 billion. To put it into context, it is a quarter of the spending on the Health Service. Most people can spend only the money that they actually have, but the hon. Member for Oldham, West promises to spend several times more than that every time he comes to the Dispatch Box.

Moreover, the Opposition seem to have forgotten, if they ever heard it, the very sound advice offered to people in glasshouses. They have criticised the size of recent pension upratings and have offered increases of £5 and £8 as their alternative, but at no time in the two years since that alternative was first aired have they contemplated uprating that promise. Prices have risen by 7·8 per cent. since then, but the Opposition's offer to pensioners has not changed. I understand why, but something seemed familiar when it occurred to me that it had not been uprated, so I cast a backward look at the Labour party's record when it had the opportunity to do something about pensions.

The Labour party came to office in February 1974 with a pledge to increase the single person's pension to £10 in the first Budget. The Labour Government fulfilled that pledge, and all credit to them for doing so, but that single increase accounted for about three quarters of the total increase in real terms over the whole life of their Administration—one large increase to implement their electoral bribe and then the pensioners were largely forgotten. Is that to be the pattern as they approach the next election?

Between July 1974 when that manifesto promise was implemented and November 1978, the real increase was just over 5 per cent.—1 per cent. per year in a period when the Opposition like to claim that pensions were being uprated by the better of prices or earnings. The hon. Member for Oldham, West said that Labour will go back to that golden age if they win the next election. It is curious that they have erased entirely from their memory the fact that in 1976 they switched from a historic to a forecast uprating method precisely to cut the pension uprating by a third. Pensions should have gone up by 21 per cent. to match the increase in prices, but they went up by only 15 per cent. and the 6 per cent. loss was never made good. That switch cost about £1·2 billion at current prices. Moreover, in November 1978 the forecast increase in pensions fell short of the statutory obligation by a further 2 per cent.

Mrs. Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): For the third time.

Mr. Major: Yes, for the third time, as my hon. Friend says in astonishment. That legacy was left to a Conservative Government to honour, as was the additional cost of SERPS and the abolition of the married women's half-test. Nor is that all.

Broadening the horizon beyond the basic pension itself, the Labour record is one of total and unrelieved gloom. If we examine it — I suspect this will be painful to

Opposition Members—we find that savings, which on average accounted for 14·6 per cent. of pensioners' net incomes in 1974, had declined, both absolutely and as a proportion, to only 12 per cent. by 1979. For every year the Labour party was in office, the value of pensioners' income from savings declined by 3·4 per cent. in real terms because runaway inflation overwhelmed interest rates and pensioners had to live on their capital. That was the reality.

Mr. Greg Knight (Derby, North): Has not my hon. Friend missed something in his account of the Labour party's record? Did not the Labour Government get the economy into such a mess that they could not pay the pensioners' Christmas bonus for two successive years?

Mr. Major: I had not forgotten that—I was about to come to it—but there is now no need for me to do so.

One further point should, however, be made. I am not talking about rich people whose losses might be regarded with equanimity by Labour Members. I am talking about the average of all pensioners, including many elderly people who worked hard all their lives to have a bit extra in retirement and found it utterly destroyed by the calamity of inflation engendered by the Labour Government's economic policies.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West might also like to know that under his party's policies pensioners' total incomes from non-state sources reduced steadily by more than 2 per cent. each year. The House will be interested to know that, on average, pensioners' total net income—the amount they had to spend—increased by a massive 0·6 per cent. per year over the period 1974 to 1979. That is the true record of the hon. Gentleman's party when it was in office, and it is a melancholy record for the pensioners who had to live through that period.

I will say this for the Labour party, however. It is true that pensioners did better than the rest of the population in that party's last period of office, but that is not saying a great deal as its record for pensioners shows. The harsh reality of that period was of pensioners becoming steadily more dependent on State sources because of the Labour Government's failure to provide economic security for the balance of their incomes. The hon. Member for Oldham, West tells me frequently, in the context of means-tested benefits, that pensioners do not wish to come to the Government for support, and I agree. They are proud and independent and they do not wish to do that. But that is exactly what the hon. Gentleman and his party brought about when they were in power. The House can judge the Labour party's policy by its results—0·6 per cent. per year growth in pensioners' incomes. We shall hang that figure round the Opposition's neck whenever they boast of their record on pensions, and we shall compare it with the 2·7 per cent. per year growth in real incomes after inflation since 1979.

The Opposition chose today to debate priorities for pensioners, but their need to examine their own priorities before questioning ours is substantial. Their record in the past was appalling and their promises for the future are unachievable. I urge the House to reject with contempt their impudent motion and to support the Government amendment.

5.28 pm

Mr. Cyril Smith (Rochdale): I wish to make a brief intervention in the debate because I have a deep respect for pensioners. Indeed, I believe strongly that pensioners, having given the best years of their lives to the country, are entitled to expect a return that allows them to live in comfort and dignity. Having listened to the Minister's speech, while I do not doubt for one second a single statistic that he has given, I do not believe that his speech will carry much weight with pensioners.

Mr. Forth: Why not?

Mr. Smith: It is not that pensioners do not believe that the figures are true, but, frankly, they are interested in how much money they will get today, rather than how much they got in 1974. They are interested in what that money can buy them and the present Government's policies. A pensioner of 60, 75 or 80 is utterly bored with the long list of statistics about what this lot did and what that lot did or what happened in 1972 or in 1979. That means absolutely nothing to the vast majority of pensioners. I strongly advise the Minister and the Front Bench to abandon the statistical argument and get down to the realities of the position.

It is nonsensical to imply that millions of pensioners are starving or living on the poverty line, but it is equally nonsensical to imply that pensioners have never had it so good. Despite all the statistics that we have been given, the fact is that the living standards of pensioners still leave a great deal to be desired. We have heard the Minister brag about how much money pensioners save and so forth, but one of my major criticisms of the Government, especially as they are supposed to believe in free enterprise and thrift, is that, with pensioners, such thrift is penalised. The more money that people save in their working lives, the less they receive from the state when they are pensioners. There is a penalty on pensioners' thrift. The Government should answer that complaint.

Some pensioners live in extremely poor circumstances and that especially applies to single people living alone. Ever since 1980 when the Government broke the pension link with earnings pensioners have lost out. That does not mean that pensioners have received nothing or have not been reasonably dealt with, but they have lost out. In statistical terms the loss has been £5·95 a week for single people and £9·40 for a couple. That loss is the result of the change in the method of calculating pensions.

Today, I speak for the alliance and we are wholly committed to returning to a pension system that links pensions with earnings. It is impossible to say that every pensioner will receive an increase under that system as pensioners' present income and income from other sources must be taken into account. However, we shall also scrap standing charges on gas, electricity and telephones. We shall raise heating allowances and we shall certainly do something about the death grant, which is a source of extreme concern among pensioners.

Mr. Maclean: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. He says that the alliance will restore the link that operated under the previous Labour Government. The hon. Gentleman and his party had a tremendous influence over the final two years of the life of the previous Labour Government. However, in 1978 the Labour Government did not adhere——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Briefly.

Mr. Maclean: They did not adhere to the earnings link. Moreover, in 1979 the Labour Government broke the rule on the proposed uprating that the hon. Gentleman's party had supported.

Mr. Smith: Perhaps that is one of the reasons why the link between the Liberal party and the Labour Government was broken. Certainly that link would have been broken much earlier if I had had my way. I accept that such points may be made, but they are not relevant in 1987—[HON. MEMBERS: "Why not?"] Hon. Members come to the House and get all worked up and get their knickers in a twist about all the statistics, but pensioners are not worried about them. We sit here arguing and mithering about all those silly statistics, but they have no relevance to the position of pensioners.

Dame Jill Knight (Birmingham, Edgbaston): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. Will he return to what he said about standing charges? I am concerned about the proposal to abolish standing charges, because that would mean spending large sums to help many people who do not need that help. Is it not wiser to spend the money on those who are desperately in need?

Mr. Smith: The hon. Lady is aware that I have a deep respect for her, but I do not believe that her argument is necessarily correct. It is possible to abolish standing charges and pass the cost of that abolition on to the cost of the consumption of the services. If one uses services, one pays for the portion of the services used rather than, as at present, paying for services one does not receive merely because one has a right to use them. *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Lady does not understand, let me explain further. Let us suppose that we abolish the standing charge on electricity. That does not mean that, as a consequence of abolition, the electricity board's income must be met through public funds. Instead, the price of electricity is increased. Therefore, those using electricity pay for what they use and that replaces the present system wherein pensioners, through the standing charge, pay for electricity that they never use.

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman: I could understand the hon. Gentleman's argument with regard to a telephone because I regard a telephone as a vital link to the outer world for the elderly and frail. I cannot accept that argument with regard to electricity. In my constituency many pensioners have under-floor heating and they would be horrified if they had to pay per unit for the amount of electricity used. The hon. Gentleman is aware that this year electricity prices have remained static in the north-west. If pensioners had to pay a lot more for their electricity they would be in far worse trouble.

Mr. Smith: That is a matter of debate, but one thing is certain. We could increase heating allowances and thereby ensure that those allowances go to those who need them. We could ensure that people pay for the electricity that they use rather than, as at present, paying for electricity that they do not use.

The alliance believe that people have the right to retire at any age between 60 and 70, with a full pension at 65. There should be a graduated pension for people from the age of 60 to 65. However, that type of system can only be introduced over a long period of time.

An increase in pensions will do more to create jobs in Britain than a 2p in the pound reduction in taxes. Pensioners spend their money on goods that produce jobs. The goods that pensioners buy are usually non-imported—that is a statistical fact.

I shall vote for the motion before the House. It is relevant not only to pensions but to other important matters such as community services and hospital beds—that is an acute problem, especially in my constituency. There is also a tremendous need for community care and beds to care for the elderly. The ability to meet that need is sparse. I have never said—I do not now—that the Government have reduced expenditure on the Health Service. That is nonsense. They have spent more on the Health Service. What matters is not whether they spend more but whether the amount is sufficient to meet needs. There are a growing number of pensioners in this country and we need more money to care for them.

Pensioners are in desperate need of sheltered accommodation. I wish to place on record the superb, wonderful job that has been done by housing associations in helping to house the elderly and provide sheltered accomodation. However, there is a great deal more to be done.

The need for community nursing is there for all to see. It is a myth to believe that poverty is the sole problem faced by the aged. There are problems of care and security. I hear pensioners say that they are afraid at night and are frightened to go to bed—I have that problem in my household at the present time. That is a great problem for the elderly. In addition, people are living in conditions that leave a great deal to be desired. Those conditions arise not simply from poverty but from physical handicap, which often comes as a consequence of age, and lack of community care. It is tragic to see that.

There is a great need to look again at our care for the elderly. They are wonderful, lovely people, deserving of help. The Health Service does not cope adequately with the problem. Community care is inadequate. Far more attention needs to be paid to loneliness, and help should be given to overcome it. We need a caring society. I believe that, basically, at heart, we have a caring society. That is why I believe that the vast majority of people, given an honest choice between 2p off income tax and increased aid to pensioners and the Health Service, would vote for the latter. I honestly believe that to be the case.

I repeat that what we need is a new approach, a caring approach backed by Government legislation. The alliance will provide that caring approach.

5.41 pm

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): It has been a most important and encouraging development in our national life that in recent years the principle of care in the community has become so widely accepted and a beacon for social policy. It was a sad and curious feature of our history in the earlier years of this century that that was not the case. Instead, there was an unhappy emphasis, perhaps inherited from the age of the poor law and the workhouse, on segregation and institutionalisation of the elderly and the frail. We can all be deeply glad that in recent years that attitude has given way to a much more open and constructive attitude, when it is far more widely accepted that the elderly are in no sense to be regarded as a problem in society. They are a group within society with distinctive needs, like other groups. We look for practical and constructive ways to help them to meet those needs and make the contribution that they can make as fully fledged

members of society for as long as possible. I agree with the hon. Member for Rochdale (Mr. Smith) that we have a caring society, and that is one of its manifestations.

One of the best examples of care in the community in recent years is the very sheltered housing that has been pioneered in Warwickshire, in the Stratford-on-Avon district. It is a model that commands international admiration and is being increasingly emulated. It originated a few years back when the social services committee of Warwickshire county council and the housing committee of Stratford-on-Avon district council together considered what the pattern should be for part III provision for old people's homes. At the same time, they wanted to consider how to improve the existing provision of sheltered housing. They felt that it was much better to take the route of improving sheltered housing, moving forward to new and improved concepts in that area, rather than to retain the old approach of old people's homes.

Two key features of the councils' thinking proved to be creative. One was the recognition that the typical standard of staffing in sheltered housing was not adequate. It was unrealistic and unreasonable to expect a single warden, low-paid, and possibly not provided with accommodation on the site, to take responsibility, on call seven days a week, for perhaps up to 40 residents. One of the reasons why sheltered housing was proving unsatisfactory was that the demands on staff were intolerable.

The second consideration was that the typical standards of design were inadequate. Design standards were set out in circular 69/82, which, I regret to say, is still a current circular, setting standards in important respects. Those standards were inadequate. The councils sought to update and upgrade the standards of sheltered housing. They set about a 10-year programme of building what they termed very sheltered housing. The architectural design would be up to wheelchair standards. There would be no single steps, and the door frames would be wide enough for wheelchairs and for people to pass through with walking frames. The councils also thought imaginatively and sensitively about the residents' need for privacy and for adequate but discreet staffing.

Those standards have been achieved. The key to success in developing the new very sheltered housing complexes and administering them satisfactorily, as has proved possible, was that there was close and willing co-ordination not only between the housing committee of the district council and the social services committee of the county council, but with the Health Service and the Department of Health and Social Security on the social security side. At local level, the local authorities and the health authority were running ahead of Whitehall thinking. One of their earlier difficulties was to persuade the Department of the Environment and the DHSS in Whitehall to endorse the approach that they wanted to implement.

Anybody who visits the very sheltered housing in south Warwickshire—for example, Melville house in Stratford-on-Avon, Dell court in Henley-in-Arden, Malt Mill lane in Alcester, or one of the other seven purpose-built very sheltered housing complexes—will be not only impressed but moved by the positive and happy atmosphere there. Very sheltered housing meets the wants of elderly people. It becomes immediately clear to anybody who goes there that those elderly people do not feel that they are on the conveyor belt that leads from home to sheltered housing, and then, when sheltered housing becomes too difficult, into an old people's home and eventually into hospital where they will ail and die. That is not the pattern. Very sheltered housing is a place where people go to form a new community and to enjoy an extended lease of active life and where they are fulfilled as individuals.

The principle is applicable as much in the private as in the public sector. While the pioneering was done in the public sector, there is now a fairly rapid development of very sheltered housing in the private sector. There is immense scope for that. There have been major changes, which have to be taken into account in the making of social policy. It is a new and important fact that now 56 per cent. of people approaching retirement are owner-occupiers. They have a substantial capital asset. As my hon. Friend the Minister mentioned, it is also important that we are now witnessing the emergence of families with second, third, or even fourth pensions. Purpose-built very sheltered housing in the private sector, offering flats or bungalows for sale, provides the means for those assets to be mobilised and released into the most relevant, effective application for people's needs as they get older.

I should declare an interest as an unpaid director of Retirement Security, one of the most progressive private enterprise firms providing very sheltered housing. It was founded by Mr. Robert Bennett, the former director of social services in Warwickshire, who was anxious to explore the possibilities of extending to the private sector what had been so successfully pioneered in the public sector.

It is cost-effective for the state to work in partnership with the private sector in this area. In this way, the responsibility, which, as a society, we all share, can be discharged at minimum cost to the taxpayer. There is large scope for a legitimate, cost-effective, mutually beneficial partnership between the social security system and private enterprise. Help can be given to residents in private sector very sheltered accommodation if they run into difficulty with mortgage interest payments or rent payments, or over service charges and rates. Help can be given towards heating costs. They can be helped by way of supplementary pensions, housing benefit and other appropriate welfare benefits, in the same way as any other of our citizens are entitled to benefits.

It is important that the authorities scrutinise each very sheltered housing scheme and each individual claimant case by case. Our experience in Warwickshire is that the authorities do so. We have to safeguard against the abuses that might emerge in such a situation, but there is no difficulty with that.

If the state, on this cost-effective basis, could work with the private sector in helping 50 to 60 per cent. of the elderly population—it would take a long time to move to those proportions—the virtue of that would be not only the good care that the 50 to 60 pr cent. would receive, but that the state would then be able to concentrate the lion's share of its resources on helping the 40 per cent. of pensioners who are not well off and the proportion who, sadly, can only be described as poor.

The hon. Member for Rochdale paid tribute to the role of housing associations. That is the third leg. It is excellent that we have the public sector in local authority provision, housing associations and the private sector working together and working also in competition. Each is exploring the possibilities of innovation. Each is trying to develop new standards of best practice. That must be of advantage to society.

[Mr. Alan Howarth]

I mentioned standards of best practice. Central Government and local authorities have an important role to play in ensuring that standards are adequate, that best practice becomes better known and that what is regarded as the minimum standard is progressively lifted. I offered the reflection that the design standards stipulated in circular 69/82 were less than adequate in today's circumstances. I am glad that the Government, in circular 90/1, for example, lifted the standard that they envisaged for the provision of lifts. It is disgraceful that in private as well as in public sector developments it is possible to find four-storey buildings without lifts. I can think of one conversion of an old workhouse, which is far too much like the old workhouse.

Central and local government have a responsibility to ensure that standards are adequate. I should like to see a system of registration by private developers in this sector, and I should like to see the state undertaking a monitoring responsibility. I am always reluctant to advocate any increase in bureaucracy, but in this case we must recognise that old people are vulnerable. There is an indispensable role for the state in ensuring that their vulnerability is not taken advantage of. Pensioners are vulnerable to unscrupulous developers. I do not suggest that there are large numbers of unscrupulous developers in this sector, but there is a possibility of that. Pensioners are vulnerable to unscrupulous finance houses which sell them annuities on confiscatory terms. Pensioners are vulnerable to muggers. They would be vulnerable to the inflation that the Labour party would unleash again, devastating their savings.

The Government have rightly been praised this afternoon for their achievement in preserving the value of the retirement pension against the retail prices index. It has been a paramount necessity to restrain public expenditure in the interests of controlling inflation. No single aspect of public policy has proved to be more in the interests of our pensioners than bringing inflation down in the manner that we have. It was difficult even to preserve the value of the retirement pension in a period when not only were there important constraints on public expenditure, but the number of retired people in the population was increasing. As a result of the emergency in our public finances that we inherited in 1979, and subsequently during the recession, it was not possible to do more than limit the increase in the retirement pension to the increase in the RPI. We are now in a different period, with different circumstances. The number of people reaching the age of 65 years is stabilising, and the element of all retired people in our population will progressively stabilise. At the same time, the economy is prospering impressively. We have reached a point at which it is reasonable to say that our 9 million pensioners should share in the growing wealth of the nation.

In his opening speech my hon. Friend the Minister quoted Beveridge, who said that it is dangerous to be in any way lavish with old age. Nobody is contemplating the possibility of lavishness for our retirement pensioners, but the time has come when we can increase the real value of the retirement pension. I hope that my hon. and learned Friend the Under-Secretary of State will make representations to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, asking him whether, in his forthcoming Budget, when it is anticipated that he will have some spare capacity, he will over-index against inflation the allowances that are directly relevant to pensioners. In particular, I hope that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services will feel able to increase the retirement pension by more than the general level of inflation.

I also ask my hon. and learned Friend to consider whether the RPI is the right measure for retirement pensions. It is a matter of some disappointment to some of us, at a time when the Government have been reconsidering the components of and are rebasing the RPI, that they may not have sufficiently taken this consideration into account. We all know that the components for expenditure of the pensioner commonly do not include items such as mortgages or the expense of running a car, which the generality of the population expects to incur. We would all agree that the retirement pension could reasonably be measured against a special basket of expenses that are more representative of the expenses that pensioners incur. I ask my hon. and learned Friend to give sympathetic consideration to that point.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mr. Nicholas Lyell): Is my hon. Friend aware, as is the case, that the pensioners' price index gives a less favourable picture for pensioners than the RPI? Pensioners do better with the RPI. That is an important aspect which pensioners should realise.

Mr. Howarth: My request to my hon. and learned Friend was that he would look sympathetically at the point that I mentioned. It is worth further exploration. I know that my hon. and learned Friend would like to find a formula that was of the most benefit to pensioners.

5.58 pm

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): Thankfully, this subject has now been given the serious consideration that it warrants. The problem that the vast majority of elderly people face is simple—they do not receive enough money to live on. All of us, whatever party we belong to, whatever side of the House we sit on, represent pensioners. It was unbelievable to hear some of the comments that were made at the start of the debate. What are the comments of the Members who were making those statements when they visit, as I am sure they do, pensioner organisations in their constituencies? We all do that. I am sure that many pensioners would have been appalled at some of the comments that were made this afternoon.

Already, we have heard that next month, when the Chancellor presents his Budget, there will be a lot of money to be given away. I wonder how many pensioners will benefit from that. The hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) made the valid point that one of the priorities in the Budget should be realistic increases in retirement pensions. The Minister must know that recent increases of 40p and 80p have been received with disgust by pensioners. It is time that we did something far more constructive for them in the level of pensions that they receive.

The number one priority for pensioners is being able to keep their homes warm, and rightly so. Many of us who have a little time to go before we become pensioners often feel cold. We know what it is like. We know that often pensioners live in housing that lacks modern amenities,

and it is essential that they keep their homes warm. The tragedy is that the present heating allowances are inadequate. When we visit pensioners' clubs, this point is made repeatedly to us. Whatever be the existing heating allowance, it is inadequate for the vast majority of pensioners, many of whom, in weather such as that which we have had this winter, have to make a choice between keeping warm and having a properly balanced diet. Both of those are crucial.

The much publicised extra £5 heating allowance was something, but I cannot be more generous about it than that. How many people have benefited from it, and for how many weeks was the benefit paid? I have one of the leaflets being supplied at the local DHSS office, and it looks attractive. It says:

"Extra help with heating costs when it is very cold . . . You may be able to get an extra £5 for every very cold week if you get supplementary benefit or housing benefit supplement."

However, on an inside page the leaflet sets out the savings requirement, which appals pensioners. Under the heading "Savings", the leaflet says:

"You can get this help only if at the time of your claim you and your partner or your children have less than £505 in savings between you."

That is a scandalous approach when people need adequate heating allowances. Many pensioners have that sum of money for a particular reason, about which we all know. Pensioners want to know that when, as we all will do, they pass on, they will have adequate funds for a decent and dignified burial. We all know how much funerals cost. I beg the Minister and his Department to look again at the restrictions on this allowance, inadequate though it is. For a reasonable funeral and headstone, one is talking about £1,000 and to refuse the heating allowance to those with more than £505 in savings is scandalous. I hope that the Minister will do something about it.

My hon Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) made several points that should be mentioned again—for example, that about home help. The hon. Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames) has disappeared. He made an intervention and read from an obvious handout, but has not returned to the debate. He gave the number of home helps in his area, and if he has got the figure right, he is very lucky. The vast majority of us know that there is an appalling shortage of home helps in our areas.

Recently, I had to contact Age Concern because a lady in her 80s could not get a home help and, as a result, she could not have her weekly pension because there was no one to draw it for her. To its credit, Age Concern was able to help. As other hon. Members have said, many voluntary organisations do wonderful work in our communities. Home helps are vital for the elderly and disabled, and we have a long way to go in the provision of them.

The Minister quoted figure after figure, all of which sounded impressive, but, as the hon. Member for Rochdale (Mr. Smith) said, those figures do not impress pensioners because they have to live with the day-to-day issues. For example, Members of Parliament are for ever fighting battles about hospital closures. In my constituency, and in many other areas, elderly people are being discharged from hospital far too quickly. I can name names of constituents who have been sent home too soon but have been told by the administrator at St. George's hospital, Tooting, that their neighbour or friend should keep an eye on them. It is an indictment of our day and age that elderly people at risk are discharged from hospital long before they should have been, and without the proper back-up services when they need them, possibly more than at any other time.

Another problem is the rundown in the ambulance service. All of us——

Dame Jill Knight: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I have read the Order Paper carefully, and it seems to me that we can talk about health matters in the next debate rather than in this one.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman must confine himself to what is on the Order Paper.

Mr. Cox: I note your comment, Mr. Speaker, but, with great respect, I must point out that, while Mr. Deputy Speaker was in the Chair, we discussed these topics, and hon. Members who have spoken before me have made comments similar to mine. Elderly people are concerned not only about the amount of pension that they draw, but about many other issues that concern their standard of living within their community and their home.

We have a long way to go before any of us can be happy about the priority given to pensioners. As hon. Members have said, at the beginning of the debate there was an attempt to confuse the real issue by giving countless statistics. The tragedy for millions of people is that, if they are poor, they do not get adequate pensions to maintain the standard of living to which they are entitled. Until they do, there will be many problems for them to live with. When the Chancellor presents his Budget, whatever give-aways he may have, the greatest credit would come to the Government if the biggest give-away, in the form of realistic pensions, went to the retired people.

6.9 pm

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox), reversing the roles at the time of my maiden speech, which was about pensioners. The hon. Gentleman was very kind to me at that time. The House listened with great interest to his speech and I know that he speaks with authority. This time he did not make the same speech as the one that he made eight years ago, but he made it with the same sincerity. I agree with the hon. Gentleman and with the hon. Member for Rochdale (Mr. Smith) that the figures bandied about in the House do not mean much to pensioners, but all hon. Members are at fault there and I am glad that in the last couple of speeches we have discussed the real problems that face our pensioners and the priorities of the elderly.

The hon. Member for Tooting said that hon. Members talk to pensioners' associations. One of my regrets is that pensioners' associations in my constituency do not always reflect the real needs of the pensioners. Too many times they get involved in political arguments far beyond the real need and the welfare of their members. Pensioners' associations would be well advised to take that into account in formulating future policies.

Inevitably, we heard the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) squealing about the Government's record. My hon. Friend the Minister of State put the hon. Gentleman right about various figures. Pensioners do not need friends like the hon. Member for Oldham, West and his party—the party that raised inflation to such an extent that pensioners' savings were deeply eroded. It is the party that gave pensioners a Christmas bonus and then had the gall to take it away. Now the Opposition are

[Mr. John Carlisle]

making false promises which they know in their heart of hearts they cannot fulfil during the lifetime of a Parliament.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security was quite right when he said that it may well be that, on the sad day for Britain of a Labour Government being returned, they would implement immediately those promises. However, their record between 1974 and 1979 gives the lie to any promise that they make. It would cost an enormous amount of money and our taxpayers cannot afford it. The Opposition are fuelling false hopes among pensioners. That is cruel and will place pensioners in a desperate situation. My party and the Government take a realistic view about the growing burden on the public sector of pensioners and old people. We must welcome the fact that medical science has seen to it that old people live longer. The average age of the population is rising quite dramatically, and older people deserve and obviously need more expensive services. The burden on the public purse will increase dramatically towards the end of the century. I remind the House of a salient fact. There are more people alive today in the world than have ever died. We must remember that when talking about future pension policies.

I shall confine my remarks to the part of the motion about community care and residential homes. They are important and, as the motion says, an absolute priority for the elderly. My remarks are based on experience of visiting local authority homes in my own area during the eight years or so that I have been a Member of this House and during the previous four years when I was a candidate. Two obvious trends have emerged. First, the number of homes provided by local authorities and, more dramatically, those provided privately has grown.

Secondly—and this is an important point—the nature and character of the people in those homes is such that their increasing frailty has placed an enormous burden on the staff. In parts of my constituency residential homes have become almost nursing homes. The tragedy is that the members of staff who man them so ably are not trained as nurses and do not have the medical expertise to cope with the residents. Consequently, there is enormous strain upon the staff individually and in terms of the number required. Inevitably, there is also an enormous strain on the facilities that are needed. Because of the frailty of the residents, they need increasing and better facilities.

I am pleased to see in his place my hon. and learned Friend the Under-Secretary of State. He will know that the report of Bedfordshire county council on the social services is still being compiled and has been brought to our attention. I shall quote briefly from that report. It talks about the trend in the condition of residents in these homes. It says:

"Since 1978 there has been a growing conviction that residents have significantly increased in physical and mental frailty and hence in their dependence on staff for the normal functions of daily life."

As I say, that has come about because of the enormous growth in the population of the elderly because people are living longer. Secondly, and rather ironically, it has come about as a result of the increased and improved home care service which means that old people are staying longer in their homes. Of course we all support that, but when finally they have to go into a residential home they are far more frail than was the case in the past. There is a definite message from the staff of these homes that the nature of the residents has changed and the staff is finding it increasingly difficult to cope. I should like to add my tribute to those paid to the staffs of those homes and especially to the staffs of the homes in my constituency. They are doing a magnificent job, sometimes under very difficult conditions.

There is a definite change in the situation and the Bedfordshire report says that the proportion of residents who are virtually independent of need has decreased since 1978 by about 85 per cent and that over the same period those partly dependent on need has decreased by some 77 per cent. Perhaps more significantly it says that the number of people who are now virtually totally dependent on staff has gone up by 75 per cent. That means that the members of staff have to give an enormous amount of time to the residents and in many cases they can ill afford that time. Incontinence, immobility, and the confusion of residents have risen dramatically—to such an extent that many residents need assistance just to get up in the morning and get themselves ready for the day ahead.

I repeat that residential homes have almost become mini hospitals or nursing homes, but they do not have the staff to cope. Various things ought to be done. First, we must all ensure that better use is made of the available resources. I am not necessarily calling for increased resources, because many county council social service departments could spend money better. My county council in Bedfordshire would be far better employed spending money to meet the needs of old people in residential homes than on making Bedfordshire a nuclear free zone or spending money on anti-apartheid campaigns.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West is wrong. It is not an increase in numbers of staff that we need. We must look at the quality of the staff who care for the patients in our residential homes.

We must encourage the private sector. I support my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth), who spoke about sheltered accommodation. The private sector has mushroomed and the Government have had to take certain steps to ensure that the private homes are adequately and properly supervised and adequately funded.

I am glad to see in her place my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight). I am reminded of the story that she told some years ago in a national newspaper about two patients in a residential home. One of them paid the full amount of £120 or £130 because she had saved throughout her life and had money in the bank. The other patient was her greatest friend, and her husband had messed about, spent all his money and died and left his widow penniless. Both those patients enjoyed exactly the same facilities. I think that the hon. Member for Rochdale raised this matter when he talked about a penalty on thrift. We have got to get this right. There is something wrong somewhere if those who have saved during their lives—that we want to encourage—are now penalised because they have money in the bank.

We must encourage the idea that elderly people must be able to be kept at home in comfort. Some form of tax assistance must be given to those who are willing to keep them. It is an enormous burden on a family for an old person to stay within that family. As much as the family might like to keep the old person with them, in some cases it becomes impossible. Perhaps my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will give a little more

assistance by some form of tax concession to those who are willing to keep their old people with them. That would encourage people to do so.

I applaud the new moves by my own local borough council which is trying to turn one of our tower blocks into a block for old people. Right hon. and hon. Members know of the great difficulties we all have with tower blocks, especially Members such as the hon. Member for Tooting. Luton borough council is now trying to encourage pensioners to move into one of our tower blocks so that it can be used specifically for old people, with the necessary security and warden control. That sort of policy needs to be encouraged.

Old people require very little. They want to retain their independence, and we must respect that. Many of them want to stay at home, and, again, that must be respected. They want to retain their dignity. They do not want to receive bribes or free handouts which they feel that they might get as special, privileged members of society. They would rather stand on their own feet. Above all, they want comfort and security, and part of that security comes from low inflation so that they are encouraged to save, their savings are not eroded and, as the hon. Member for Tooting said, so that they can save for their funeral expenses, which is often a great priority in their financial independence.

I believe that the Government, by their policy and by the fact that we have retained and increased the pension well above the rate of inflation, thus increasing spending power, have treated pensioners extremely well. I believe, hope and know that they will give us a vote of confidence when the day comes. We deserve it, and they deserve our support.

6.22 pm

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): One of the tests of any civilised society must be the extent to which the needs and aspirations of its elderly are looked after. By that standard the record of the Government is lamentable. I do not believe that they are meeting any of their basic obligations to elderly people.

In my constituency there are more than 8,000 pensioners, many of whom have nothing which in any way approaches a decent standard of life. I was going to try to deal with some of the technicalities of the statistics quoted earlier but time does not permit that. However, it is sufficient to say that many of the pensioners in my constituency do not have much in the way of savings, nor have they been fortunate enough to receive the benefit of an occupational pension scheme. They do not perceive themselves to be well off at all. In fact, they perceive themselves, in relative terms, to have a declining standard of life.

The supply of suitable housing for elderly people has been raised by several hon. Members on both sides of the House. Again, I was going to deal with some of the statistics in my own borough and mention how the provisions, certainly in terms of capital resources through the Housing Corporation and the housing investment programme allocations, do not meet the needs identified by the local authority. Perhaps I can mention one good example of a scheme that is dealing adequately with the aspirations of a particular group of pensioners and that might be a model way of providing housing for many groups of pensioners in the future.

The Huyton Community Co-operative for the Elderly is a body that I played a small part in setting up. It is not in my constituency; it is in the neighbouring constituency represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. Hughes). That co-operative has a two-phase programme. The first is providing 24 units of accommodation for elderly people at a total scheme cost of £750,000 and the second envisages building 35 bungalows. Those two phases are funded through the Housing Corporation and will meet the needs of the tenant-co-operators.

If anyone ever visits these schemes once they are completed, in many respects they probably will not look dissimilar from other straightforward housing association schemes. What is important is that the elderly people who are going to live there, who were nominated by the local authority, will, for the most part, have been involved in the scheme before the design was completed. They would have been involved with architects in drawing up the design for the scheme. That seems to be an eminently sensible way of providing housing for the elderly. For all we in this House and elsewhere may sympathise and feel strongly about issues affecting the elderly, it is they who know the difficulties they face in their everyday lives and it is they who know what design features would help to overcome them.

I now want to raise the issue of how elderly people are consulted and listened to about the things which affect their lives. Much as I accept entirely the manifesto laid out by my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), I believe that the involvement and representation of elderly people by elderly people has to be a significant part of any future programmes, whether we are talking about housing, pensions, health or whatever. I pay tribute to the National Pensioners' Convention, led by Jack Jones who is the president of that excellent body. He is the former general secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union—*[Laughter.]* Hon. Members opposite may laugh, but it is important that people like Jack Jones with organisational skills should put those skills to work on behalf of other elderly people when they retire. That would certainly apply just as well to retired company executives.

It is crucial that pensioners are represented not just in this place and on local authorities, but in their own organisations which are manned and led by their own people. Once those organisations, whether locally, regionally or nationally, are in place it would be difficult, with the growing proportion of the population which is elderly, for any Government ever again to get away with the appallingly bad way in which this Government have treated the elderly.

6.27 pm

Dame Jill Knight (Birmingham, Edgbaston): In the true debating sense which does not always obtain in the House, I rise to respond to a speech made by my hon. Friend—I am not making a mistake when I say that—the Member for Rochdale (Mr. Smith). Let us acknowledge that we all care about elderly people, and no one in the House wants to see poor old people who cannot feed, warm or house themselves properly. Let us instead, therefore, address ourselves to the difficulties, because the difficulties are very real.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale said that he wanted to abolish standing charges for gas and electricity

[Dame Jill Knight]

to help elderly people. Many people believe that the cost starts only when one turns on the tap. In fact, that is not so, because it costs money to make power or water available to one's house. Therefore, someone has to pay that money. When, after the hon. Member for Rochdale had said that the alliance's intention would be to cancel standing charges, I suggested that that would help everyone indiscriminately, whether they were wealthy or poor, he manfully faced the question and explained that he realised that it would cost a lot of money but that the money would be gained by increasing the cost of electricity. I want the House to know that the gas and electricity undertakings looked into that possibility and found that using a low amount did not necessarily mean a person was poor, because, for instance, many people with two homes, such as some of the holiday homes in Wales, use very little electricity, and they would benefit from that scheme. We all want to help pensioners and we must address ourselves to these real difficulties.

Many people will agree with my hon. Friend that it would be much better to increase pensions than to take 2p off income tax, and to that extent I agree with him. However, it would be better still to take more pensioners out of the tax bracket altogether because many people on pensions are paying income tax. That is what I should like to address myself to.

My final point is about penalising thrift. People used to save money for a rainy day, but they do not save it any more because the Government provide the umbrella. It cannot be right that the Government should pay for items with taxpayers' money — many taxpayers are poorer than the recipients—when the recipients themselves have enough money in the bank to pay for those items. I do not find it easy to meet that third difficulty either.

If only we would address ourselves across the House to solving those genuine problems, we could get somewhere.

6.30 pm

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): 1987 is a year for elderly people in Wales as it is the 40th anniversary of Age Concern Wales. Obviously, it is an appropriate time for this debate.

Demographic factors are ensuring that the position of pensioners will be a dominant political issue for the next decade. Between 1981 and 1996 there will be a 28 per cent. increase in the number of people over the age of 75. Between 1983 and 2001 there is a forecast increase of 73 per cent. in those over 85 on an all-Wales level. In my county of Gwynedd the number of those aged over 80 will increase from the 1985 figure of 8,782 to the 1996 projection of 11,117. Those are real people who will need real care. That is why we need to pay attention in this debate to our spending priorities for both pensions and the services that are important to those people.

As pensioners live longer beyond retiring age, their capital expenditure items, such as clothing, washing machines and painting the house, often become an increased cyclical burden. Pensioners must face them perhaps two or three times after they retire, which becomes a real burden because their savings are eroded as they grow older. That is a burden particularly for single household pensioners. In Wales 27·7 per cent. of all pensioners live in single households and in my constituency the figure is 33 per cent. That shows the extent of the burden. There is a need to increase the resources available and, in particular, to give an extra differential to those in single households to meet those costs. There is also a need for a review of the benefits available.

I should like to draw to the attention of the Minister the mobility allowance for those over 75—we should not write them off and say that they have no right to mobility—and the death grant. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have drawn attention to the anxiety of many people about having enough money to pay for their funeral. As we all die, the state could bear a reasonable proportion of the cost of that.

The motion refers to services. Home helps and nursing services certainly need to be further developed to enable elderly people to remain in the community. Perhaps we need a new hybrid person who is a mixture between a home help and a home nurse to focus the attention and help that is needed. We also need more multi-disciplinary teams playing a crucial role where old people live. Perhaps there should be one such team for every general practioner area.

More thought is needed in constructing bungalows, sheltered housing and service flats about the needs of elderly people as demographic features change. We also need to look carefully at the joint planning and joint funding approach. Gwynedd area health authority recently told me:

> "The majority of frail elderly persons and their carers require support from both statutory agencies but the separateness of their organisational and management systems together with major differences in the priority and funding of services leads to a totally disjointed provision at the 'sharp end'."

We should take that message home.

I agree with the hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth) that we should listen to what elderly people have to say. At the last annual general meeting of Wales pensioners, 10 points were drawn up as a charter. I shall summarise them in headings. They are the substantial increase in the value of pensions; the abolition of standing charges; the linking of pensions with average earnings and the retail prices index; the amendment of the Social Security Act 1986, which is worrying many pensioners; improved health care facilities, which we shall debate later; local hospitals, which we shall debate later; the need to establish effective pensioner lobbies so that their voice is heard and people speak on their behalf; a retirement age of 60 for men and women; the cost of funerals to be borne to a greater extent by the public purse; and an end to discrimination against pensioners. Those 10 points made by pensioners should commend themselves to the House.

6.35 pm

Mr. Derek Conway (Shrewsbury and Atcham): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) for the brevity of his remarks, which enables me to contribute to the debate. I am frequently tail-end Charlie on these occasions.

The House should pay tribute to the courage of the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher). I took part in the debate on cold weather payments. The hon. Gentleman received such a mauling on that occasion, and has done so again this afternoon, by my hon. Friend the Minister and hon. Members that, if nothing else, one must recognise the courage of the man for coming to the Dispatch Box, albeit with inaccurate information.

The hon. Member for Rochdale (Mr. Smith) rightly said that pensioners do not want to hear about statistics, but want to live in the real world. But the fact remains, "by their deeds ye shall know them." During the time in office of the Labour Government, who were propped up by the Liberal party and the hon. Gentleman, who begged us to forget about the record of that Government, I was in local government and pensioners had their savings base eroded. They need to be reminded of the past. They cannot be allowed to forget it because there is nothing to stop the past returning. That is the lesson of history. If we return to a high-spending economy without earning it, pensioners will again lose their savings base.

The Minister reminded us, and it is as well to say it again and again to our pensioners, that after allowing for taxation and inflation between 1974 and 1979 when the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) was a member of the Labour Government—yesterday he made this point to the Prime Minister and was subsequently corrected—pensioner incomes grew by 0·6 per cent. Under this Government that record is four and a half times better. Our achievement cannot be forgotten and pensioners must be constantly reminded of it.

The average net income of pensioners has increased from £68·50 in 1974 to £83·10 under this Government. That is twice the growth in income of the population as a whole. No hon. Member, certainly no Conservative Member, says to pensioners, "You have it easy and it is all coming your way" because we know that that is not the case. Pensioners want and deserve more.

As a young Conservative on an exchange to Austria I was struck by the respect extended by our continental cousins to the elderly parents of the household. They were regarded as the senior members of the household and were not shunted to one side. That made me think that we had a lot to learn from that society. Pensioners receive their dignity, not by relying heavily on the state, but by independence. That is why it was important for many elderly people to receive a second chance to buy their council home and to have the dignity of owning property. Those who experienced the war years when they were young did not have the means to buy their home, but they have subsequently been given that opportunity, which is important.

The service provided in private homes for the elderly is excellent and no more so than in my constituency. The homes that operate on a proper basis and have registered nurses providing proper care have audited accounts. It would be a big help if the DHSS paid those homes by cheque so that there was no longer an incentive for some of the less scrupulous operators to employ people on a black economy basis and to provide a less reputable service as a result. It is equally important that the planning constraints imposed by the Department of the Environment should be relaxed to allow for the building of more private developments for the elderly. Such developments, especially the recent one in my constituency called Carline Fields by Mercian Holdings, are popular. The one in my constituency is an excellent development for the elderly.

The debate has given us many issues to ponder. Although we accept that not everything is rosy, we cannot forget the past. If ever the spendthrift policies of the alliance and the Labour party are implemented, the problems of the past will return.

6.40 pm

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): The elderly are a growing proportion of the population. It is expected that in 1991 more than 3 million people will be over 75 and that the number of those over 85 will increase from about 400,000 to 600,000. Those people are entitled to independence and dignity. Little respect was shown for either their independence or their dignity by the behaviour of some Conservative Members at the start of the debate. Frankly, it was disgraceful.

Retirement should, for the majority, be a time of opportunity. I welcome the campaign run by Age Concern called "Celebrating Age." It seems to select and to catch the right note. It is certainly a better note than the one that the Prime Minister struck when she spoke of the "burden" that the elderly represent on the working population. The Age Concern campaign draws attention to the resources that the elderly represent and reminds us that they are more likely than those in any other age group to be engaged in voluntary work. If the elderly are to have opportunities and are to be able to exercise them to the full, they need assistance and support.

There are a number of worrying tendencies in the development of policy under this Government. One has been the increased reliance explicitly on charitable care. Cuts in statutory provision have been accompanied by the encouragement and switch of financial support to the voluntary sector, although, as is the pattern with this Government, having cut financial support to the statutory sector, they follow it by cutting support to the voluntary sector. There has certainly been a switch of direction.

The EEC scheme for distributing food from the food mountains, with its direct use of charities, has used the avenue which the Government must surely understand is the most unfortunate one for that generation which rejects needing to apply for help as a basis for charity. A scheme which provides for charitable payment may be the type of scheme that replaces the present severe weather payments scheme. We know that such a replacement scheme will have to be brought in over the next few months because the existing one will disappear in April next year.

It is ironic that the present scheme debars those who have made savings from receiving any assistance with their fuel bills. A number of hon. Members have mentioned that. It is ironic, especially as the Government make such a point in their amendment about the value of pensioners' savings. Savings over a particular level debar people from receiving severe weather payments, as from receiving single payments for draught-proofing and from getting help with, for example, transfer from institutional to community care. In so far as the Government have taken the trouble to outline their proposals for the future, they see such help as may be available as more a charity than a right in the sense that the payments will be available only when DHSS staff decide those who have proven need. But the DHSS will not have the funds to help all those whose need is proven.

Social fund grants or loans for the elderly for transfer into the community will be available only after consideration has been given to whether the patient has saved money out of the benefit paid to him while in the institution and whether relatives, charities or other agencies could give assistance and, if so, how much.

Presumably, severe weather payments—if they are paid at all—will be on the same basis. It is instructive to

[Mrs. Margaret Beckett]

consider the likely cost of an adequate scheme—not the one that the Government have or are likely to introduce —such as the winter premium which we propose. We calculate that it will cost about £150 million. The Government have implied on a number of occasions that the money for such a scheme cannot be found. Of course, it could have been found even this year had the Government been prepared to divert the £164 million that they spent on marketing the sale of British Gas.

For more than a year, the Government have been promising to tell us what they intend to do about single payments for draught-proofing, which are due to disappear as well. The programme of energy conservation, which most hon. Members should welcome as being beneficial to pensioners and of benefit to public expenditure, is under threat because of cuts in the Manpower Services Commission's budget for the community programme. Ten thousand places have been lost and 35 planned schemes of draught-proofing are under threat. I suppose that that is at least consistent—short sighted, improvident, but at least consistent—with the fact that the Department of the Environment is cutting its scheme for insulation grants.

The Minister spoke enthusiastically about the Government's record. We shall have to read *Hansard* carefully to examine his statistics, since they bear out the experience of neither most pensioners nor most hon. Members—a fact that was clearly evident even in the speeches of Conservative Members.

Mr. Maclean *rose*——

Mrs. Beckett: I am sorry, but I do not have time to give way.

The figures that the Minister cited managed to steer clear of the record on, for example, housing benefit cuts, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Fulham (Mr. Raynsford) referred. Hundreds of millions of pounds have been cut from that scheme, mostly to the disadvantage of pensioners and especially those on occupational pensions, which the Minister commended to the House.

The Minister implied that pensions not only were rising but would go on rising, as would the general income of pensioners. That was extraordinary. Indeed, I think that it comes into the category of misleading the House. The hon. Gentleman is aware that the Government's policy is to lower pensioners' expectations and ultimately to lower their pensions. The Government have made no secret of that.

Mr. Major *indicated dissent.*

Mrs. Beckett: The hon. Gentleman is clearly misinformed. It is explicitly the Government's policy to lower pensioners' expectations.

Mr. Maclean *rose*——

Mrs. Beckett: The Secretary of State has made that clear. The hon. Gentleman was not present to hear what was said so perhaps he is not aware of that fact. The Government have cut the state earnings-relrated pension scheme and occupational pension schemes. They have reduced pensioners' likely expectations, whatever the quarter from which they draw their pension. The Minister had the nerve to boast of the increased pensions that people will draw from either the state earnings-related pension scheme or the occupational pension schemes. He knows perfectly well that in the Social Security Act 1986 the Government reduced the likely increases in those pensions.

Attention has been drawn to the level of cuts. It is the Government Actuary's prediction, not ours — the Government have never questioned or contradicted it—that the fall in the basic pension and in the earnings-related pension will be so severe under the policies introduced last year by the Government that the total pension from both sources will fall below the level of the basic state pension alone. Against that background, it is extraordinary that the Minister should have boasted about the fact that people now do not have to live just on the basic state pension, because many are receiving pension supplements. We welcome those supplements, but the hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that the Government's policy will mean that pensioners will not even get their present pension levels.

The Minister skated over other aspects of the Government's policy—for example, the way in which heating allowances were abated for the first time ever by the available scale margin and the way in which the amount that the Government have been prepared to pay in heating allowances makes up for about a fifth of the sum that pensioners have lost because of the break in the link between pensions and earnings. The Minister skated over the way in which the costs that pensioners have to meet have increased because of the taxes that the Government have imposed on fuel.

The Government's policy—if hon. Members doubt this, I recommend that they read what happened in Committee on the Social Security Act, 1986—is, as the Secretary of State has stated repeatedly, to reduce the expectations of pensioners. The Government have already reduced their prospects by cutting all elements of pensioners' income, by their toleration of high levels of unemployment, which in themselves are bound to reduce future pension entitlements, and by their pressure, especially on the low paid, for people to take still lower wages, out of which people cannot possibly save towards their retirement. Under this Government, celebrating age will become more and more difficult for the majority of elderly people. We require different policies and a different Government.

6.49 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mr. Nicholas Lyell): There is just one matter of common ground in this debate and that is that pensioners deserve a good standard of living in retirement. The issue is how to provide that good standard of living, how it has been provided in the past and how it should be provided in future. The Opposition have sought to criticise our record and they boast of their priorities. The fact is, they fail on both counts.

This debate has highlighted in stark terms the difference between the empty hopes and unfulfilled promises of state Socialism and the present Government's real achievements for pensioners over the past eight years based on sound economic policies and the control of inflation. One central truth illuminates the difference between the two systems. That truth is that living standards for pensioners have risen under this Government by more than 18 per cent. in real terms. They have risen twice as fast for pensioners as for the population as a whole and they have risen more

than four times as fast as the pitiful rate achieved by the previous Labour Government. Indeed, even to say that tends to exaggerate Labour's achievements.

The Labour Government made one big election promise between the two elections in 1974—to increase the single person's pension to just £10 in their first Budget. The Labour Government fulfilled that promise at the expense of the taxpayer and forthcoming inflation. The next five years brought little but a succession of unfulfilled hopes, broken promises, unpaid Christmas bonuses and the sad sight for pensioners of their savings of a lifetime being crippled by inflation.

Mr. George Howarth: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Lyell: My hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and the Disabled has described the sorry catalogue. Pensions were to be uprated by the higher of earnings or prices increases. The Labour Government failed to do that in 1976, depriving pensioners of no less than £1·2 billion which the Labour Government simply could not afford to pay. The Labour Government twice failed to pay the Christmas bonus—in 1975 and 1976. For every year that Labour were in office, the value of pensioners' income from savings declined by 3·4 per cent. in real terms because runaway inflation had overwhelmed interest rates and pensioners had to live on their capital.

I want to emphasise one point. We may think that not many pensioners had savings. However, 71 per cent. of pensioners have incomes from savings. That 71 per cent. saw their income and that capital decimated by the Labour Government. In November 1978 the forecast increase in pensions once again fell short of the Labour Government's statutory obligation by 2 per cent. It was left to this Government to honour that commitment which Labour could not reach and which they were irresponsible to have given.

By contrast, under this Government, pensioners' incomes have steadily improved by an average of 2·7 per cent. a year. I notice that the hon. Member for Rochdale (Mr. Smith) is in his place and he claimed that percentages can be confusing. I understand that. However, if we consider the matter in cash figures, and I give those cash figures in 1985 prices, things become clearer. Under the previous Labour Government, the average income for pensioners at 1985 prices managed to creep up over the whole of the Labour Government's period in office by a mere £2·10. During the period of this Government, simply from 1979 to 1985, pensioners' incomes rose by nearly six times that amount, by £12·50 a week, which is more than £600 a year. That is total net income and money in the pocket. That shows the real improvement that has been achieved by this Government.

The title of this debate is "Priorities for the Elderly". I want to say a few words about priorities because Opposition Members and others should be very clear on this point. Whether by design or incompetence—and I prefer to believe it is the latter, although I am not quite sure—the priorities of the leaders of the Labour party do not seem to be to help the poor. As we have explained many times, the poor pensioner will gain little or nothing from the promised £5 increase for single pensioners and the promised £8 rise for married couples, since it will almost all—and in many cases all—be clawed back by the means test. That is what the Labour party proposes. Despite being challenged time and again, neither the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) nor the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) has responded. They must know, even if they did not realise it when they made their promises, that unless they make corresponding increases for those on supplementary benefit, for widows, and the long-term sick and disabled, those groups will benefit little, if at all, from the increases. If those increases are made, the cost will be not £3·6 billion—which is all that the Labour party will have available, and I doubt whether it will have even that —but £5·6 billion.

The message from the Opposition is, "The poorer you are, the less you will benefit." What a reversal of priorities. It is precisely because of the empty nature of those promises that pensioners would be wise to learn the lessons of history.

This became a thoughtful debate when my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) and my hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Conway) made some excellent points. Those tied in with the points made by the hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth) and my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle). I agree with the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North about the importance of sheltered housing. Sheltered housing has been a priority under this Government and will continue to be so.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon asked about the possibility of considering a different index. Certainly we will consider that point. However, it is interesting to note that the RPI is a great deal better for pensioners than the pensioners' price index. Over the period of this Government leading up to the last uprating, if we had uprated by the pensioners index as against the RPI, pensioners would have been £2·70 a week less well off. That is an important point to remember.

The hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) referred once again to the 40p and 80p. That must be seen in the context of the fact that we are changing the system so that pensioners no longer have to wait so long for their increases. There have been small increases as a result of lower inflation. However, if we examine a 16-month period, the figures are £3·70 for a single person and £5·95 for a couple. That is a significant help.

I want to emphasise two comparisons. The first is the comparison of pensioners' income relative to that of the rest of society in this country, and the other is a comparison with Europe. It should be remembered that, because of the growth in occupational pensions, including SERPS, which we are paying on exactly the same basis until the end of the century, and because of the tremendous turn round in pensioners' incomes for savings, covering more than two thirds and approaching nearly three quarters of pensioners, pensioners' incomes have improved twice as fast as incomes for the population as a whole. Furthermore, under this Government, pensioners have moved out of the lowest 20 per cent. of earners to a significant extent. However, when the Labour party left office, 38 per cent. of pensioners were in the bottom one fifth of income earners. We have lowered that figure to 25 per cent. There has been a steady improvement for pensioners in the average earning levels across the board.

Sometimes comparisons are made with Europe. I emphasise that, taking the position as a whole, as the motion enjoins us to do, including total support for elderly

[Mr. Lyell]

people and the services that they receive in the form of personal social services and residential and nursing home care, Britain is the third highest provider in Europe.

The facts disclosed in the debate should be a crushing blow for the confidence of the Opposition, and a heartening boost to the confidence of pensioners. The motion is ignorant and misleading. Our amendment shows the right way, and I commend it to the House.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 199, Noes 273.

Division No. 101] **[7.0 pm**

AYES

Abse, Leo
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'rmline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Rt Hon J.
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clelland, David Gordon
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freud, Clement
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Fife Central)*
Hancock, Michael
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley, N)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Janner, Hon Greville
Jenkins, Rt Hon Roy *(Hillh'd)*
John, Brynmor
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
MacKenzie, Rt Hon Gregor
McTaggart, Robert
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Neillist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R.*(W'hampt'n NE)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C.*(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Cyril *(Rochdale)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'ds E)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stewart, Rt Hon D. *(W Isles)*
Stott, Roger
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wainwright, R.
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Wrigglesworth, Ian
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Allen McKay and
Mr. John McWilliam.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, William
Best, Keith
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Bulmer, Esmond
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carttiss, Michael
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Hon A. *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Cormack, Patrick
Corrie, John
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
du Cann, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald

Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John S
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hickmet, Richard
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hirst, Michael
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irving, Charles
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Nicholas
McCurley, Mrs Anna
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, M. *(N'bury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
Madel, David
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Mather, Sir Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Miscampbell, Norman
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Mudd, David
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Patten, Christopher *(Bath)*
Patten, J. *(Oxf W & Abgdn)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Prentice, Rt Hon Reg
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Squire, Robin
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Patrick *(N'lch N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Wiggin, Jerry
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Michael Neubert and
Mr. Gerald Malone.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

Mr. Speaker *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House believes that pensioners deserve a good standard of living in retirement, whether their incomes come from state benefits, occupational pensions or savings, notes with approval that the Government's economic policies have reversed the previous sharp decline in the value of pensioners' savings; welcomes the higher level of expenditure on benefits for elderly people even after taking account of provision for one million additional pensioners since 1978; and congratulates the Government on its success in improving pensioners' living standards in both absolute and relative terms.

Health Care and Services for the Elderly

7.13 pm

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): I beg to move,

That this House deplores the failure of the Government to provide sufficient resources to enable the National Health Service and local councils to provide Britain's elderly people with the services they need, deserve and have paid for.

Mr. Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

Mr. Dobson: We all know that a growing number of people in our country are living longer. Everyone should welcome that. In terms of history and geography, life expectation has been a measure of the prosperity of a society and can be safely used to compare our society with earlier times or with other contemporary societies, simply on the basis of how long people live. The judgment is usually—the longer, the better. Certainly that is most people's judgment for themselves, their relatives and friends, and so it should be for our country.

Nothing irritates me more than people who go on about the problems of people living longer and the problem of there being more old people. When it was mainly the well-off who lived for a long time, nobody said that it was a problem, even though some of them sponged on society for all of their lives. Therefore, I should like to know why it is described as a burden when it is ordinary people who are living longer.

What is needed for all the people who are living longer is a decent standard of life that can be enjoyed by all throughout their extended lives. That includes a reasonable and secure income, somewhere warm and decent to live, a sense of security, and the stimulus of company, together with the practical services that will help them to keep healthy and mobile.

Under this Government, the living standards of elderly people have not kept up with those of the rest of us—*[Interruption.]* Apparently, some Conservative Members were not listening to the earlier debate or they would have——

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): As somebody who was present during the two Front-Bench speeches in the previous debate, from which, I believe, the hon. Gentleman was absent, I remind the hon. Gentleman of two points that were made. First, his hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) was holding forth with out-of-date statistics. Secondly, the real living standards of pensioners have actually gone up more during the last few years than the real living standards of the population as a whole; and they have gone up considerably anyhow.

Mr. Dobson: What the hon. Gentleman asserts is palpably false. The standard of living of most elderly people in this country has not gone up in line with the standards of living of most of the rest of us.

Keeping warm and having somewhere to live has become more expensive and more difficult for many old people——

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dobson: No, I shall not give way.

Crime and the fear of crime keeps many of our old people in what amounts to self-imprisonment, denying them much of the company that they need and would enjoy. During the last two years of the Labour Government, in the years 1977-78 and 1978-79, crime fell by 4 per cent. If witless Conservative Members cannot remember that, perhaps they can remember that crime has increased by 50 per cent. under this Government, leading to damage to the health, welfare and practical living standards of many old people, because if one decides or chooses—if that is the right word—not to go out because of all those pressures, one's standard of living is considerably reduced.

The practical services to help elderly people to keep healthy and mobile have not expanded in line with their numbers and needs. Nor has there been any recognition of the need to extend those services so that the quality of life of the increasing number of elderly people may be improved.

To put things into perspective, we must remember that 95 per cent. of people over 65 live in their own homes and look after themselves, or are looked after by professional or voluntary carers. Some need help to do tasks that are simple for the able-bodied but difficult for them, such as getting in and out of bed or round and about their houses or flats. They may need such assistance when they want to get in or out. Those are simple tasks, but some of the tasks carried out by the professional carers are considerably more complicated and demanding.

Those services could be expanded but they are not being expanded in line with need, nor are there any significant plans nationally to improve the situation. There has been no increase in the number of community or district nurses devoted to looking after the elderly. There are no plans to do as the health visitors wish and to build up their role in providing continuing care and advice to elderly people in their areas.

One of the objectives, it is said, of the policies of all Governments is to try to make sure that as many elderly people as possible can stay in their own homes for as long as possible. But, because of the curiosities of the benefit system, there is now a financial incentive to be institutionalised in a private institution. Plainly, that runs contrary to the intentions of the Government and their predecessors in trying to keep people well looked after at home.

The Government have been keen to expand the provision of private residential care for the elderly, and some of the outfits that provide it are dubious. I shall not talk at length about such an expanding sector, save to point out that many of the private homes, good or bad—quite a few of them are bad—do not last long. It is estimated that about one in three proprietors of small private residential homes go broke or leave their businesses with heavy losses. When they do so, they often leave the residents in a bit of a state because there is no continuity of care.

Mr. Nicholls: The hon. Gentleman will nevertheless concede that many people live in private homes. That is where they expect to spend their twilight years. How does the hon. Gentleman think it helps their security when they read about the plans that the Opposition announced last week? They will be driven out of private homes because of the alterations that the hon. Gentleman's party will make to the social security payment. Does the hon. Gentleman think that that will contribute to the well-being of elderly people?

Mr. Dobson: The hon. Gentleman has obviously read *The Sun's* version of what we said last week, which is not likely to reach even to his low intellectual standards. We have given guarantees for any transitional arrangements that cover people in such circumstances. I remind the hon. Gentleman that, under the present system that he apparently strongly supports, roughly one third of smaller homes go out of business and leave old people bereft of any care or cover. If he is to attack what we suggest is an improvement, he should remember that he has a lot to defend on his own side.

A further problem is that, even now, in our medical schools, after the recognition by many people outside medical education of the vast increase in the number of elderly people, education in the treament and care of elderly people is not a major requirement, and it should be. The Department of Education and Science and the DHSS should do something about it. Many doctors who were trained years ago are certainly not well versed in dealing with the problems of the elderly. Many general practitioners, social workers and other people who are supposedly helping elderly people are not well aware of the provision available to help them. Last year, the Health Education Council produced a leaflet entitled "Who cares", but it did not reach many carers because its circulation was so low.

If we examine the basic services for the elderly that are provided by local councils, we see that the councils with the best records seem to be those most often vilified by the chairman of the Tory party, the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit). Of course, they are vilified and mocked also by his friends in the gutter press. Newcastle, St. Helens, Greenwich and Lewisham have three or four times as many home helps per 1,000 elderly people as Tory Surrey or Sussex east or west, Tory Barnet, which is represented by the Prime Minister, or, worst of all, the Liberal-controlled Isle of Wight. If we consider the number of meals supplied per resident over 65, the picture is much the same, with Islington, Haringey and Greenwich supplying three or four times as many as Tory Redbridge or Tory Barnet supply. Overall, between 1979 and 1984, the number of home helps has not kept pace with the number of people over 75, while the number of meals on wheels and luncheon club meals has fallen a long way behind.

Informal carers — family, neighbours and friends — need a lot more help if they are to keep on caring. All of us recognise the immense burdens that relatives and friends take on in trying to care for elderly people. We must recognise that, if they are to continue to carry out that difficult task, they need respite from it. We need respite care to give the carers a holiday. That requirement has been cut as the number of hospital and local authority beds available for elderly people is reduced.

When we consider the hospital service, we need to remember that many of the services that are used by the elderly are the same as those used by the rest of us. Care for the elderly cannot stop at the door of the geriatric ward. Indeed, 34 per cent. of patients over 65 are in acute beds—that is, just 1 per cent. fewer than the number of elderly patients getting specific geriatric treatment. Long hospital waiting lists and long waiting times for all sorts of treatment have as adverse an effect on elderly people as they do on the rest of us.

Some of the changes portrayed as improvements in efficiency do not seem to be so to an elderly patient. What a newly appointed general manager logs as improved throughput can seem to an elderly patient like being shifted out of hospital too soon. I understand that some elderly people are referred to by health economists as bed blockers. To the persons concerned, it is simply a way of getting the attention that they need and, over the years, have paid for and have a right to expect.

The recent increasing problems that hospitals encounter in coping with emergencies hit old people in two ways. Frequently, they are the people who need emergency treatment and for whom it is hard to find a bed. They are also among those who cannot get into hospital because their planned admissions are not possible as beds are full of emergency cases. They are caught out both ways. In case anyone denies that this is happening, I shall quote circumstances that have arisen at the Royal Free hospital in Hampstead. It was recently reported:

> "Two 80-year-old patients, who had both suffered strokes, had to wait 25 hours and 14 hours respectively . . . before beds could be found for them at the Royal Free hospital . . . the one waiting longest lying on a trolley in a corridor.
> . . . a 79-year-old woman with peritonitis . . . had to wait four hours in casualty before a bed could be found for her in the Coronary Care Unit, and an 84-year-old woman . . . had to be placed in an obstetrics ward."

That is a bit late for an 84-year-old. It was further reported:

> "Admissions from the waiting list for surgery had come 'virtually to a standstill' and patients were being discharged"—

as the consultant described it—

> "before they were fit, to make room for others.
> Specialties like dermatology and rheumatology"—

both of which heavily affect old people—

> "could not admit patients from the waiting list at all".

This very day, I received a letter telling me what had happened about closures of the Brook general hospital and the Greenwich district hospital to all cold admissions because they were overwhelmed with emergencies. On nine occasions between 19 and 23 January 1985 and in February 1986 that has occurred at Brook general hospital. It has happened twice at the Greenwich district hospital within the same period. That meant that predominantly old people, particularly emergency cases, were filling beds and that other people had to be turned away. When there is difficulty in finding beds, there is usually a long delay before treatment can be given.

That picture is repeated all over the country, from Barnet to Birmingham. Certain specialties that are available to us all but that are of particular interest to old people frequently command little public attention, or they are not very fashionable in the medical profession. Consequently, they are not well provided for. Rheumatology is a good example. Twenty million people suffer from rheumatism. Some of them are young, many are middle aged, but even more are elderly. Yet about 30 health authorities or health boards in England, Scotland and Wales do not have a single, solitary consultant rheumatologist. Health authorities such as Warrington, Huddersfield, Dewsbury, Bolton, Bury, Milton Keynes and North Tyneside do not have a rheumatologist. Twice as many health authorities were described by the Arthritis and Rheumatism Council as being grossly deficient in their provision of specialist rheumatology services.

Recently the National Association of Health Authorities warned that the National Health Service faces a serious and growing shortage of occupational therapists and chiropodists who play a big part in helping, for

[Mr. Dobson]

example, stroke victims to recover and in helping to keep elderly people mobile. The NAHA report said that the demand for those services already outstrips supply and that we need 70 per cent. more occupational therapists and 30 per cent. more chiropodists to get us into the 1990s. The latter estimate is lower than the DHSS study, which said that 35 per cent. more chiropodists are needed.

There are other perturbing developments in the philosophy of the National Health Service under this Government. The measures of quality of life that have been canvassed in some quarters seem to carry with them the assumption that life after 65 does not have quite the importance of life before that age. That may be because health economists would like us to come into existence, fit and well, at 21 and to die suddenly on our 65th birthday without requiring medical treatment in between. That is the beau ideal human being for the health economist. Fortunately—I think that it is "fortunately"—humanity is not built like that. We are an awkward lot, and a lot of people get a bit more awkward as they grow older. People want to live for a long time and to receive proper health care both at home and in hospital. We want top quality health care from the cradle to the grave and we want that period to last a long time.

We owe that quality of service to the older generation. It is worth saying that the older generation to which I am referring is a rather special older generation. It is the generation that defeated Hitler. There are old men who once ran up the Normandy beaches, or fought in north Africa, or worked on the Burma railway. There are many, many more old women, some of whom lost their husbands at that time.

More than once I have been asked by the leader of our party to represent us at the Cenotaph ceremony for war widows. It struck me, as I stood there among women in their sixties and seventies, that the men they were remembering were not 60 or 70. They were strapping 20-year-olds or 25-year-olds—young men in the prime of their lives who sacrificed their lives for this country. Women, including those who were not widowed, made many sacrifices. They survived the blitz and they brought up the generation that, generally speaking, fills this Chamber and this country today. They are a special generation.

Those people are even more special, because when this country emerged from the darkest period in its history, absolutely flat broke, the self-same men and women had a vision. Their vision was that we should create a National Health Service that would provide the best health care available for everybody—rich or poor, man or woman, wherever they lived. The country was flat broke. Now that those self-same people are older, they are faced by a Government and, to some extent, by a news media who say that, although we are now one of the richest societies the world has ever known and producing more oil every day than Saudi Arabia, we must tighten our belts and must not expand the provision for these people who have done so much for our country. It would be a national disgrace if we failed to do our duty by not expanding the services that they need, deserve and have paid for.

The Opposition believe that very deeply. That is why we have put down this motion and why we are determined, both in this House and outside it, to struggle to ensure that the elderly in our society are looked after in the way that they expected to be looked after when they fought, struggled and secured the establishment of the National Health Service and in the way that we look forward to being looked after when it is our turn. That is only fair and decent, that is what we are in favour of, and that is why we have put down this motion.

7.37 pm

The Minister for Health (Mr. Tony Newton): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

'congratulates the Government on the steps it has taken to facilitate and prolong the health and independence of elderly people; welcomes its provision for the increasing proportion of elderly and very elderly people in the population; notes the substantial increase in health care of elderly people in hospitals and in the community; and applauds the Government's success in helping elderly people to improve their quality of life.'.

The one matter upon which, from what I have heard so far in this debate, we shall agree is that this is an important debate about one of the major challenges that is facing the National Health Service. It is three years since the House last had the opportunity to debate specifically health care and services for the elderly. That is surprising, perhaps, as we estimate that more than 40 per cent. of the present expenditure on the hospital and community health services relates to people who are aged over 65.

To echo something that the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) said, or to give additional figures, between 1985 and 2025 the number of people over pensionable age in England and Wales is expected to grow by nearly 3 million. Within that total, the number of those aged 75 and over, who are obviously the most likely to be in need of services, will grow by about 1·6 million. There can be no doubt, therefore, about the importance of the subject that we were discussing, the importance of the services that the National Health Service provides for the elderly, and the growing demand that there will be for those services.

Beyond that, I have very little in common with the hon. Gentleman's rhetoric, with his facts and figures, or with his suggestions about the way in which the health services have been moving and developing. I want to spend a moment or two on the figures relating to the Health Service and to pick up not only what underlay what the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras said, but also what the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) said more specifically in his speech earlier today—which I regret I was unable to be present to hear—and also in his statement that was reported in some of today's newspapers—which, almost equally, to my regret, I have been able to read. I will pick out only the most glaring errors.

First, so far as I can judge, the figures which he says relate to expenditure on the National Health Service do nothing of the kind. They are plainly wrong. They exclude entirely the hospital building programme, which is now running at nearly £1 billion a year, and the family practitioner services, which are running at nearly £5 billion a year and which are of particular importance to many elderly people. Both those elements, which the hon. Gentleman appears to have ignored in his statement, have increased by about 36 per cent. in real terms since 1978-79.

Secondly, in the table at the back of the statement which he issued yesterday he appears to have assumed that demographic trends, principally the self-same rise in the

number of elderly people, have required an annual expenditure increase of 1 per cent. each year throughout the period just to stand still. That, too, is completely wrong. As the detailed figures provided to the Select Committee on Social Services last year showed, the demographic effect for most of the period in question was substantially less than 1 per cent. Those two errors alone mean that the hon. Gentleman's figures are not worth the paper on which they are written, so far as I can judge.

What is almost as bad as these basic errors is the thoroughly misleading way in which even these figures were presented. Again I shall take only the most significant points. First, they seem to take no account whatever of the improvements in efficiency which have taken place, often as a result of the Griffiths management reforms. Over the past three years that factor alone has meant some £400 million extra for patient care. In the current year about £150 million is expected to be released in that way. I emphasise that that is money being made available for patient care that would previously have gone in another direction.

Secondly, when the hon. Member for Oldham, West talks about the number of beds, he takes no account whatever of the changes in the pattern of care not only of the more efficient use that is being made of beds, but of the shift towards care in the community for many thousands of mentally handicapped and mentally ill people whom everyone agrees ought not to have been in hospital at all. I have made the point to him before that I find it little short of deplorable that, on my assessment, he includes in his figures for cuts in the provision of hospital beds the beds that have been removed because mentally handicapped children are not in long-stay hospitals for the mentally handicapped on the scale that they were before, which all of us have been seeking to bring to an end.

Perhaps the most glaring omission from what the hon. Gentleman has been saying is the absence of any reference to what went before. When he talked of the reduction in beds, why did he not tell us that the annual reduction was greater under Labour between 1974 and 1979 than it has been since this Government came to office? When he talked about waiting lists, why did he not tell us that the lists are 80,000 lower than those left behind by the Labour Government?

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): That is misleading and a misrepresentation.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) can make his speech later. It is a fact that the waiting lists are nearly 80,000 lower than when this Government came to office. Those lists were left behind by the hon. Gentleman's Administration.

When the hon. Member for Oldham, West purported to deplore that Britain spends what he claims is an inadequate 5·5 per cent. of GNP on health, why did he not tell us that when Labour left office that figure was only 4·8 per cent.? In other words, the proportion of GNP that is being spent on health has risen substantially under the present Administration.

The fact is that the way in which the hon. Gentleman is using health statistics is in danger of going beyond a joke to being a disgrace.

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): As the hon. Gentleman has chosen to use this debate to make a slanging attack on something that has obviously nettled him greatly, may I answer his points? First, the figures are all based on Government figures. They are hospital and community health services figures. If one were to take gross NHS revenue expenditure, I suspect that the difference would be minimal.

Secondly, the figures do not include efficiency savings, as the Government call them, although I suspect that is a euphemism for cuts. Anyway, £150 million out of the £18 billion NHS budget means that that again is a footling qualification.

Thirdly, of course, we support the movement of mentally ill and mentally handicapped patients back into the community, but in the acute sector there has still been a cut of 10 or 11 per cent. That accounts for most of the 36,000 beds that have been cut since 1979. So none of what the hon. Gentleman has said alters the basic tyuth of the points that I was making on their record on the Health Service since 1983 in particular.

Mr. Newton: All I can say is that last night I read the hon. Gentleman's statement carefully. The table at the back, on which much of the rest of it is founded, with some wrong assumptions about demographic patterns which I shall not go into again, is clearly headed:

"Percentage change each year in total NHS expenditure."

The hon. Gentleman has just said that it is not that; it is hospital and community health services expenditure. The difference between the two is billions, not just peanuts. Expenditure on the primary care services, which are of particular importance to many elderly people, has more than doubled in money terms in that period. It has risen by about one third in real terms and that has led to a sizeable expansion in the services themselves, on which I shall comment. I do not mind in a sense what the hon. Gentleman does with statistics so long as he uses them clearly, knows what he is talking about and presents a fair picture. I object to statistics which purport to be something which they are not, and which are calculated to mislead the public and to distort real debate about health issues.

There are two plain and simple facts about the totality of NHS expenditure. One is that total expenditure has risen by 26 per cent. in real terms between 1978-79 and 1986-87, and will rise again next year. The other is that within that total we are carrying through the biggest sustained drive to modernise the country's hospitals that has ever been seen, and that is now well on the way to undoing some of the damage done by the drastic cuts—real cuts, not statistical illusions—that were imposed by the Labour Government in 1977 and 1978. In one year alone the hospital building programme was cut by 22 per cent. when the Labour party was in office.

Mr. Dobson: Is it part of the drive to improve the efficiency of the National Health Service that the cardiothoracic theatres and wards at the Brook hospital in Greenwich closed at the beginning of this week because the health authority cannot afford to run them until the start of the new financial year?

Mr. Newton: The position in Greenwich, as in many other health authorities, is that the health authority is actively seeking ways of making sure that it uses its resources to the best effect. The hon. Gentleman implied in his speech that the regional health authority was attempting to get the district to close Brook hospital.

Mr. Dobson: I never said that.

Mr. Newton: It certainly came across to me as the implication of what the hon. Gentleman was saying. I want to make it clear that the district health authority is conducting a review of the acute services and that the outcome of that is far from clear.

The most important point about the Health Service is that, in the end, it is to be measured not by the amount of money it has or by the number of beds in its buildings, any more than by the number of doors or windows in its buildings, but by the people it treats, the care it provides and, as my right hon. Friend emphasised in his widely welcomed statement today, increasingly by what it does to prevent avoidable illness occurring in the first place. By that measure of patients treated and care provided, the NHS is by any standards not a service which is being cut, let alone a service in decline, but one of sustained expansion.

Between 1978 and 1985 in-patient cases rose by very nearly 1 million, or about 18 per cent. Day cases rose by 400,000, which represents an increase of over 70 per cent. Out-patient attendances were up by 3·5 million, or 10 per cent. The growth in 1985 alone was 176,000, or nearly 3 per cent., in in-patient cases, 60,000, or nearly 7 per cent. in day cases, and 398,000, or 1 per cent., in out-patient attendances. Those increases have been more than enough to match the growing number of elderly people and they represent a real improvement in services.

The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras referred to staffing in hospitals and within the increasingly important community services. In both those areas there have been substantial increases. The number of district nurses in community health services has risen by 18 per cent. The number of hospital nurses caring for geriatric patients has risen by 22 per cent. The hon. Gentleman also mentioned chiropodists—and that staff has increased by nearly a quarter. The number of consultant geriatricians has increased by over a third. There is no pattern of decline.

I wish to give some figures for primary care services, which the hon. Gentleman appears to have entirely ignored, despite the fact that for most people their interface with the Health Service is the general practitioner rather than the local hospital. Compared with 1979 there are 3,500 more GPs, an increase of 15 per cent., 13,000 more support staff in general practice, an increase of nearly 40 per cent., and about 2,500 more dentists, an increase of 20 per cent. There are 1,500 more nurses, whole-time equivalents, specialising in mental illness, and that represents an increase of well over 100 per cent. I could go on.

This is a story not of decline but of expanding services in the areas of most importance to many elderly people. The next line of argument advanced by the Opposition may be to claim that those increases do not match the number of elderly or very elderly. Let me make it clear that between 1978 and 1984 the number of hospital treatments provided for people over 75 per 10,000 of that population has increased from 1,736 to 2,057. Thus, an increased amount of treatment is being provided for those in the very elderly age group. It is a question not of increased treatment being outmatched by the growing numbers of the elderly, but of a real improvement in services.

The fact that the hon. Gentleman persistently wished to disguise or run away from is that more elderly people than ever before are receiving hospital treatment. More elderly people are able to take advantage of the opportunities provided by modern medical technologies and skills to improve the quality of their lives. Whether or not we discuss quality adjusted life years—QUALYS—many of the things that we are discussing improve the quality of life for elderly people. That is why we want to see those services increased and have devoted our attention to achieving that objective.

Let me take two obvious examples that particularly benefit elderly people. The number of cataract operations rose from 38,000 in 1978 to 55,000 in 1984. We have set a target of 70,000 a year for 1990. Hip replacements rose from 28,000 a year in 1978 to 38,000 in 1984. We have set a target of 48,000 a year in 1990. *[Interruption.]* I do not know what the hon. Member for Wrexham is complaining about. Does he or does he not want an increase in those important operations for elderly people, to whom they make a great deal of difference?

Dr. Marek: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. The hip replacement is a comparatively new operation, and of course such operations will increase. I do not mind giving credit for the fact that at least the Tory Government have not refused to allow such operations, but the waiting lists for those operations are getting longer. However, I object to the Government claiming credit for the advance in medical science and the maintenance of standards of service because of that advance.

Mr. Newton: No one is claiming credit for the advance in medical science. We claim credit for the fact that, far more than the Labour party, we have made it possible for elderly people to benefit from those advances. We have every intention of ensuring that elderly people continue to benefit.

So far I have concentrated on health services, especially hospital services, for elderly people. However, 95 per cent. of elderly people live at home and, like most of us, can expect to spend only short periods in hospital or, indeed, in any kind of institutional care. Most of them want—and we wish to help them in this respect—to be able to stay and be cared for in their homes. That involves a wide range of agencies, statutory, private, voluntary and informal. Undoubtedly, the key to success to ensure that that community care takes place is proper co-ordination between the agencies and the individuals involved. We have devoted considerable extra sums of money to that in the form of joint finance and improved machinery in the form of joint planning. The changes in joint planning and the involvement of voluntary organisations in that planning have helped to create better co-ordination. There have been some significant and important effects.

Personal social services manifestly have an important role. Since the Government came to office, spending on personal social services has increased by over 20 per cent. in real terms. The key indicators of service provision have also increased. For instance, there are 14 per cent. more home help staff, and the number of places in day centres has increased by over 15 per cent.

I was puzzled by the reference to home helps made by the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras, because today I answered a question tabled by the hon. Member for Oldham, West on the number of home helps expressed as whole-time equivalents per thousand population aged

65 years and over in the three years from 1982 to 1985. I use those three years because they were the ones that the hon. Gentleman asked about.

I thought I heard the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras refer to Greenwich. In the period 1982 to 1985 the number of home helps per thousand population aged 65 years and over in Greenwich has risen from about 11·5 per cent. to more than 13 per cent. If one considers England as a whole during those three years—the figure not only represents the total number of home helps, but that figure expressed per thousand of the population aged 65 years and over—there has been an average increase from 6·7 per cent. to 7·2 per cent. Where are the cuts? Where is the great story about the diminution in the provision of important services? Wherever one looks one finds that the picture painted by the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras does not stand up to reality in virtually every part of the country.

Mr. Dobson: Does the Minister recognise that if it was not for the very councils that he, his party and especially the chairman of the party constantly denounce for wasting money and providing services there would not be a jot of increase in services? If, in London, we had to rely on services provided by Sutton, Bexley, Redbridge, Barnet or Bromley, there would be no increase in services.

Mr. Newton: Perhaps I may say gently to the hon. Gentleman that I am not sure that I have been denouncing the London borough of Camden, to which he is so dedicated, for wasting money. I rather thought it was denounced by an independent report that the council had commissioned.

Mr. Dobson: Following the courageous decision of the Camden council to set up an independent inquiry and to publish it immediately it was received—unlike virtually any document that the Government receive—will the Minister confirm that the independent report said:

"The Department (DHSS) has statutory inspectorial duties and the periods between inspections seem to be of an unacceptable duration."

The report continued:

"Some of the issues raised in this report would have been identified and possibly dealt with earlier had the Department exercised its statutory duty."

Mr. Newton: If it is the hon. Gentleman's view that the London borough of Camden can only be expected to run its services in a remotely acceptable way with the social services inspectorate permanently breathing down its neck, he may be right, but I would regard that as a proud claim on behalf of Camden.

This is an important, short debate, in which a number of hon. Members wish to take part. We have been discussing one of the great challenges that face not just the NHS but the whole community. It undoubtedly presents problems. Of course, there is a need for continued development of policies to overcome those problems and to meet needs still more effectively. In a variety of ways that is precisely what we are seeking to do. They include, not least, the review that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has asked Sir Roy Griffiths to undertake on the ways in which public funds are used to support community care.

No one who studies the facts of the expansion of services for the elderly that the Government have brought about can vote for the motion tonight. No one who studies the Opposition's mixture of bogus statistics and half-baked promises would vote for them at any other time either.

7.59 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Quite rightly, I must address myself to the statement just made by the Minister. I must consider what I should recommend my colleagues to vote for. I looked carefully at the motion and the amendment when they were made available.

The fallacy of the Government's amendment is that although, for example, more money has been spent in the Health Service on the elderly, although there has been new provision, although new initiatives have been taken, and although there has been greater throughput, to use the clinical word, these have not taken into account the relatively enormous and growing proportion of the demand on our Health Service and on our other services which is caused by the increasing number of elderly people in our community.

I remind the Minister of what her right hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (Mr. Newton) said in 1983 when he was wearing his other departmental hat:

"central Government concluded last year that a minimum expenditure growth of 2 per cent. was needed to maintain existing standards of service in the face of growing numbers of the very elderly and other increasing pressures." —[*Official Report*, 15 February 1983; Vol. 37, c. *135*.]

When I look at the issue in the round, I allege that the failure of which the Government have been guilty since 1983 is in having committed themselves only to the minimum real growth in expenditure that is their responsibility in managing the public purse and that is needed to maintain the standard of health care provision for the elderly. It is the Government's greatest failure that the figure that they set and defined for themselves as being necessary has not been fulfilled in reality.

There has been a bit of double talk since then because the Government have since argued that a 2 per cent. growth in services is necessary, not a 2 per cent. real growth in expenditure. The Minister will know that that 2 per cent. growth in services requires slightly less real growth in expenditure because one can make efficiency cuts, and so on. I think that we are on common ground in that.

The argument should not be—I would never make it—that simply putting money into a service necessarily improves it. That is always fallacious. None the less, the substantial deficit in funding, which is the burden of the Labour party's motion, has prevented the sufficient development of the care services, which I hope everybody in the House will admit we need. I should like to develop some of the relevant points.

I shall start with one or two statements of principle that people do not always bear in mind, in relation to the elderly. We are talking in general about health care services for people over 60. It is easy to conclude, and for the public perception to be, that old age in itself is a disease, brings problems and requires expenditure, but it is not true that just because somebody is old he or she need be ill. That does not necessarily follow. Indeed, Lord Shinwell was perfectly well until within a few days of his death, to take a topical example from this building. Old age is a triumph, not a problem. The objective of the state's services should be to enable people in their old age to make

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as much of their opportunities as they can. Often, people have not had many opportunities for several years before by virtue of their working life, family responsibilities and so on. It is an insult to presume that old people are ill people, because many old people are not ill. Clearly, they become more frail as they grow older, but they do not necessarily become ill.

It must be admitted that as people get older the relative cost to the Exchequer of their illnesses grows. The most recent figures that I have are for 1983-84. National Health Service expenditure in England per head for the 16 to 64 age group, which is not covered by the debate, was £150, whereas expenditure for people over 75 was over £1,000. Rightly, we shall have to face the fact that the demand for expenditure on the elderly will increase enormously.

Over the 20-year period beginning at the end of the last year, the population aged over 75 will increase by 10 per cent. from 3·7 million to 4·1 million. The population over 85 will increase by a staggering 54 per cent., from 700,000 to 1·1 million. We must make sure that we plan the commitment to meet the inevitable bills that will accrue to the Health Service and the inevitable demands that will be made on our personal social services, given the size of this growing part of our population.

I should like to consider another general presumption. In this debate we need not go into every corner of the issue. It is often a failure of our health and social services that elderly people are incorrectly diagnosed as being mentally ill. The Minister may have seen the example in *New Society* on 12 December last year of an elderly man being diagnosed as having dementia when he had a severe heart problem, which was confirmed when he was admitted to hospital.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Health and Social Security (Mrs. Edwina Currie) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Hughes: I see the hon. Lady accepting that.

Often there is a presumption that old people have certain types of condition. The presumption is based on something of which we lay people may be guilty, but of which the medical profession never should. It is an ageist approach, based on the presumption that elderly people are more likely to suffer from such conditions. As everybody in the House will know, the vast majority of elderly people do not suffer from dementia in any way. Under 5 per cent. of people over 65 have a severe impairment of memory, intellect, orientation or personality. About another 3 to 5 per cent. have milder forms of dementia. Although dementia in its general definition is a problem of advancing age, 80 per cent. of those over 80 have no form of it.

Often old people suffer from an incorrect perception of their need. Of course, 20 per cent. of elderly people suffer from some form of mental disability or dementia, which is a tragic condition. Alzheimer's disease is the most common. I challenge the frequent automatic assumption that the elderly in our community are a general problem for the Health Service, or a specific type of problem, that they are incapable of managing themselves as human beings.

Mr. Laurie Pavitt (Brent, South): Will the hon. Gentleman make this plain when he talks about senile dementia? Unfortunately, most of the public think that the clinical term "dementia" has something to do with people being demented. It means nothing of the sort. It means merely a loss of memory in various degrees.

Mr. Hughes: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. He is absolutely right. That is another example of a conclusion drawn from a false analysis. Clinicians will define that condition, but it might not be as grave or problematical as the common assumption would have it. I entirely accept the hon. Gentleman's point.

Another issue is as much to do with social services as with the Health Service. As people get older, they suffer physical disability. For example, one third of those over 85 cannot get upstairs. About one fifth are bedridden or housebound. Social and welfare provision must respond to those facts in the way in which the community cares.

The Secretary of State made an announcement today, which I welcomed, on cancer and on AIDS, all of which are, to a substantial degree, preventable illnesses and diseases. Many of the illnesses from which old people suffer are preventable. Tragically, many old people die from diseases that we could do something about.

The preventative arm of the Health Service is as applicable to the elderly as it is to much younger people. We must work to avoid the problems of heart disease, cancer, strokes, bronchitis, diabetes and incontinence. Those illnesses can, in different ways, be treated early and cured. A topical example, which occurred this winter, is hypothermia. If we manage our communities properly there is no need to have nearly so many deaths from hypothermia, as I am sure the Minister will accept. Our European neighbours in colder countries do not have as many deaths from hypothermia. The problem of hypothermia cannot be solved at a stroke; it is not just a matter of health and social service provision but of homes insulation, educating people to look after themselves, and giving them the proper provision. A proper approach to preventive medicine, health care, and health education will reduce the burden on the Health Service.

Another area of common agreement is that we must all try to make a reality of the commitment of Government and Opposition parties to community care wherever possible. I shall take a topical example, which applies to the acute services as well as to properly defined community care services. The local small cottage hospital in my constituency, St. Olave's hospital, was recently closed, as the Minister knows. The closure meant not just a loss of beds from a local hospital, but the loss of the feeling that people were being treated in their community, even though they were in a hospital bed. They went to a large regional hospital where they felt more isolated. There must of course be acute services for the acutely ill, and we do not want to keep people unnecessarily in beds in hospitals for the acutely ill. The strategy must be to plan for, and meet the demand with, care in the community services.

One criticism which applies equally to my health authority of Lewisham and north Southwark, and to Camberwell—for which I am in part responsible—is that the strategy is not yet being matched by the provision of service. Everybody has agreed that we should have care in the community, for example, by removing the mentally ill from residential care in horrendous Victorian long-stay institutions, but we do not yet have the facilities to cope with them at home. Without the commitment to that, which needs to be planned, care in the community is, to many people, still a mirage and not a reality.

One of the beliefs that I stand for, and to which I commit myself and my colleagues—it is not a cheap option—is properly funded care in the community. It has three elements in terms of professional support for the elderly. First, we must have the doctor in the community. There is still a weakness in proper GP provision, particularly in the inner cities, where the elderly are often concentrated. I hope the Government will seriously consider—they have taken up many of the recommendations made by Age Concern and others over the years—building up training and the appropriate level of service capability for GPs and staff in health clinics and centres so that they will be able to deal in the community with many of the problems and needs of the elderly.

The second matter, on which we have had a lobby today, relates to the nursing profession. The Cumberlege report and the general pattern of recommendations from the Royal College of Nursing and others is that we should train people for a new nursing profession—not the old bedside Florence Nightingale nursing, but a much more adaptable community nursing provision. That gives enormous potential and enormous possibilities for people to be looked after and visited at home. I wrote to the Minister about nurses being able to prescribe at a day centre in my constituency. She replied that a pilot scheme was being looked at. I hope that we can progress quickly down that road—although we must have safeguards—so that health care practitioners, at the appropriate level, can administer that health care in the community. There is every opportunity to secure that as each health authority develops its strategy.

One of the encouraging signs is that we have been able to agree to develop in Lewisham and north Southwark a combination of facilities. One is for respite care on the health authority site at St. Olave's hospital where elderly people who are cared for by relatives day after day can go so as to give their relatives a week or two off. The other facility is a small domus-type institution where small numbers of people can form their own communities. These are much more personal than the old geriatric or psycho-geriatric wards in big and impersonal hospitals. There is a problem in delivering enough of those services quickly. Those sorts of things show where the will is and whether the service can be delivered.

The third group is the people who are not trained at all, or who are not trained professionally as doctors or nurses. I sincerely ask the Government urgently to think about requiring a payment of, and validation for, carers who are not doctors or nurses. We need the home helps, the visitors, the people to provide laundry services for the elderly. We need them all, and many are willing to work in the caring service. Relatives, neighbours, friends, part-time and full-time, a small number of hours a week or many, youngsters and older people, all are willing to be the complimentary, substantial band of practising supporters of the elderly. In that way we can keep our elderly in the community, and they can feel reassured. I hope that the Government will develop that area.

I hope that the Government will respond positively to the requirements on general practitioners. I hope that they will respond positively to developing community nursing services and to the RCN paper at the end of the consultation period. I hope that carers can see that the Government will be committed to them and to funding them, so that we will be able to maximise that third group of people in support of and to help the elderly.

Mr. Newton: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will recognise that almost every one of the thoughts that he has uttered in the last five minutes are thoughts that have been actively raised by the Government in the course of the primary care consultation, our own Green Paper and the Cumberlege report, and by the positive response in the direction of consultation that we have already shown to Project 2000 and by work which I am sure he knows is going on in the Department about support assistance for nurses. I can tell him, as he already knows, that we have been acting positively in the ways that he mentioned.

Mr. Hughes: I want to end on something that has a slightly harder edge than that. The most acute problem is that, as yet, there is not proper co-ordination of the services that try to fulfil Health Service requirements. For example, in my local health authority there are still massive waiting lists. The figures have gone up 260 per cent. since 1983. On 31 March 1986 more than 8,000 people were waiting. That applies not just to old people, but to all people. The other day an elderly man presented himself at a hospital for a bed, was told that there was not one and he went away. He returned, was accepted, and anaesthetised and then was told that he could not be dealt with. He had to be sent home and to return. The lack of co-ordination that allows priority care cases to be accepted, but fails to make sure that when people need to be admitted they are, and the then failure to co-ordinate with the social services so that when people are discharged they are discharged into a community that can care for them seems to be the greatest gap.

I hope that a real effort will be made to co-ordinate social service provision and Health Service provision through joint consultative committees and the like, so that there can be a strong combined effort that does not allow many old people to fall through the gap of our national welfare care. Old people often do not shout the loudest. The test of a caring welfare state is that we heed and serve most those who are the most vulnerable.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. This is a very short debate, and many hon. Members wish to speak. I appeal for short speeches.

8.20 pm

Mr. Lewis Stevens (Nuneaton): I was interested in many of the points made by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) and I congratulate him on making them in such a reasonable way. I am sure that many of us would agree with what he said. It seemed that he was saying that the Government were moving in the right direction but should try harder and do better. Many of us feel that that is the way in which we have to approach the matter. Demographic changes have brought about a growing problem. We have coped to some extent with the recent changes, but we shall have to continue further along the path, in view of the large number of elderly people and the problems that will be created, particularly at the turn of the century.

My hon. Friend the Minister quoted an important figure which shows how much the Government have paid attention to the National Health Service. The NHS's share of gross national product has risen from 4·8 per cent. to 5·5 per cent. That is a 12 per cent. increase in NHS provision.

Dr. Marek: Has that got anything to do with gross domestic product being a lot smaller than it need be because of the Government's economic policies?

Mr. Stevens: There is a net growth in the economy and a growing share is going to the NHS.

With the new buildings in the Health Service and a change in facilities, there has been a definite improvement. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) was so emotive, talking about what people have a right to expect and what the elderly have done for the country. We accept what they have done, but many of the elderly would also accept that the developments in the Health Service, not just through Government but through discoveries, are a considerable improvement on what they might have expected 30 years ago.

I am extremely surprised that the Opposition should dismiss, as they so often do, the need for efficiency improvements. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey rightly said that there is scope for such improvements. In an organisation with as many as 800,000 employees, and with £20 billion expenditure, efficiency must be an important factor. That leads not to the detriment of service, but to a great improvement. The West Midlands regional health authority has made cost improvements. The three main areas of the four into which it intends to put those savings are care for the mentally ill, for the mentally handicapped and for the elderly.

The problems of the elderly do not all occur in hospitals. They are not all ill or in difficulties. In the private and the public sectors, there is a wide range of residential accommodation, ranging from that with virtually no medical attention to that with much medical attention. While I do not doubt that some establishments are of a low standard, I am sure that there are many, some of them newly opened, of a high standard.

In my constituency, a nursing home has been set up to care mainly for the elderly but also for others with medical problems. I am proud to see its standard, the care and attention that it gives, and the availability of medical attention 24 hours a day, with a qualified nurse on duty and easy access to doctors. However, other nursing homes and homes for the elderly start off merely with better accommodation such as sheltered accommodation. All of this is helping elderly people into more acceptable and usable establishments and homes in which they can enjoy the company of others. We shall see more of these developments. We should be encouraging them rather than condemning them, as Opposition Members do. They can make an important contribution to the welfare of the elderly.

The hospital building programme has led to the removal of many old hospitals and old facilities which were never a joy for old people to go into, irrespective of whether they had permanent bad health or were ill for a short time. Some old hospitals were not of the sort in which we would want to see our elderly relatives.

Now, new hospitals are being built and old hospitals are being extended or rebuilt, as in my area with the George Eliot hospital. That improvement was long overdue, but it is at last happening, and we are seeing the benefit. While there are not the number of beds for geriatrics and the mentally infirm that we would like, there is accommodation of a better standard. They are getting better attention. As my hon. Friend the Minister said, the number of operations that relate to elderly people, such as cataracts and replacement hips, is being extended considerably. That is important for not only the physical well-being but the mental outlook of old people. They can expect these operations and improvements in a more reasonable time, which is extremely encouraging.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey spoke about community care for people coming out of mental institutions. A great deal of attention must be paid to training and co-ordination. Without that, we shall not get benefits for the people involved. Co-ordination is a vital factor, and within the NHS one of the major reasons for new management thinking was to get this right. Co-ordination is still the problem within some parts of our Health Service, and if general managers have any part to play, it is better co-ordination.

We have not had community care for long. We have had district nurses and other services coming in, but there has not been a co-ordinated effort, on a professional basis, with many different parts of the medical and social services professions. I hope that that will prove a major part of our development. As my hon. Friend the Minister said, the Government have provided extensions in both district nurse and special nurse care for geriatrics and in many other sectors. The Department has been going along gently, perhaps not fast enough, but it is going in the right direction and facilities and resources are being provided.

The Government's record stands comparison with any predictions that might have been made a few years ago that such things could not happen. We are taking steps to make sure that resources are provided to help the elderly. How fast is that being done? People always ask for it to be done faster, and it would be amazing if the Opposition did not say that it should be done twice as fast. Had they been in government, I doubt whether they would have been prepared to advance the Health Service as fast and as effectively as this Government have done.

8.30 pm

Mrs. Renée Short (Wolverhampton, North-East): There is a rather poor showing of hon. Members in the House. I should have thought that many elderly hon. Members would have been happy to be here to get a few tips. However, they are absent and the youthful hon. Members are here.

After the Green Paper was published the Select Committee on Social Services looked at primary care. Its report dealt with many of the problems relevant to the care of the elderly. In our report we drew attention to the greater use of primary care by the increasing numbers of elderly people in the community and to the growth in private residential homes financed virtually from the social security budget.

The health needs of the elderly are clearly linked to the social services—for example, to housing, social security, home helps and community nursing. All these things are important, and we put more and more burdens on community care not only by changes in population and the fact that people are living longer, but by reducing hospital care. People are moved out of hospital more quickly and look to the social services to help them at home. That inevitably means that we need more general practitioners and a significant sharing of care by nurses and others and much more education about prevention and about self-care by patients.

Health education is crucial for the whole population but especially for older people, and perhaps the Minister will tell us what is going on at present in the Health Education Council which seems to be lying dormant because of all sorts of problems. The consultation paper contains proposals for making more suitable premises available in inner cities, for new financial initiatives to encourage doctors and nurses and perhaps some salaried general practitioners to work in inner cities, and perhaps different rates of pay to encourage other health workers to work in inner cities. All those ideas which were endorsed by the Select Committee were put forward five years ago in 1981 in the Acheson report. I wonder why Ministers are not giving a clear reply now and undertaking to take steps to improve the availability and quality of health care generally and in inner cities.

We need many more properly trained nurses and nurse practitioners working with general practitioners to improve the service for elderly patients, especially the housebound elderly. There is movement in the right direction. I recommend the Minister to study our report about the Birchfield medical centre in Birmingham. It offers comprehensive health screening to elderly patients registered with the practice, runs a patient liaison group which is good for getting patients together in the practice to discuss common health problems, and produces first rate leaflets on patient care for patients to collect when they go to the surgery.

Some hon. Members have spoken about the Government's policy on discharging patients from mental hospitals. Many of those patients are very elderly and many have spent the major part of their lives in an institution. If the Government policy is to work, many more professional workers, including social workers, will be needed to work in the community. Local authorities are being asked to do very much more about providing housing for patients who are discharged, providing community centres and workshops and providing all the other things which the Select Committee said in its report on community care for the mentally ill and handicapped we could not do on the cheap. We need the resources and the will to do those things and money has to be provided to help those who want to do them. Money must be found if that policy is to succeed, and there is great anxiety throughout Britain that the Government are not providing adequate resources to carry out their policy.

At every conference that I address, especially conferences on this crucial matter, I am told of great concern especially about long-stay patients. I hope that the Minister will respond to that. The problems faced by elderly people are important to them and to their families. I hope that the Minister will tell us exactly which of the proposals in the Government's Green Paper and the recommendations made on them by the Select Committee will be provided with the resources to enable them to be carried out. I hope we will be told that the Department has the will to do those things.

8.36 pm

Mr. David Evennett (Erith and Crayford): In my constituency, as in the whole of Britain, there is an increasing number of elderly folk. Over the last few years I have been privileged to meet a great number of pensioners in my constituency. I have met them in their homes, in local authority homes and in hospitals. I have talked at great length with them, listened to their comments and wishes, heard their concerns and listened with interest to their expressions of gratitude for the many facilities provided today which were not provided in the past, especially the increasing provision of facilities.

It must not be forgotten—and I am sure that the Minister has not forgotten—that we are providing many more facilities than ever before for the elderly and that they are grateful. As president of the League of Friends of Homeleigh, an old people's home in Erith in my constituency to which I am a regular visitor, I am extremely impressed by the facilities provided by Bexley local authority and by the quality of the care provided. Too often in this House and outside we criticise and too rarely do we praise, yet the increased provision at that home and at others, like Meyer house and Wolsey house, which are also in my constituency, is a matter for congratulation. The local social services staff are to be complimented for the excellent job that they do in a changing world.

The care of the elderly concerns us all, and, as my hon. Friend the Minister said, it is a challenge for the nation and a challenge for tomorrow. I am always disappointed to hear the Opposition voice criticisms and display manufactured hysteria about the facilities for the elderly. I would rather discuss this matter in a constructive way and try to go forward rather than make party political points. I was impressed by the constructive speech of the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) who spoke about south London, which I know very well.

As the years pass and medical science advances, this problem grows. Many hon. Members have spoken about that. Many pensioners in my constituency are fed up with being lectured or talked down to by politicians. That is because they value their independence, but, like other people, they are also realistic and appreciate the economic situation. They want to advance the services provided by the Health Service and local social services. We do them no credit or justice if we do not accept that they appreciate those things and realise that there are financial constraints. Within those constraints they want an efficient service. The Government have shown that they are determined not only to increase resources, but to increase efficiency in the provision of services. That is vital.

Pensioners are grateful to the Government for controlling inflation not only because of their own fixed income—as we heard in the previous debate, they are the section of the community that will be hardest hit by inflation — but because with inflation they see the destruction of services. They saw that in the 1970s, as a result of inflation and economic mismanagement. Therefore, they are well aware of how important it is to maintain low inflation and get real value for money in the services provided.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Stevens) that when one looks at the record, we could always do better. We would like to see more money provided. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey mentioned community care provision. We would all like to see more community care provision. However, we are aware of the increases that have taken place under this Government. The total Health Service budget increased from £7·75 billion in 1978-79 to £18·9 billion in 1986-87. That is a real achievement. When one

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realises that over 40 per cent. of that is spent on caring for the elderly, it shows the Government's concern to ensure that the elderly are well provided for in the Health Service.

With a progressively aging population there is inevitably an increasing demand for services. There are 1 million more pensioners today than in 1978, so we face a daunting task. I listened with interest to my hon. Friend the Minister when he mentioned the percentage increase in Health Service personnel dealing with elderly people. He mentioned district nurses. There has been a 34 per cent. increase in consultant geriatricians since 1979. That is a real achievement and one of which we can be proud. Of course, it is not enough. We need more, and hopefully we shall see more.

The other issue regularly raised with me in my surgery and in my meetings with pensioners is the waiting list problem for particular operations. We all know that the length of waiting lists in the Health Service was not good in the past, but we have seen a considerable break-through in reducing the length of waiting lists. In the south-east region, in which my constituency is situated, the waiting lists have not been reduced enough. I look forward to the visit of my hon. Friend the Minister for Health to my constituency and to Bexley health authority next month when we will put our case to him for increasing resources for our area to reduce waiting lists. However, the number of operations taking place, especially for elderly people who are often in considerable discomfort and need hip replacements and so on, has been increasing. The number of hip replacement operations increased from 28,000 in 1978 to 38,000 in 1984, and the target we are projecting is 48,000 in 1990. Those are real achievements and we should be grateful. However, that is not enough. Of course, we would like more, and I am sure that when my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State replies she will take note of the points that have been made and will seek to improve the situation further.

Although we would like to see more money spent, Conservative Members must say to Ministers that it must be spent efficiently and effectively and it must be spread fairly across the country. We have had many debates in the House on funding for the Health Service in the south-east region and the London region because we often feel that London has been somewhat neglected under the RAWP reallocation. However, we were grateful for the Secretary of State's comments last week on additional funding for the Thames region. We must year in mind that in some areas of the country the number of elderly is increasing more rapidly than in others. I hope that the increasing number of elderly in certain regions will be taken into account when the allocation of resources is determined.

The Government's record is creditable to date and we are grateful for the advances that have been made in provisions for the elderly. However, there is much more to do, and all we can say is, "Keep going, but perhaps a little faster."

8.45 pm

Mr. Lewis Carter-Jones (Eccles): I should declare an interest at the outset because I am an old-age pensioner and, therefore, one could say that is an example of enlightened self-interest. I am pleased to say that I am enjoying good health.

I would like to strike an optimistic note. I would like the Minister to answer the three issues I am going to raise. I want to talk about a continuing interest I have had over 20 years in the House — the whole concept of rehabilitation for disabled and elderly people. I want to spend time on the problem of incontinence because of the size of that problem and a couple of minutes on the possible treatment of Alzheimer's disease.

I am trying to keep as up to date as I can and I want to refer to the report of the Royal College of Physicians which it published in July 1986 entitled "Physical Disability in 1986 and Beyond". In many ways it summarised my feelings within that area. Frequently elderly or disabled people suffer despondency and despair because they feel they cannot cope with life. My own feeling is that the proper and wise application of rehabilitation techniques to those people can give them the independence that they so worthily need. That can be provided at a relatively low cost.

The three issues that I want to discuss today are related to my philosophy with regard to health care: that if it is technically possible—I say this over and over again—economically sound and morally right, it ought to be implemented. I suggest that in areas where it is possible to establish sound concepts of rehabilitation, it would be a worthwhile economic procedure for the Government to follow.

The Minister is an old friend of mine and he knows that I have ridden that hobby horse for a long time. I plead with him to apply greater resources to rehabilitation in general terms and specifically to the care of the frail elderly. At the end of the day, the experience we possess in rehabilitation medicine is such that we can provide a much better quality of life to our elderly folk. It means collaboration between physiotherapists, geriatric consultants, nursing staff trained in that area and a whole range of paramedical professions. They can provide a quality of life which we at one time thought had gone from certain people. I must pay tribute to the good work being done within my own constituency at Ladywell hospital and the Hope hospital. The Minister will realise that I shall come back to that subject on a personal basis at a later stage.

I shall now deal with a subject that is almost taboo in the House—the question of bowels and bladders. Some people seem to assume that human beings go around at certain times without bowels and bladders. However, we should get it quite clear: there are 2·5 million people in Britain who suffer from incontinence. Those are figures not from my imagination, but figures that the Minister gave me recently. What is worrying is the fact that we accept incontinence as a way of life. The Under-Secretary of State who will be replying to the debate knows full well that it is the female of the species who accepts incontinence without taking action about it. That is very sad. The assumption is that one has had a couple of kids and all one needs to do is to pad up because there is nothing one can do about it. That is the most tragic misunderstanding that takes place in medicine. I ask the Under-Secretary of State to look carefully at expanding the uro-dynamic clinics for the incontinent, because I have had some startling information from the Minister. According to our national records, for the 200 health districts in Great Britain and Northern Ireland there are only 134 nurses with responsibility for and interest in incontinence. Therefore, not all districts are covered. There are only two in

Scotland, both of whom are based in Edinburgh, and in Northern Ireland there are no facilities for this sort of advice.

First, there should be an assessment of the needs of a patient suffering from incontinence. Often that leads to dramatic improvements. We should not write people off as being incontinent for the rest of their life. I have personal knowledge of the work done in the Maelor hospital, Wrexham. Incontinence can be reversed medically and surgically, and we should say that loud and clear to prevent the 2·5 million people and their families from having to suffer the indignity of this complaint.

If incontinence cannot be cured by medical or surgical means, the problem can often be managed successfully by exercise. That can overcome what is known as stress incontinence. I am trying to take an optimistic approach to this issue. We tend to start at the end by saying, "Oh, it's pads." Pads should be the last in a long line of careful analysis. Again, the Minister will find that this does not involve great cost. Indeed, bed occupancy would decrease if the symptom were treated properly.

Following the substantial number of parliamentary questions that I asked on this subject, I received a letter from a nurse in Blackpool who looks after incontinent people. Throughout the country we would like to have walk-in incontinent clinics so that men or women can walk in, state their problems with this often taboo subject, and have them analysed and assessed there and then. In that way their suffering can be discontinued. The nurse's letter reads:

"The incontinent client is, in many ways, a social outcast; alone in their suffering and one who incurs much needless expense. I feel it is time the problem was considered at Government level so that guidelines may be given to professionals and carers in the promotion of continence . . . It can be prevented, it is often curable and it can be managed."

The work done by the Disabled Living Foundation is remarkable, and I pay tribute to the fact that the Department supports it. However, I am worried that faecal impaction is often treated by somebody who is untrained. Despite the optimistic reply I received from the Minister, I have reason to believe that it is treated more frequently by untrained people than the Department is aware of. This is an extremely sensitive issue. All too often people, particularly elderly people, are put into a psychiatric ward because of the misunderstanding and confusion that the condition creates in their mind. People like Dorothy Mandelstam, who works at DLF, would state that there was evidence of that.

I shall end shortly because other hon. Members wish to speak. I should like to refer to a matter which I must approach delicately — Alzheimer's disease, or senile dementia. All too often people assume that it is incurable and nothing further can be done. Nobody ever wants to raise false hopes, and the Minister knows full well that I tend to receive information from all sorts of sources because all sorts of people trust me. This subject is particularly difficult to advance on the Floor of the House because it is not yet generally accepted that the condition can be contained.

Will the Minister look carefully at the experimental work being done with success on tetrahydroaminoacridine substances which help in this disease? Sometimes middle-aged but most frequently older people suffer from this dreadful disease. Some 500,000 people are involved, and their carers and families also suffer. I do not wish to raise false hopes, but in reply I hope that the Minister will say that she will look carefully at the work being done in this area by Nottingham and the Guy's Maudsley unit.

8.55 pm

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East): As the youngest hon. Member taking part in the debate, I am particularly pleased to follow one of the best experts on the disabled and the elderly, the hon. Member for Eccles (Mr. Carter-Jones). I know that he has championed many causes and I have learnt something just listening to him.

I wish to talk about two important matters: residential care for the elderly, and a local problem in a hospital in Leicester. However, I must begin by congratulating the Government on the additional £25 million to help cut hospital waiting lists and by thanking the Minister for the £2·4 million given to Trent. That will help the elderly and reduce some of the long waiting lists, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett) alluded.

The Daily Telegraph, not *The Sun*, of Wednesday 18 February reported rather frighteningly that a Labour Government would axe help for the old in nursing homes. I appreciate that there is anxiety about the way in which some of these homes are run, but it is particularly important to allow our elderly to have the best possible facilities first at home and then, when it is too much of a strain for the rest of the family or for carers to look after them, in a residential care home or registered nursing home where they can be given independence and respect.

The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) spoke about a numbers game and said that the number of registered nursing homes was reducing. I shall prove that their number has increased. On 31 December 1984 there were 1,491 registered homes. In 1983, there were 1,316. Obviously there has been quite an increase.

I have a lot of respect for residential care homes. The majority of the people who run them do an excellent job. But in 1984 there were 4,090 residential care homes with 55,168 residents; in 1985 there were 5,200 homes with 69,000 residents; and in 1986 there were 6,303 homes with 80,000 residents—a tremendous increase. Much of that increase is to be welcomed because obviously not all elderly people can be cared for in their own homes and many have to turn to residential care.

I should like the fees for residential care homes to be better controlled. My hon. Friend the Minister is aware of my feelings on this matter. Those people who are unable to cope on their own must either be looked after in a local authority home or the local authority sponsors them in private or voluntary homes. It appears that the Labour party plans to take away the finance for that. Labour Members must appreciate that there are many hard-up elderly people, although not a huge number, who need the best possible care. Homes are available for them and, whether they are local authority homes or private or voluntary homes, Labour Members must ensure that those facilities are allowed to continue.

Dr. Marek: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bruinvels: I would rather not give way because time is short.

The availability of generous supplementary benefit board and lodging rates has ensured that many people who otherwise might not have been able to take advantage of

[Mr. Bruinvels]

private sector care can use those facilities. That system should continue. We must consider the wide choice of private residential care homes and the type of care available. I should like each residential care home to publish its charges, the number of staff on duty and whether staff are totally professional in the sense that they are fully qualified. There should never be a residential care home that is not registered. Some such homes are not registered at the moment because they have fewer than four beds. I believe that residential care homes with just one bed should register. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will consider that important point further.

Public money is offered to these homes and the Government are especially careful to target it in the right way to ensure that it is spent on the best, most suitable form of care for the people who need it. A working party, comprising Government officials and local authorities, is examining ways of using these funds rationally.

The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) said that the elderly were living longer, and that is true. Obviously it is good news. It must be because of the atmosphere, their determination to survive and the general way of life. About 50 per cent. of the care needs of the elderly are catered for by the private sector at about 50 per cent. of the cost incurred by the public sector. That means that about 35 per cent. of people in private care pay their own way, although they have contributed to the state system throughout their working lives. Residential care homes offer a homely care facility and are nothing like the Victorian and Edwardian institutions at the turn of the century.

A confederation has been set up to represent the interests of the large number of privately owned registered residential homes. It is self-monitoring the bad residential homes. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras talked about a number of them being bad, but I do not agree. There are a few bad apples—obviously we must weed them out—but the rest have done extremely well. I should like minimum standards to be guaranteed in every residential care home. The Registered Homes Act 1984 must ensure that that happens. Facilities and services must be provided — for example, lifts, fire exits, proper directions and proper food, which in some homes has not been up to reasonable nutritional standards.

The regulations lay down the bed square footage which should be provided and standards are always being updated. The Registered Homes Act 1984 has given district health authorities the right to inspect premises regularly. The Registered Nursing Home Association is fearful because residential homes are inspected "at all times". Inspections should be encouraged, provided that they are carried out reasonably. Some people have alluded to raids on residential nursing homes. According to my information, that does not happen. We must give residents the best possible care and ensure that facilities are the same in all residential nursing homes.

Staff, including ancillary staff, must be adequtely, professionally and technically trained. There must be adequate arrangements for the patient in the home so that he or she receives proper medical and dental services as and when required.

Minimum and maximum charges must be considered. Obviously, charges must be realistic in view of the services offered. Many residential care proprietors give far better care than some of the relations of the elderly could. It is a sad fact of life that, in certain cases, love and care is given by a residential care home because it is too difficult to look after the elderly person at home. My hon. Friend the Minister of State announced new limits on the charges and the gross costs and the minimum standards. That announcement was welcome.

In the long term, we must obviously provide more suitably qualified staff in homes. There must be proper night staff and we must consider the precautions for fire risk. That is an area of difficulty as the elderly need to get out of residential homes fast. Certainly the requirements in regulation 10 give due regard to those obligations. We must ensure that homes are properly registered and check on them when they take residents in for residential care, and the residents should have a say in the way in which the home is run. It is especially important that there are proper and adequate facilities at all times. None of my constituents should be charged £16,000 for a room with just a bed, as one of my constituents is being charged outside Leicestershire.

The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras referred to the elderly and the tremendous service that they have done for their country. All hon. Members will agree with that. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras is not in the Chamber at the moment, but it is important to put on record the fact that when there are war memorial services in Leicester the entire Conservative group attends. However, at the last service only three Labour councillors out of 39 went to the service. I do not need any lectures on how the elderly are to be supported and honoured at war memorial services.

Will my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security pay an official visit to Leicester Royal infirmary? I know that my hon. Friend has visited the infirmary in the past, but one part of the hospital is in a decrepit and Victorian state, especially around the entrance to the hospital. As my hon. Friend knows, the Leicester Royal infirmary is a renowned teaching hospital and the university relies on it as a training hospital. However, some old Victorian wards are in a decrepit state and the elderly are being treated long term in those wards. When I visited the Leicester Royal infirmary two Fridays ago, I was appalled at the poor state of repair of that facility area for the elderly. It is unusual for me to call for additional funds, but I urge my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security to supply additional funds to that hospital.

Mrs. Currie: For the sake of balance, does my hon. Friend recognise that a substantial sum of money was spent in Leicester not very long ago? Off the top of my head, I believe that that was about £25 million. It provided a brand new hospital just up the road.

Mr. Bruinvels: I acknowledge that additional funds have been given. The problem is that we have almost too many hospitals in Leicester—almost, not definitely.

The Leicester Royal infirmary is not in my constituency and the funds have gone to the constituency of the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner). However, one part of the Leicester Royal infirmary is very drab indeed. It has no private facilities and the morale of the staff is not at its best. When I paid my semi-official visit to the hospital and spoke to the staff, it was clear that more

funds were needed. I ask my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State to treat that as a matter of urgency as many of my constituents attend that hospital.

The closing of the Fielding Johnson hospital and the Roundhill maternity hospital will provide additional funds which, I hope, can be channelled to the Leicester Royal infirmary. However, obviously I do not want my hon. Friend to forget the Towers hospital and the Leicester General hospital in my constituency which are well looked after, and I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for that.

The elderly are living longer in Leicestershire and they need the best facilities that are available. Provided that those facilities are properly channelled and correct decisions are taken by the Trent regional health authority and the Leicestershire area health authority, and the RAWP requirement is sufficient — my hon. Friend knows that we receive 96 per cent. at present, but we would like a little more—I believe that the elderly will continue to be well cared for.

I pay tribute to both Ministers for what they have done to help those who are desperately in need in the city of Leicester and in the county. The health provision is second to none. The finances put into Leicestershire are pretty good, but a little extra would be welcome. The future is rosy for the elderly people there, provided that we can reduce the waiting lists, and the additional funds that my hon. Friend announced earlier this month will ensure that the elderly in Leicestershire receive the best possible care.

The Government amendment is by far the most realistic proposition. It acknowledges the work that has been done, the dedication of the staff and the certainty that the elderly will have more chance of getting better more quickly in the best-provided hospitals in the county of Leicestershire.

9.10 pm

Mr. Tom Pendry (Stalybridge and Hyde): As the motion refers not only to the Health Service but to local councils and services, I am puzzled that we have two Health Ministers and two Opposition health spokesmen in this debate. I wish to discuss not Health Service provision, but some of the other services that are essential for the elderly.

It is right that the House has turned its attention this week to the problems of the elderly, through the two debates initiated by the official Opposition today and the debate initiated by the Government yesterday. I suppose that the latter was intended to be an occasion of self-congratulation about the EEC food surpluses, but it turned out to be yet another self-inflicted wound. It was right for my colleagues to point out yesterday that charities such as Age Concern, Help the Aged, the Salvation Army and the Women's Royal Voluntary Service are toiling to get those food surpluses to the needy, but, through no fault of theirs, to little effect. Indeed, the scheme is costing those charities a good deal of their precious money. Age Concern in my constituency received its first consignment of butter yesterday, and it has spent £700 through telephone costs organising meetings, issuing literature, and so on. It wanted to spend that precious money on 10 high-backed chairs for its new day centre. I hope that the House will press the EEC to ensure that that money is repaid to the charities which are trying to distribute food to the elderly.

The branch of Age Concern in my constituency, like most branches in other constituencies, does valuable work, but its work in Tameside will be restricted because the Government plan to lop off Tameside council from their urban aid programme. The Manpower Services Commission's programme is also severely restricting Age Concern, the welfare rights charities, Help the Aged and other organisations in my constituency. The MSC is being asked to give more of its thin cake to the inner cities. I do not decry the problems of the inner cities, but in some pockets of my constituency, and in many other constituencies in the north-west, there is similar deprivation and there are similar problems for the elderly. We should be talking not about slicing this thin cake, but expanding the cake to meet our ever-increasing problems, especially those which affect the elderly. No Government who allow organisations such as Age Concern to run down to their present level can be called a caring Government.

In my constituency, Age Concern is sponsored by the MSC. It does many of the jobs that have already been outlined, including the jobs that the elderly cannot do for themselves, such as repairing flexes, painting their homes, and so on. Unfortunately, they will be under threat if the Government's current policies are pursued. Those services will be run down by the Government if the urban aid programme is not restored to many local authorities like mine, and if the Manpower Services Commission programmes are cut.

The Government pay a great deal of lip service to caring about the elderly. During the winter months we heard about their aims, but they gave only empty promises to the elderly. Some 2,000 old people died from hypothermia or cold-related illnesses during the week following the recent cold spell. However, the Government have steadfastly refused to tell us with what, if anything, they intend to replace the single payment allowance that has been invaluable in helping old people to insulate and draught-proof their homes. We want to know from the Minister tonight what will happen after April, because many people throughout the country want to know what will happen then.

I want the Minister to address herself to the drastic cuts that have been planned by the MSC. I know that that is not the responsibility of her Department, but the MSC is directly responsible for many energy-saving schemes that are currently being held up. In her capacity as a "caring" —if I may put it this way—Health Minister, she should be knocking at the doors of the Department of Energy and of the MSC and finding out exactly what is being done to ensure that those energy-saving priority projects—or so we are told—are realised and come on stream for those elderly people.

Two such schemes have been held up in my constituency. One is called "Keep Hattersley Warm"—nothing to do with the deputy leader of the Opposition, but with a Manchester overspill estate. According to an independent survey, 90 per cent. of those interviewed said that their homes were hard to heat, 88 per cent. had draught problems, 85 per cent. had difficulty paying their heating bills and 34 per cent. of the total number were pensioners. It is a cold and bleak estate in winter, as hon. Members who have visited it will know.

The second scheme is called "Keep Tameside Warm". That is another estate in my constituency with a high proportion of pensioners. They are waiting for a scheme that has been approved by the MSC but held back because it has cut 10,000 of 255,000 places that it promised for next year. That means that in my constituency there will be a great deal of resentment because expectations are already

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high in those estates. However, the residents will not benefit from the schemes because the community programmes are designed to try to meet the needs of all those people currently on the schemes. The MSC does not wish—I do not blame it—to lop off any of the schemes currently in place and working.

It is the new schemes that are being held up. The MSC should tune its criteria more finely and consider energy-saving projects, as distinct from other projects within its scope. It is disgraceful that the schemes, which are designed to save energy and lives, are not considered separately from other environmental schemes.

Time is short and other hon. Members wish to speak, so I have already shed most of my speech. I see my Whip nodding. The Government should look more closely at some of the other areas that are so desperately important to the pensioners of this country.

We should ensure that the Manpower Services Commission, the Department of Energy, the Department of the Environment and the Department of Health and Social Security work more closely together to ensure that elderly people have a much better deal than they presently have, especially in areas in which the elderly need to keep warm during our cold winters. If the Government wish to be caring in future—we all know that that is a false claim—they should address this matter in a much more positive way.

9.20 pm

Mr. Laurie Pavitt (Brent, South): I hope that the House will bear with me as I relate a recent personal experience that I believe will provide an insight. I have had a crash course on dying. For three months, I experienced the way in which one nurses a dying person and the trauma, stress and strain that is involved. My elderly sister with terminal cancer came out of hospital three months ago. Because she lived alone, she had to be nursed by my wife and another sister until her death four weeks ago. That experience gave me an entirely new perspective on the matter of care at the end of one's life. Previously, the debate was dominated by two poles—on one hand, a geratric hospital ward and, on the other hand, community care. But the Cinderella is the care, compassion and medical help that one needs in the process of dying.

A recent new dimension that has caught a certain amount of public attention is the hospice movement. There is an inadequate number of hospices and inadequate support for them, yet they are perhaps one of the most civilised developments in the care of the elderly that have taken place in this decade.

What is being done about the domiciliary care of the dying that is provided by two excellent services? I defer to no one in my appreciation of district nurses, but two special organisations, the Marie Curie nurses and the MacMillan nurses, provide terminal care with special experience and expertise. I have experienced the trauma of what can happen when necessary home support is not available. What support are the Government prepared to give those excellent organisations that provide a service that nobody else provides so effectively? A district nurse is competent over the whole area of care, but her time is limited, especially as there is a shortage of district nurses. Therefore, those who suffer the constant day-to-day pressures at the time of a person's death need far more support than we, either governmentally or locally, are giving. I ask the Minister to rethink his strategy on geriatric wards and hospices.

I object to the fact that in my constituency two hospitals with 180 geriatric beds have been closed over the past four years. I want the Minister to think more clearly about institutional and community care. At the moment the matter is too rough and ready. I pay tribute to the primary care consultations that are going on and to some of the excellent ideas that are being shared between those who need to care.

Although we think in terms of illness and the elderly, as has been said, to be old is not a problem, but it can create and have problems within it. There are four main areas of concern for the person who does not need hospitalisation or even community physicians. They are, first, hearing disabilities; secondly, dental problems; thirdly, eye problems; and, fourthly, foot problems.

I recently had the privilege of having an article published in a magazine called "Saga", which goes to a few million elderly people. As a consequence, I am getting letters from all over the country. I am surprised when I continue to get the kind of letter that I received from an elderly lady of 85, who was conned out of £650 for two hearing aids by a door-to-door salesman, because she filled in a coupon. The NHS hearing aid service is as good as one could expect, and 1·5 billion hearing aids have already been issued, free of charge. Batteries are also free. Will the Minister provide the maximum amount of publicity to inform elderly people that they do not need to pay hundreds of pounds for hearing aids, because the NHS hearing aid is just as good? I am wearing two NHS hearing aids—the BE52s. By buying in bulk, the Government, according to a recent answer from the Minister, is paying £21 for each of these aids. The same aids are being sold for £300 each in the private sector. I know the makers. The elderly are being conned, and they need to be protected.

Will the Minister refer to the statement of the right hon. Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Jenkin), when he was the Opposition spokesman on health, who agreed that my Bill, to amend my own Hearing Aid Council Act 1968 to plug this doorstep loophole, would be accepted by the Tory Opposition? I have introduced that Bill for 10 years, with the support of the Royal National Institute for the Deaf, the British Association for the Hard of Hearing and of all other hearing impaired people. Each time the Government Whips have blocked the Bill. I have been to see the present Minister and pleaded that something should be done about it. Therefore, I ask the Minister to take steps to lift the ban so that, when it comes up for Second Reading in May, I shall be given a clear run.

Increased dental charges now mean that an elderly person has to pay £47 for dentures. I hope to goodness that the charge will not be increased again on 1 April. The House knows that as people grow old there is gum and ridge shrinkage. Consequently, new dentures are needed. Elderly people, who have much dignity, do not like to ask for charity, so most old people make do with what they have already got. Therefore, the Government should take action and listen to the pleas of the British Dental Association.

The only people who now have any help with glasses are those on supplementary benefit. At one time, all old people had that privilege. Testing remains obligatory, but I wish that the Government would make it mandatory that opticians should go further than just testing visual acuity.

One can obtain from an optician an early diagnosis of glaucoma, cataracts, hypertension and diabetes long before anybody, but in particular the elderly, goes to see the general practitioner. Surely it was Scrooge at his worst to take from old people the right to free spectacles that they had enjoyed for so long.

I refer the Minister to her report "More Trouble with Feet." That survey was conducted by Dr. Ann Cartwright. Old people need to be mobile so that they are not lonely. They need to be able to get about. However, despite the increase in provision that the Government boast about, there is a drastic shortage of chiropodists and also of training for chiropodists in the year ahead. Dr. Cartwright says:

"Fifty per cent. more chiropodists are needed immediately."

The elderly should be able to live in a civilised fashion in the community. Therefore, these four areas of concern that I have outlined should be acted upon by the Government.

Local social services, health services and the voluntary bodies co-operate in providing help for the elderly. For example, my much maligned Brent council has provided 2,699 telephones for elderly people who are living alone —and the telephone provides a lifeline, especially for those who live in high-rise blocks of flats.

The combined operation of joint planning and joint funding is now an antiquated system of co-ordination between the local social services and district health authorities. I appeal for an early revision of the system. When will we ever learn? The care of the elderly is indivisible. As my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) said, we can never repay this generation for what they have done for us and for generations to follow.

9.30 pm

Mr. Den Dover (Chorley): I wish to refer to two aspects of health care, one in the community and one involving mental illness. We have not heard enough about the district nursing service. Over the last decade or so people have been spending shorter periods in hospital and the burden of service has been put on the community. People have to be dealt with by the community nursing service for longer in preparation for hospital treatment. When patients come out after shorter hospital stays an ever-increasing burden is placed on the district nursing service. Are the Government giving enough emphasis to the needs of staffing in the community?

It is all very well saying that in our large inner cities the population is reducing and that we do not need spending on major hospitals. That is right. But it is in those very inner cities and large centres of population that there is an ever-increasing number of elderly people. They need more and more care by the district nursing service. Unbearable burdens are being put on that staff. Are the Government allocating enough resources? The district nursing service is always seen as the junior partner in the provision of health services.

How much or how little emphasis has been put by the Government on mental illness, despite policy studies in the early 1970s, when the Conservative party was in opposition, aimed at improving mental illness services? We have enormous estates. We should try to get the elderly and mentally infirm back into their families if possible. We should redevelop the major estates and release funds for more health care services in hospitals and in the community.

The private sector has a part to play. Surely we need not leave it to the public sector solely to deal with mental illness. There is no reason why there should not be privately financed treatment of the mentally ill and infirm. I should like to see that because there is an enormous untapped resource which could be used to improve the Health Service throughout the nation.

9.32 pm

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): This debate has been characterised by Conservative Members saying that everything within the National Health Service is good and that the Government have done everything that needs to be done, yet at the same time in their own constituencies there is something which is not quite right. We have had the unedifying spectacle of the hon. Member for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett) making special pleas to the Government for more funding because of the number of old people in his constituency. We have had the spectacle of the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Bruinvels), who said that he rarely votes for spending more money, telling us about going round Leicester Royal infirmary. He said that some old wards are in a decrepit state. He went further; he said that he was appalled at the state of those wards and he wanted extra spending.

So we could go on. I am sure that, if asked, any Conservative Member could find something in the National Health Service that is not quite right. Of course, the public know very well that wards are being closed every day, that there are five-day wards and that there is a continual search for beds simply because the authorities have to consider performance indicators. The accountant rules, and what the accountant wants he has to get.

My hon. Friends the Members for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), for Brent, South (Mr. Pavitt), for Eccles (Mr. Carter-Jones), for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mrs. Short) and for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) have put the argument for more and better care of the elderly very well. I agree with those arguments. Eventually, I hope that those arguments will convince the Government — they will certainly convince the next Labour Government—that more should be done for the elderly.

I wish to repeat the figures for old-age pensions given by my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) in the last debate. They are also valid for this debate. Money is important because that gives the elderly the ability to look after themselves, to provide heat in winter, to feed themselves and to pursue an active life to the end of their days. My hon. Friend said that old-age pensions had increased by 20 per cent. over and above prices during the period of office of the previous Labour Government, but that they had increased by only 4·5 per cent. over and above prices under the present Tory Administration. The Minister for Social Security sought to say that those figures were not as accurate as they should be, but he did not give us the accurate figures. The figures mentioned by my hon. Friend were in the research note that was published on 18 November and had been placed in the Library. Therefore, the Minister, had he wished, had plenty of time in which to find the accurate figures. Suffice to say that, if the figures given by my hon. Friend are inaccurate, they are not very inaccurate.

[Dr. John Marek]

The Minister was rattled and produced his figures and added in all sorts of allowances concerning poverty or disability. The figures that the Minister produced were misleading because one figure suggested that the disposable income of pensioners had increased faster than the disposable income of the rest of the population. That might be right, but the Minister did not say that a considerable part of the population is unemployed and has little disposable income. That has been the tenor of the statistics and arguments put forward by the Government Front Bench during the two debates.

The Government have sought to say that the figures produced by the Opposition are inaccurate. I am not saying that those figures are the last thing in accuracy. They may be inaccurate in detail, but they seek to provide an accurate, true reflection of what is happening to our old people.

When the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security replied to the previous debate he put a figure on the disposable income of pensioners and said that it had risen 18 per cent. more than the disposable income of the rest of the population. Such a figure is misleading. The crunch of the argument is that central to pensioners' well-being—after increases in public health services for which Governments of all persuasions have been responsible—is the amount of disposable income that they possess. That income helps the elderly to heat their houses in winter, to feed themselves and to lead active lives.

My hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West said that old-age pensions are equivalent to 18 per cent. of average earnings in this country. They are equivalent to 50 per cent. of average earnings in West Germany and 60 to 70 per cent. of average earnings in France. They are shocking figures and I make no apology for repeating them. I cannot see how any Government can try to get out of accepting those figures. I repeat that the Labour Government, as a start, will increase the single pension by £5 and the married pension by £8.

The Minister for Health pursued the same line in his speech. He said that spending on the National Health Service has increased by about a third in real terms. In the past it has been said that spending has increased by 22 per cent., then 24 per cent. and now the Minister says it has increased by a third in real terms. The Minister did not say that we are getting older as a nation and therefore spending must increase to ensure that the standard of service is maintained. The Minister did not say that the medical price index increases at a higher rate than the retail prices index and that, therefore, we would have to spend more money in real terms to maintain standards.

The Minister did not say that there are now many new operations that were hardly dreamt of 10 years ago, such as hip replacement operations, that are desired by the population, especially the elderly, so that they are assured of an active life in later years. He did not say that presently there is much more unemployment and that the unemployed need the National Health Service more than do the employed. But we know that the Government do not believe that, because the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales says that he does not believe that there is a link between unemployment and ill health. Finally, the Minister did not say that there are new diseases such as AIDS, which demand new expenditure and need extra expenditure to keep the standard of service the same. The hon. Gentleman simply said that spending on the NHS has gone up by getting on for one third. That is a shallow misrepresentation, for which I do not blame him. Obviously, it is an edict given out by the Prime Minister some years ago, that one uses all the possibilities of misrepresentation and selection of figures to try to convince the people that everything that can be done by the Government is being done.

Of course, people are not fools. They see long waiting lists. They know that they might be refused admission when they go to hospital and that they might have to go again to see whether they can have their non-urgent operation. They see that there are not enough nurses doing nursing duties because there have been cuts in ancillary staff. They will not be fooled by shallow misrepresentations.

Some of the elderly have been moved into community care. There is an unseemly haste by the Government in pressing health authorities to get rid of their elderly patients and put them into the community. It has meant that some patients are becoming hopeless and suicidal, and are also the victims of grasping and uncaring landlords. The NHS and voluntary bodies simply do not have the resources for proper continuing care after patients are discharged into the community. There have been cases where former patients have been put into community care, and have found themselves sharing a room with two or three other former patients, sometimes of the opposite sex. In one documented case, a 60-year-old woman had not eaten for two days, and had gone into a tiny room at the top of a dilapidated staircase, with electricity being supplied illegally through an adaptor connected to a 5p slot meter.

I have a case at present in my constituency where a housing association is seeking to convert a large home so that is is suitable for elderly patients being discharged into the community, but it says that resources are not there for a warden to be provided. It says that it has money to provide only bedsitter accommodation, and that it does not have the finances to provide properly constructed one-bedroom flats. I fear that that pattern is being repeated throughout the country.

Of course, the Government look at community care as a cheap option. I have seen no evidence to the contrary. They look at it as something on which the Treasury can spend less, whereas proper community care would cost as much if not more than insitutionalised hospital care.

I visited the Truro constituency earlier this week. I was told that the Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie), was due to visit it on 16 February. She cancelled her visit. I do not know whether there was any reason why she did that, but the people in the Truro constituency do not know. She did not turn up. Radio Cornwall announced that she was going to look at the hospitals, but when the day arrived, she was not there. She did not go. Was she muzzled? Was she told by her masters and by her mistress that there is something going on in Truro, and it would be better if the hon. Lady was not there?

Mrs. Currie: I would not wish to leave the hon. Gentleman in suspense. I could not attend because I was preparing for the Opposition debate the following day. As

he will recall, I replied to another debate that day. The visit was rearranged for today. I decided that I preferred the hon. Gentleman's company on this occasion.

Dr. Marek: What can I say after that? [Hon. Members: "Be careful."] My hon. Friends warn me to be careful. This is a serious point. I hope that the hon. Lady will go to the Truro constituency because I should like to see whether she can say that there is something that she or her Government can be proud of—she has not been in her job that long, and it would be unfair to blame her for all that the Government have done.

When I went round the local hospital in St. Austell, I was told that many things were wrong in the constituency. There is a long waiting list for hip replacement operations. Eye operations are having to be done in the private hospital next door to Truro. Apparently, a surgeon will do them free so that the waiting list can be cut down. I wonder what the NHS has come to when that happens. The ambulance service is not of the same quality as it used to be.

I have only another two minutes to speak, but I wonder whether the Under-Secretary will mend her ways? In the House of Commons, she said:

"Universal screening is neither desirable nor necessary." —[*Official Report*, 5 February 1986; Vol. 91, c, 372.]

If she said that—*[Interruption.]* I have it here in a copy of *Hansard*. Does she still believe that it is neither desirable nor necessary or will she now say that it is desirable for all people to have screening, to have regular checks, so that preventive care will mean something to our elderly people?

On a different day the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South said:

"We do not believe in equality . . . There should be a gap between the rich and the poor."—[*Official Report*, 28 June 1984; Vol. 62, c. 1218.]

If she did say that, I do not think that our elderly will derive much hope from the present Government and its policies, certainly not while the hon. Lady is occupying her position.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South talked about dentures and hoped that their price would not rise in the next Budget. The hon. Lady is quoted as saying:

"charges irritate people and they put some people off, but on the dental side there is no evidence that they put people off." —[*Official Report*, 25 March 1985; Vol. 76, c. *163.*]

The charges do not put the rich off, but those are not the people that my hon. Friend was worrying about. The hon. Lady does not give us much hope, and I do not think that we will get much hope from the present Government. The elderly need more home helps; they need cuts in standing charges for electricity and gas, and preferably abolition of such charges. We need more district nurses; we need more therapists; we need more for the medical service so that we can have frequent check-ups for elderly people, and, above all, we need more disposable income for the elderly so that they can look after themselves. In spite of all the cant that we get from the Government, I do not think that we will get that from them.

9.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mrs. Edwina Currie): I listened with interest to the words of the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek). I do not think that he has much confidence in the Opposition case. He spent most of his speech trying, with singular lack of success, to reopen issues that were disposed of by my hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) in the previous debate. As to the question of universal screening, I thought that we dealt with that last week. I do not think that the hon. Member for Wrexham was present on that occasion; perhaps he was in Truro at the time.

We have had an excellent debate, with a number of well-informed speeches. I hope that some hon. Members will not mind if I write to them in detail about the issues that they raised. I agree with one or two of the comments that were made. For example, I agree with the hon. Member for Eccles (Mr. Carter-Jones), who spoke about rehabilitation. What he said about many of the issues that he raised was right. Prevention also is an important matter. The hon. Member talked about incontinence clinics. It may be that we should have well-elderly clinics that encompass a number of such issues. Broadly, I give the hon. Gentleman the assurance that he asked for on Alzheimer's disease. I hope that he never has need for the services that he called for.

The hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Pavitt) asked about chiropodists. We have set up additional training schools, and another school is opening this year. He also mentioned hospices. As he probably knows, we had a debate on hospices last week, which was called by my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Sir P. Goodhart), to whose speech I refer him. We held a joint conference on care of the dying between the DHSS and the National Association of Health Authorities which resulted in a guide for health authorities. A circular setting out DHSS policy on terminal care is coming out at the beginning of next week, which we hope will encompass some of the issues that he raised.

Several hon. Members talked about co-ordination of services for people who are discharged from hospital. Under the Helping the Community to Care programme we are funding a number of voluntary organisations, including Age Concern and Red Cross, to develop new ways of developing such co-ordination. We will look with interest at the results.

I was a little surprised at the comments that the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) made on crime. If he is so concerned about crime, we hope that he will persuade his party to back the police in the future. There are a number of other detailed issues, but in view of the time I hope that hon. Members will allow me to write to them about them.

We are all interested in services for the elderly, because we all hope to get there some day—perhaps me more than most, since women are far more likely to do it than men. Currently, there are 3 million people aged between 75 years and 84 years and 750,000 aged over 85 years. There are 3,400 people who are more than 100 years old. A centenarian these days has a life expectancy of two years, and we expect the number of them to increase substantially. No one tonight has paid tribute to medical science, or the improved living conditions and good preventative work that has resulted in this considerable growth in numbers, and we look forward to much of the same.

For many people, old age is not a disaster but, in the terms of "A Handbook For Retirement" recently produced by Age Concern, "The Time of Your Life". Lord Murray said in his introduction:

[Mrs. Edwina Currie]

"Retirement should not mean inaction but a period of liberation—a time to do all those things which a full-time job made impossible . . . . Today's retired men and women are generally more youthful, active and healthy than ever before. They are branching out in new skills and interests . . . they are taking up new lines of work, both paid and unpaid; they are the mainstay of social clubs, sports clubs and charities"—

as they are of political parties.

"They are refusing to retire from everyday life and are doing things their way, regardless of how people expect them to act at their 'time of life'."

The standard of living of retired people has risen quite dramatically. In 1975 only 20 per cent. of retired households had access to a car, and now it is 30 per cent. Some 48 per cent. had a washing machine, but now it is 65 per cent., which helps with some of the other problems that we have mentioned. Sixty-nine per cent. had a fridge; now it is 95 per cent. Some 37 per cent. had a phone; now it is 75 per cent. Ninety-seven per cent. have a television set, so we would not be surprised that they watch on average 40 hours of television every week, which is twice the amount that young people watch. Most important in terms of comfort, 33 per cent. used to have central heating and now 61 per cent. have. As a result, we can say that they are much better housed than ever they were.

The opening speeches today dealt with how we make the system function, particularly in reference to local councils, which do a great deal of work. I have a report referred to earlier of an independent review of residential care for the elderly in the London borough of Camden. I agree with the hon. Member for Holborn and St Pancras, whose constituency is covered, and some of whose constituents are mentioned, that the council deserves recognition for having had the guts to commission the independent report and publish it. However, the scandals described in it should never have happened. I shall read some of it into the record.

This is what the report said about Camden's care for the elderly:

"effective management of residential care in Camden has broken down . . . The Council's concern to be a good employer became carried to a point at which elderly residents have suffered."

It presents a detailed report of each home and says of one:

"We observed failure to clean up urine and faeces; residents being scolded . . . Standards of hygiene generally very poor and in our view contained a risk to health . . . Custom and practice has led to care assistants being able to take up to one hour's tea break—all at the same time . . . We heard of difficulty in gaining access to the building during tea breaks. We know of one resident left helpless during a tea break, lying transverse across the bed with only a vest across her shoulders and was blue with cold . . . the Trade Union had remained adamant that there should be no reduction in the time out taken . . . care is not a priority for some staff".

Another home was described in this way:

"A downstairs lavatory approached by steps which is inaccessible to people using wheelchairs or walking frames. In consequence dependent residents are regularly toiletted on a commode in a four-bedded downstairs bedroom with no privacy at all."

Another home is described as having bedrooms that are "unacceptably overcrowded". Furthermore,

"the lift is subject to frequent breakdowns and has been left unrepaired for as long as six weeks."

In that home the depression rate of residents is 53 per cent. Furthermore,

"there has been a recent suicide of a very disturbed woman who could not be adequately supervised . . . Getting up of residents starts at 5.45 a.m."

Of another home, the review said:

"For physically disabled residents the care system appears to have collapsed . . . a dirty neglected appearance of both surroundings and individuals . . . 14 out of 18 'incontinent' residents could in fact be kept continent with proper care. Clothing . . . is often dirty and unkempt, often with no underwear and in particular there is an absence of knickers —similar complaints have been voiced by relatives . . . We had drawn to our attention a number of incidents concerning residents. One man was reported as having been found by a visiting doctor as so soaked in urine that it had made a 'high tide' mark, which would have taken up to seven hours to form, across his shirt . . . some staff members expressed themselves as deeply distressed at their inability to offer good care, because some colleagues did not carry out their duties responsibly, refused orders and were aggressive and abusive. We heard allegations of fights amongst staff members and of staff having to be escorted to public transport because of fear of retribution from other staff members.

As things are we however feel it necessary to say that the Home is very close to disaster, and could easily become the focus of a major scandal."

Mr. Dobson: The hon. Lady will accept that any sensible person would regard the circumstances described in that report as disgraceful. Does she also accept that it is somewhat hypocritical not to note other things said in that report, that the Department of Health and Social Security has statutory inspectorial duties and that the periods between inspections seemed to be of unacceptable duration? Does she recognise that some of the issues raised in this report would have been identified and possibly dealt with earlier if the Department had exercised its statutory duties? We will not take lessons from people who will not accept their own responsibilities.

Mrs. Currie: The DHSS does not run these homes; Camden council runs them. For the hon. Gentleman's information, may I say that I asked whether inspectors had recently visited the homes and was told that they had. I shall make available to the hon. Gentleman the report that they have just produced. They again used the words "dirty" and "untidy", and referred to "poor standards of care". It is not as if Camden does not have any money. It spends more per head on residential care and on just about everything else than any other borough. It is repeatedly compared unfavourably with other local authorities.

I cannot see how the Opposition's policies would be of any help. In the Health Service they would get rid of prescription and other charges, and that would lose at least £350 million a year. They would stop contracting out, and that would lose another £75 million. They would lose all the other cost improvements which my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Stevens) drew to our attention. They would do their best to get rid of the private sector. They say that the private sector and care of that sort is no part of Labour's philosophy. They say that their aim is to put public money into good public services. I hope to God that they are not like those in Camden.

The hon. Member for Wrexham spoke a little self-righteously about waiting lists. The waiting lists were longest when NHS staff were out on strike, and the Opposition backed that strike in every way. We saw recently the walk-out of clerical staff from Selly Oak hospital, of home helps in Liverpool and of meals on wheels staff in Hackney. That is what the Labour party supports.

The Opposition talk about reversing tax cuts. I hope that they remember that pensioners are also taxpayers and that 70 per cent. of them have income from savings which would be eroded by taxation and inflation and by what the Opposition plan to do to pension funds. It was all summed up for us by Richard Crossman in his diary entry for Sunday 14 June 1970, when he described the Conservative years as

"years of economic expansion and a tremendous rise in living standards".

The Labour years were described as

"years of hell and high taxes."

That is exactly what we would have again under Labour. Years of hell and high taxes are all that is promised by the Opposition for us, for our elderly and for everybody else. I trust that they and their motion will be rejected.

Question put, That original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 186, Noes 252.

Division No. 102] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Rt Hon J.
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clelland, David Gordon
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Freud, Clement
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Fife Central)*
Hancock, Michael
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley, N)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Janner, Hon Greville
Jenkins, Rt Hon Roy *(Hillh'd)*
John, Brynmor
Johnston, Sir Russell
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
MacKenzie, Rt Hon Gregor
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shields, Mrs Elizabeth
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R. *(W'hampt'n NE)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'ds E)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stott, Roger
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wainwright, R.
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ron Davies and
Mr. Tony Lloyd.

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Bulmer, Esmond
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carttiss, Michael
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Hon A. *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Corrie, John
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
du Cann, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald

Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Sir Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John S
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hirst, Michael
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irving, Charles
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
McCurley, Mrs Anna
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
Madel, David
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mather, Sir Carol
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Miscampbell, Norman
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Mudd, David
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nellist, David
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Patten, Christopher *(Bath)*
Patten, J. *(Oxf W & Abgdn)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Pollock, Alexander
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Prentice, Rt Hon Reg
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Jim *(Dorset W)*
Squire, Robin
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M.
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Waller, Gary
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Francis Maude and
Mr. Michael Portillo.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

Mr. Speaker *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House congratulates the Government on the steps it has taken to facilitate and prolong the health and independence of elderly people; welcomes its provision for the increasing proportion of elderly and very elderly people in the population; notes the substantial increase in health care of elderly people in hospitals and in the community; and applauds the Government's success in helping elderly people to improve their quality of life.

European Court of Auditors

10.12 pm

The Minister of State, Treasury (Mr. Peter Brooke): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of the Annual Report of the European Court of Auditors on the financial year 1985, together with the replies of the Institutions; and approves the Government's efforts to press for effective Budget discipline and proper financial control of Community expenditure.

The House has before it for scrutiny this evening the European Court of Auditors' annual report on the Community's 1985 financial year. This report offers to the Community, and to its member states in particular, a key opportunity to consider in some detail the effectiveness with which the Community's resources are in practice used. We are fortunate to have as a basis for our debate the clear and helpful report from the Select Committee on European Legislation. I should like on behalf of the Government to pay tribute to the important work of the Committee and to its thoroughness in carrying out its scrutiny role on behalf of the House.

The Government share the Committee's assessment that the court's role is a daunting one. As the range of Community activities has expanded in recent years, the court's task has been made more difficult and even more vital to the task of ensuring that the Community's finances are managed with the necessary efficiency and rigour. I am sure the House will join me in putting on record our appreciation of the importance of the court's work and our support for its endeavours. We must constantly make it clear that the same standards for which we strive in matters of national public expenditure must also be applied to the Community.

The role of the Court of Auditors' report in the Community's budget procedure is set out in the explanatory memorandum which I submitted to the House on 22 January. As the House will recall, it is the responsibility of the European Parliament, acting on a recommendation agreed by qualified majority in the Council of Ministers, to grant a discharge each year to the Commission in respect of its implementation of the Community budget. The Council bases its recommendation for discharge upon discussions of the court's annual report. The ECOFIN council will be debating this question on Monday 9 March, and comments made by hon. Members this evening will be a useful input to the Government's preparation for that discussion.

Mr. Mart will again be present at ECOFIN to present his report in his capacity as president of the court. I am pleased to be able to report to the House that over the last few years pressure from the United Kingdom has helped to ensure that these discussions reflect more fully the importance of the work of the court in the financial affairs of the Community.

I would like to highlight key areas in the court's report. The court draws attention to the need for a review of commitments outstanding which could turn out to be defunct. The United Kingdom Government support this call strongly and we look to the Commission to take further measures to weed out commitments still on the Community's books which no longer relate to real projects. The financial pressures faced by the Community mean that this must be a priority over the coming year.

The court also highlights the outstanding liabilities of the Community. A figure of 20 billion ecu has been mentioned in this context. In considering the Community's liabilities it is important to distinguish between those which relate to binding contracts entered into and those which concern wider political commitments made by the Community which have yet to be translated into financial terms. It is not always helpful to lump together definite and contingent liabilities in this way, and the resulting figures must be used with caution.

The United Kingdom's position is clear. It is normal for the Community to have outstanding liabilities, particularly in the structural funds. Indeed, in a system where some of the payment may be made a considerable time after the contract is signed this is advisable to ensure that funds are not disbursed before it is necessary to do so. However, we need to maintain stricter control over the growth of those liabilities. The Commission must ensure that outstanding debts are held to the minimum necessary for the efficient functioning of the Community. The budgetary authority decided in the 1986 budget to take major steps to redress the imbalance between commitments and payments to which the court drew attention. Now that this has been achieved, a strict implementation of budgetary discipline is required to ensure that its future decisions maintain a sensible balance in this area.

The court reiterates points made in previous years concerning the use of an intergovernmental agreement—IGA—to balance revenue and expenditure in 1985. For reasons set out at some length on other occasions, the Government do not accept this criticism and, in common with all other member states, consider that the use of an IGA in the particular circumstances of 1985 was a proper and legal means of providing a balanced budget. The Government agree strongly, however, with the underlying concern of the court to ensure that expenditure is maintained within the revenue available.

Mr. Terence Higgins (Worthing): My hon. Friend has said that that brought about a balanced budget. Was it not absolutely clear that the budget did not balance and that the IGA was used to bring about a balance which did not exist within the terms of the treaty?

Mr. Brooke: As my right hon. Friend will recall, that is an issue on which he and I exchanged words on the Floor of the House and in correspondence.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): A very serious criticism has been made of the system of advances, which is described in paragraph 1.11 as being temporary, because it has become a permanent feature of the Community finances. Will my hon. Friend please answer that criticism?

Mr. Brooke: It is going a little far to say that the particular arrangements which were made in 1985, and which, as my hon. Friend says, were described as temporary, have become a permanent feature of the Communitys affairs.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Brooke: No. I want to make a little progress, and then I will gladly give way.

The court also comments in some detail on the operation of the provisional twelfths regime, which ruled Community finances from January 1985 until a 1985

[Mr. Brooke]

Budget was finally adopted in June 1985. The court made clear that there are several unsatisfactory aspects in the manner in which the provisional twelfths regime currently operates. The Government broadly support these criticisms and will be pressing for amendments to be made to the necessary legislation in the context of amendment of the financial regulation.

The court found that the number of irregularities detected in CAP expenditure increased by 70 per cent. between 1984 and 1985, and noted the high concentration of those irregularities in some countries. The court thought that regulations should be amended to enable the Commission to intervene directly to investigate fraud. The Commission replied that it was taking steps to improve co-operation between its officials and those in member states and had put forward to the Council an amendment which would enable it to carry out inspections in member states.

Mr. Marlow: My hon. Friend has said, and we are very pleased to hear it, that the IGA will not become a permanent feature and will not become embedded in stone for ever, but he will know that there is to be some sort of whip-round — perhaps sensibly — to deal with the vast mountains of agricultural produce and huge lakes that exist at the moment. Could my hon. Friend, who has said that the IGA will not become a permanent feature, give the House an undertaking that if this whip-round takes place, and it is a loan, and we are to be repaid that loan, the repayment will in no way be dependent upon this House agreeing to a further increase in Community own resources at a later stage?

Mr. Brooke: That was a somewhat convoluted question, but I repeat what I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen): the features which were described as temporary have not become permanent. Indeed, during the 15 months in which I have held my present post, I cannot recall any discussion in the budget Council of an IGA. I acknowledge the overhang of agricultural expenditure, for which proposals will be required from the Commission and to which the Council will address itself.

Mr. Marlow: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Brooke: No, I will continue if I may. My hon. Friend will have ample opportunity to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in our less than full House tonight.

The court has taken its usual careful look at the administration of the Community's development aid. We were especially pleased to see the court's comment that administration of the Dublin plan, under which the Community and member states undertook to deliver 1·2 million tonnes of cereals to famine-affected countries in Africa in 1985, was "entirely satisfactory". It was a difficult programme to implement, but the total European effort of the Community and member states combined undoubtedly made a significant contribution to relieving famine in that year.

There is less evidence of delays in delivery of food aid than in previous years. Previous Court of Auditors reports about such delays were a significant factor in the Council's decision to reform radically the Community's food aid procedures under the United Kingdom presidency last November. We believe that the new arrangements will allow much faster response in emergencies.

Some deficiencies in the administration of aid from the European development fund are again brought to light, but at least some of the difficulties mentioned are being tackled in the implementation of the new Lomé convention, which was signed by the Community and by 66 African, Caribbean and Pacific countries. It came into force on 1 May 1986.

Mr. Budgen: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Brooke: Does my hon. Friend wish to intervene on the subject of the Lomé convention?

Mr. Budgen: I hope that my hon. Friend will not pursue the tactic of talking at great length about peripheral issues to avoid answering questions that have been put to him properly by my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow). The House is interested in how the books will be made to balance properly, and a lot of talk about peripheral issues will not interest us very much.

Mr. Brooke: I do not wish to take issue with my hon. Friend, but I asked him whether his question was about the Lomé convention. Having heard his question, I do not think that it was. We have ample opportunity for debate this evening, and I look forward to hearing the points made by my hon. Friends and by other hon. Members.

The Lomé convention entered into force on 1 May 1986. It allows European Community aid to be better planned, more coherent and so more effective.

There is now recognition that developing countries have to be helped over the shortage of foreign exchange which prevents them making use of existing investments. There is provision in the new convention for the supply of spare parts and essential commodities, alongside more conventional investment projects. The concentration on particular sectors for Community aid and the introduction of policy commitments by recipient countries also mean that the Community can make a better evaluation of the extent to which developing countries will provide the policy environment and, if necessary, local finance to make the aid work.

In conclusion, the Government recognise the need for greater rigour in decisions on the spending totals available to the Community and in the financial control exercised over that spending. We shall continue to impress on our partners the need for the Community to live within its means. Resources are limited, and it is as important for the Community, as for its member states, to cut its coat according to its cloth.

Similarly, for any given amount of Community expenditure, it remains just as important as ever that such spending should be as efficient and cost effective as possible. The Court of Auditors has a central role in helping to bring that about and we shall continue to support the court in its efforts.

10.25 pm

Dr. Oonagh McDonald (Thurrock): I want to agree in one sentence with what the Minister said and to welcome the Select Committee's report and its useful analysis of the report of the Court of Auditors. It makes much better reading than the large heap of papers that we have received from the Court of Auditors. However, from there on agreement between us must cease. Indeed, there did not seem to be much agreement between the Minister and his hon. Friends either.

The Minister referred to the removal of defunct commitments — that is something with which we all agree and which we want to happen. However, he was really clutching at straws in a desperate effort to find some way of reducing Community expenditure, that being the only possibility.

I find the motion puzzling. We are asked to take note of the annual report and to approve

"the Government's efforts to press for effective Budget discipline and proper financial control of Community expenditure."

I am not quite sure to what the final part of that sentence refers, because budgetary discipline did not apply in 1985. It allegedly began to apply in 1986 when the own resources ceiling was put up to 1·4 per cent. However, most of us doubt that budgetary discipline applies at all.

On the Government's efforts to press for effective budget discipline, if the Prime Minister occasionally going along to the Council of Ministers and hectoring the other Ministers—telling them that we must stop spending as much in the Community—counts as that, it has been remarkably ineffective ever since the discipline was allegedly introduced.

The Court of Auditors' comments about 1985 will no doubt be repeated when it reports on 1986 and 1987. In 1985 the percentage of agricultural spending steadily increased and reached 70 per cent. In the current budgetary year, agricultural spending will overrun yet again and there will be a 5 billion ecu deficit. It is expected that the figure will range between 3 and 5 billion ecu at the end of this year, precisely for the reasons that many of us pointed out right from the start—the gap in budgetary discipline which allowed for account to be taken of changes in the exchange rate. The fall in the dollar has brought that about exactly as everybody — certainly most hon. Members present—repeatedly said it would.

Turning away from what we expect to happen in 1987 and referring back to what we are supposed to be debating, which is the Court of Auditors' report, what the Court of Auditors has to say about the way in which the Commission and certain member states run their finances shows that the notion of ever imposing budgetary discipline on that lot is little short of a farce.

Let us consider what the Court of Auditors says about the accounts in the opening paragraphs of its report, from 1·5 onwards. It states:

"Setting them out in this way lays the Commission open to the accusation of not having given a true and fair view of the Community's actual financial situation."

That point is emphasised in paragraphs 1.10 and 1.11. Paragraph 1.10 states:

"For the second year running, the Communities have not observed one of the fundamental principles upon which their financial organisation is based, namely the need to cover fully each year's financing needs with the equivalent amount of annual revenue . . . use of advances from the Member States, far from helping to amortize the 'burden of the past' . . . has, on the contrary, allowed it to increase throughout the financial year 1985."

And so the report goes on; there is no real attempt to control Community spending——

Mr. Budgen: What about the stocks?

Dr. McDonald: I shall come to that matter, if the hon. Gentleman will just wait for a moment or two.

Community spending continues to get out of hand, and at the end of the report the Court of Auditors says that, had the accounts been properly presented, it would have been clear that the 1 per cent. ceiling was busted in 1985 and had approached a ceiling of 1·3 per cent. of VAT.

If the Government really want anything like financial discipline to be imposed, they could make a start by ensuring that every member Government paid. Paragraph 3.7 of the report records that, by 31 December 1985, France, Italy and Luxembourg had failed to pay the amount agreed under the intergovernmental agreement. We want to know when those amounts were paid and what happened to France, Italy and Luxembourg for delaying their payments. If major members of the Community such as France delay their payments, how can we rush to pay so nobly? How about a little delay on our part? Why do we not say to the French Government, "You pay first and we will follow"? Rather than the Prime Minister leaning on other Governments with empty hectoring, following that suggestion might be more to the point.

Paragraph 4.40—the Minister referred to this point in passing, but he was considerably more optimistic than the Court of Auditors — refers to 219 cases of irregularities involving 12 million ecu. After a long investigation, the recoveries made in 1985 a result of overpayment related to 70 cases for the amount of only 1·3 million ecu. To suggest that there is any greater efficiency or that the Community can make any proper checks on that is to be far too optimistic. Paragraph 4.40 states:

"Faced with the same observation for the financial year 1984, the Commission agreed to give the reasons for this imbalance; at the present time, the Court has still not received the answers promised by the Commission, which are even more necessary considering the considerable increase in 1985."

Irene — not a lady, but a computerised system — should have been introduced, but is still delayed. it is to be used for recording and analysing frauds and irregularities reported by member states. Not surprisingly, the olive oil problem referred to in paragraphs 4.64 and 4.65 still exists, despite — and this shows why the Minister's optimism is so ill-founded — the confident prediction of the Commission in reply to the Court of Auditors' special report of June 1985. Perhaps the Minister could say a little more about what happens on issues such as olive oil and what progress has been made on the recording and analysing of frauds and irregularities, instead of expressing the type of optimism that he did.

Table 4.5 shows clearly the costs of public and private storage in 1984 and 1985. It states that the commission's accounting procedures make it no longer possible to get full or accurate information for a particular financial year. The Select Committee quite rightly drew attention to that fact. The Commission is not in a position to provide a full disclosure of costs and financing of stocks, an increasing share of which is borne directly by the member states. By November 1985 the total value of the cereals in storage was two fifths of the value of the stock of all farm products. The price package of 1986-87 is better, but, in the Court's view, does not go anywhere near to achieving a solution.

The Government, in their motion, refer to their pressing for budgetary discipline, but, quite honestly, there is little sign of such pressures having any effect in 1985. There is little sign that they will have had any effect in 1986. As for 1987, we all know full well that the budget will run into enormous difficulties and that, yet again, there will have to be a Government whip-round, probably

[Dr. McDonald]

towards the end of this year—though, if we say that at this stage, we shall probably find that it comes earlier rather than sooner.

I suppose that that is one of the events that the Government hope will happen after a general election, so that they will not have to deal with the problem and come to the House with their collective tail between their legs and say, "Sorry, budget discipline failed. The 1·4 ceiling has been busted. We have not succeeded in reforming agricultural policy. We have not found proper agreement. By the way, talk has been going on with other members of the Community about "possibilities." Who knows what the discussions that the Foreign Secretary has been having over the past few days entail for future expenditure, but most commentators suggest that the future of that expenditure and the future Community burden on us is not at all bright.

When we are asked to approve the Government's pressure to bring about budgetary discipline, we can record yet another year of dismal failure that the Court of Auditors has quite properly and fully exposed. If a company kept its finances in such a way, it would not be allowed to conduct any business. In its present state, we should not allow the Commission to have vast sums of public money to fritter away in such a fashion.

10.38 pm

Mr. Terence Higgins (Worthing): The House should be grateful to the Select Committee, under the chairmanship of the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), for its report. I should like to refer to a point made in the report. It states:

"It—

That is to say, the Court—

"notes that some Member States are not prepared to co-operate with the Court and the Commission over access to information . . . with the result that the court has not so far been able to discharge fully its responsibilities for the audit of the VAT own resources and the EAGGF Guarantee."

What will the Government do about this matter? Quite clearly, it is not acceptable that taxpayers' money should go out in that form. The body responsible for auditing such matters cannot get information from other Governments. My hon. Friend said that he would take into account the views that are expressed in this debate when the matter is discussed in the wider forum. I hope that he will express in the strongest possible terms that this is not acceptable. I want to know what he can do about it, and also what he proposes to do about it.

We were assured by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister some time ago that as more countries became net contributors, this would provide an effective guarantee of budgetary discipline. However, one has only to look at the long written answer that my hon. Friend the Minister of State gave on 17 February 1987 to see that he said that he voted against the Council's proposals but that all the other member states voted in favour. So much for the argument that the most effective guarantee of budgetary discipline is the fact that more countries are now becoming net contributors.

As for the wording of the motion, it

"takes note of the Annual Report."

It does not approve it. Last year I pointed out in our debate that it would be more appropriate for the House to approve it. There is certainly a case for spelling out in greater detail the kind of concerns that are expressed in the Select Committee's report, so that when they are discussed in the European forum my hon. Friend can put clearly before that wider group the fact that the House of Commons has expressed the view, for example, that it is deplorable that the information has not been provided to enable the court to carry out its duties.

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): Does my right hon. Friend have any evidence that suggests that the auditors' report is discussed by Ministers at any time?

Mr. Higgins: I understood my hon. Friend the Minister to say that that will happen. If that is not so, perhaps he will correct the matter in due course. My hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) may be right. If so, that would be very bad indeed.

The second part of the motion

"approves the Government's efforts to press for effective Budget discipline and proper financial control of Community expenditure."

As the Treasury Select Committee has pointed out on previous occasions, it is quite clear that effective budgetary discipline has not been imposed. The motion implies as much, although the increase in the VAT ceiling was made only on the clear understanding that there would be effective budgetary discipline. However, all that we are told in the motion is that we should approve the Government's efforts to press for effective budgetary discipline. That has not yet been realised, but the increase in the VAT ceiling has been realised and the money paid under that ceiling has been realised, too.

Most of the problems are caused by the common agricultural policy. It does not meet the case for Ministers to come back after negotiations and say that they have had a splendid success over the CAP. It is not possible to patch it up. The only effective way to deal with the CAP is to abolish it. It is incapable of reform. This week's edition of *The Economist* contains a very cogent article. I could not hope to express the matter as clearly as it is expressed in that article. It relates to the green currencies, the multiple green currencies and the various monetary compensatory amounts that have been introduced.

I ask my hon. Friend the Minister a very simple question. Why is it that agriculture should be protected from fluctuations in exchange rates when no other industry is? I do not understand why that should be so. Perhaps he will give us an answer to that rather simple question, since many of the problems to which the Court of Auditors has given attention stem precisely from those arrangements.

I ought to spend a moment or two on the criticisms that are made in the Court of Auditors' report. It states very clearly, as it did last year, that the Court particularly regrets that a situation has been gradually allowed to arise that increasingly contravenes the requirements of a balanced budget and that the institutions have not always exercised the budgetary powers conferred upon them under the treaty. My hon. Friend said that all these things were temporary and not a permanent arrangement. That is contrary to the clear implication of paragraph 1.12 of the Court's report; referring to paragraph 1.10, it says:

"This being so, calling for advances from the Member States, though presented as a temporary emergency measure, will inevitably"—

I stress the word "inevitably"—

"become a permanent financing tool if the Community is both to remain within the 1·4 per cent. limit established for 1986

and 1987 for the Community rate of VAT own resources and start seriously to amortize part of the accumulated past liabilities which, alone, already represent the equivalent of more than one year's VAT revenue for the Communities."

For my hon. Friend to come before the House and to say that this is all a temporary arrangement is contrary to what the Court is clearly arguing, namely, that it is inevitable that it should go on from being a temporary arrangement year after year to becoming a permanent arrangement. I hope that he will accept that point and tell us what the Government propose to do about it.

My hon. Friend put great stress, as indeed the Court does, on the question of the outstanding commitments or liabilities. He distinguished between binding contractual commitments and political ones. Let us concentrate for a moment on the binding contractual commitments. My hon. Friend was not quantitative in his approach. Could we be told what he understands the binding contractual commitments to be in the period covered by the report and in subsequent periods to the extent that figures are available?

My hon. Friend emphasised, as the Court does, that some of the commitments may be defunct. It is greatly to be hoped that some are defunct. Of course, the numbers that are likely to be defunct are very small compared with the total. Just to grasp at straws by saying that some of the commitments probably will not be realised is to cast on one side the much more important question of the size of the commitments and liabilities that are likely to be realised.

The position outlined by the Court of Auditors is deplorable. The Government must get a grasp on it rather than seek to suggest that all is allright, that we need not bother and so on. No one who reads this document could possibly believe that that is so. I am sure my hon. Friend does not believe it. Since no doubt we shall return to this year after year, let us on future occasions have motions which set out in the clearest possible terms that the position outlined in the court's report is not acceptable and that the Government are not prepared to accept it.

10.48 pm

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): As a general principle I always prefer agreeing to disagreeing with people.

Mr. Marlow: Does that apply to the SDP?

Sir Russell Johnston: If I may respond to that, it is indeed a principle of the alliance.

I am happy to begin by associating myself with the points made by the right hon. Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) at the beginning of his remarks. Clearly it is not only unsatisfactory but wrong that information should be denied to the Court of Auditors. I hope that the Minister will respond to that point and say that Her Majesty's Government are as anxious as the right hon. Gentleman to see the matter corrected.

Like the Minister, when I looked at the report of the Select Committee on European Legislation my eye also fell on the sentence about the Court of Auditors having to face a range which is "increasingly formidable" and a task which is "correspondingly daunting". I accept that not only as a comment but as a compliment to its 12 members.

To those hon. Members who will probably use this debate as yet another opportunity to knock the European Community around the ring I would say — the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) looks shocked at that suggestion, but, judging from my experience, he should not be shocked—the Court, in the face of complex problems, succeeds in producing penetrating and effective criticism. The members of the Court deserve congratulation for that success. The Community also deserves some congratulation for having an instrument as effective and forthright as the Court of Auditors. It is welcome that the reply of the Commission refers to changes in administration. The idea of a four-year financial perspective is also welcome.

It is not easy to deal with a wide-ranging report in a short time, and I shall concentrate on a number of central issues. The right hon. Member for Worthing quoted from the conclusion of the first part of the Court's report. I would like to quote another paragraph, which I fear is equally critical. The right hon. Gentleman quoted paragraph 1.11 about the advances, but paragraph 1.10 bluntly states that

"the Communities have not observed one of the fundamental principles upon which their financial organisation is based, namely the need to cover fully each year's financing needs with the equivalent amount of annual revenue. What is more, use of advances . . . a preponderant and growing share of these liabilities does not correspond to this natural growth of commitments entered into in connection with future common policies, but rather corresponds to the systematic carrying-over of previous budget deficits and to postponing the task of accounting for certain costs arising from agricultural stocks to future budgets."

That is a serious fundamental criticism of the budgetary position. The right hon. Gentleman did not refer to another criticism that I, from my pro-European standpoint, find as grave as the financial criticisms. That criticism is contained in paragraph 1.12, which states:

"This prospect is all the more regrettable as recourse to advances from the Member States has already shown, in 1984 and 1985, the extent of the damage done to the financial autonomy of the Communities which was the objective of the authors of the Decision of 21 April 1970 on the Communities' own resources. The fact is that the use of a system of advances is tantamount to renationalising the budget of the Communities and, in so doing, negating the objective of the above-mentioned decision. Secondly, the need to obtain from each Member State prior approval of the advances reintroduces the power of individual veto into the Communities' budgetary decision-taking procedure, which has hitherto been characterised by voting by qualified majority."

When the Minister replies, I hope that he will say something about that.

Those who believe that there are considerable advantages to be derived from our membership of the Community cannot baulk at the grave position of the budget. There is an urgent need to reform the budget.

Hand-to-mouth solutions, such as non-reversible advances, carrying-over of deficits to the following years and those suggested by the right hon. Gentleman are not long-term solutions. That is clearly stated by the court and the Commission.

With respect to the hon. Member for Thurrock (Dr. McDonald), I did not think that she was fair to castigate the Commission. The Commission's record is good. It has tried very hard to put pressure upon the Council of Ministers to act with more prudence and probity than it has done in the past. I do not believe that the blame rests at the Commission's door.

The increase in the VAT element of our resources following the Fontainebleau summit was largely swallowed up by carried-over commitments from previous

[Sir Russell Johnston]

years, Britain's rebate, and agriculture, which has left little for new policies. The 1987 budget, which was agreed two and a half weeks ago, will be about £3 billion short. That is a fact. It might be a bit more or less, depending on the United States dollar and the agricultural harvest. It will still be short of the figure that is necessary to cover inescapable commitments to the common agricultural policy.

The need for budgetary reform is obvious, but it is important for the Government to realise that one will not achieve that unless one takes a collective attitude. Constantly to put national interests, which often are electoral interests, before the overall benefit of the Community is a certain way to create future budgetary problems.

I know that it has been said before, and that it does not diminish the force of the criticisms that have been made, but one should remind oneself that the overall budget of the European Community, through which 12 countries co-ordinate a range of policies for joint action, and which represents them on the world stage in all trade, agriculture and fisheries negotiations, is about three fifths of Britain's social security budget. So one should get it into perspective. That does not reduce the force of the criticisms made, but it is something that one should remember.

In the view of members of the alliance, the structural funds are an important component in the budget. We would argue for an increase in investment to deal with the problems of unemployment. There is no doubt that the gap between rich and poor regions of the European Community, which is already a major problem, is likely to get worse still as a result of the achievement of the internal market by 1992. One is in favour, but there must be some checks or the situation will become much worse. That is the major issue, which Liberals in Europe will discuss at our European Community conference of European Liberal Democrats, in Lisbon, at the beginning of April.

The Select Committee's report refers to the regional fund and the fact that

"ten years after the creation of the Fund it is still hard to assess its effectiveness."

That is true. But one of the reasons for that is the lack of information about additionality of aid from the Community and the extra development effort that such aid will make possible. Therefore, we in this country contribute to the inability of the Community to assess that properly. We have long criticised the United Kingdom practice of EC aid being simply swallowed up by the Treasury instead of being clearly viewed as additional to the United Kingdom's own effort.

It is perhaps too early to say anything specific or definite about what Mr. Delors has been saying, but it is impossible to have such a debate on the Court of Auditors comments without making some reference to Delors. I am surprised that that has not yet been done. Although it is not possible to be firm about it, on a reading of his presentation to the European Parliament last week, I believe that it is a thoughtful, practical and forward-looking basis for negotiation. That is the sort of approach and initiative that one would have liked to see occur during the United Kingdom presidency.

I have said many times in these debates that when the United Kingdom — very successfully, I do not deny — negotiated the rebate, it should have not simply negotiated a rebate, but tried to negotiate a fair general basis for budgetary payments. The only fair basis seemed to be some relationship between gross national product and the payment that the country made. That is what is contained in the Delors proposal. Equally, Delors said that without CAP discipline everything else is meaningless. I accept that completely. His aim is to allow an increase in European Community income from about £27 billion as it will be this coming year to £36 billion by 1992. That is a modest objective if one is to have realistic increased expenditure on research, the environment, regional and social funds and matters of that nature.

If the Community criticises itself, as the Court of Auditors has done, it is seized upon by people who criticise every aspect of the European Community. We continue to believe that the Community is essential to Britain's future prosperity and security and influence in the world. We should take the lead in seeking more effective co-operation with our European partners over the widest possible range of issues.

11.2 pm

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): Following the remarks of the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston), one is tempted to discount slightly the remarks and advice of the Opposition spokesman and also perhaps some of my hon. Friend's advice because their motives are bound to be a little suspect, at least politically. The Labour party seemingly is in favour of a huge expansion of public spending, but is not in favour of Commission public spending. It is always severe about measuring and testing it. I suspect some of my hon. Friend's motives slightly, because their criticisms transcend in an existential way more than just looking at the Court of Auditors.

It is equally possible, perhaps in a reverse sense, not least as a member of the Select Committee, to express some doubts and ask some searching questions about this annual examination by the Court of Auditors. Obviously and manifestly some of these practices, procedures and problems are still unsatisfactory. Therefore, we pay tribute to the Court of Auditors and its developing work, and for the manner in which it has established its own collective corpus and attitude in trying to examine properly Community expenditure. This is an enormous report, and akin to that the Select Committee's comments are traditionally rather long on this subject.

One of the encouraging aspects of the report for enthusiastic Europeans like myself is that the Court of Auditors is presided over by Mr. Marcel Mart from Luxembourg, who is an extremely enthusiastic and creative European, like many Luxembourgers, but none the less a good and effective guardian of this type of scrutiny of Community expenditure.

The overriding conclusion from this report, from the annual report and from the Select Committee's own examination of them is that the Community's budget problems are, to some extent, substantially artificial because of the ceiling constraints. When all the financial pressures are there — financial pressures which exist equally in the member states which do not have those constraints—there is no ceiling; there is just a deficit in the member states. In the Community budget there is this artificial constraint and ceiling, about which some hon. Members are enthusiastic.

The other related problem is in trying to get information from the member states, including ourselves. The Court of Auditors has said in previous reports that it did not get the right kind of information from this country as well as others. It is a general problem, perhaps applicable to one or two members more than most, but none the less is not necessarily to be singled out in a highly discriminatory way as a piece of *Daily Express*-type criticism of foreign countries and the way that they run their finances. It is also a developing problem because in many areas the Commission is unable to get the right information, and the Commission does not give efficient and correct answers to the Court Auditors, and the court is groping towards the truth.

The main problem, highlighted by the Committee's report and the report of the Court of Auditors, is the liabilities that have arisen and that are producing an enormous deficit that has to be made up. The Commission needs to draw up a list of the financial liabilities that have accumulated. The Community needs to observe fundamental principles of financial planning. Within the current framework, with which I disagree, as hon. Members will know, but which has to be adhered to, each year's financing needs have to be covered with an equivalent amount of annual revenue, and a growing share of liabilities has come not from the growth of commitments but from the carrying over from the previous budget of deficit figures, and the postponing of accounting for certain costs that arise principally from agricultural stocks.

The Commission has been unduly criticised by the hon. Member for Thurrock (Dr. McDonald)—I agree with the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber on that—but it needs to be much more active, energetic and efficient in co-ordinating the supervisory role, to get a better result for the whole of the Community, rather than just be more critical of what is happening. The number of member states not wishing to co-operate with the court will, I hope, rapidly diminish—this is still too much of a disturbingly strong manifestation.

There are still all the weaknesses of the European agricultural guidance and guarantee fund, which is an intractable problem. I sympathise with my hon. Friend the Minister, who has to give advice to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on the way in which it should represent United Kingdom interests, and Community interests, as the two should fit together, in the Agricultural Council and the Budget Council.

I am worried by the fact that the Commission's literal instrumentation of cash management needs altered practices to become more efficient. There are still many differing habits and practices in the banking sense between different member states, and these are difficult to harmonise and bring into a single coherent whole for both the Court of Auditors and the Commission.

Better use should be made of the lessons learnt in connection with previous regional aid disbursements and regional aid measures to prevent similar problems and to produce a much more realistic forecast of what is likely to happen. There are parts of the Community budget that still remain unsatisfactory, and others that will be handled well from now on. One example is not particularly relevant to the Court of Auditors report, but will, I hope, be a growing feature in the future. It is the amount of money dispensed in the central Community organism on research and development. There is a raging debate in the council of research Ministers on this subject. That, too, will be a difficult sector for the Court of Auditors to monitor in the future.

Progress is being made. Equally, European enthusiasts, and people who are keen on the Community, such as myself and the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber, are entitled to be stringent and observant of financial controls and scrutiny. We need to encourage the Court of Auditors to have much stronger authority and powers. That must, to some extent, come from legislative changes within the Community, because some members of the Court complain that their powers are insufficient, and that they do not have the direct and determining power to intervene, visit the member states and get the proper information out of the local national public sector accountants that they should have to do a proper job. That is all a million miles away — probably much to the chagrin of the Labour party — from saying, in a transcendental fashion, that everything in the Community is rotten. That is just a feature of the painful, developmental stage in the Community, and I have every confidence in the future.

11.9 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I echo the points made by the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) at the end of his speech. When any auditor of any organisation feels that he does not have sufficient powers, that shows that there is something not quite right. That in itself is a danger signal, although I understand the hon. Gentleman's feeling that it is not as serious as some other hon. Members have said that it is.

As chairman of the Select Committee on European Legislation, I thank the Minister of State, Treasury and other hon. Members for their kind remarks. Our report on the auditors' report comes out every year and is part of a series of weekly reports that the Committee issues when the House is sitting. It comes under HC22 and is our ninth report of this Session. These reports provide a useful compendium of the legislation that is likely to have legal or political impact on the United Kingdom. Some of that legislation we debate, and some we think should be reported without debate.

Perhaps our report is not as complete as it might be. For example, the debate that we had yesterday on the distribution of cheap food was reported by the Committee through a documentary accident in that it came just within our terms of reference. With the coming of the Single European Act — assuming that it is passed — some actions, especially those taken by the Commission, will not come within the terms of reference of the Committee. The Committee drew this to the attention of the House in its second special report last May. I am quite sure that, being a gentleman of financial stringency and documentary exactness, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury would not wish the Committee to be hindered by an accident of terms of reference, particularly as the Select Committee of the House collectively have powers which enable comprehensive reports to be made.

I now turn to the Court of Auditors' report. It is worth putting on the record some of the Committee's summary. We receive from the House some thanks for our work, and my Committee is one of the best staffed of the Select Committees. That is as it should be, because some of this legislation is complex and difficult and on occasions takes some disentangling. In our report we say:

[Mr. Nigel Spearing]

"The Court concludes (para 1.10) that, for the second year running, the Communities have not observed one of the fundamental principles upon which their financial organisation is based, namely the need to cover fully each year's financing needs with the equivalent amount of annual revenue. What is more, use of advances from the Member States, far from helping to amortize the 'burden of the past' — apart from a few timid attempts to depreciate agricultural stocks — has, on the contrary, allowed it to increase throughout the financial year 1985."

That is a mild qualification, at least in accountancy terms. The heavy qualification has already been referred to by hon. Members who quoted paragraph 1.21 about member states not being prepared to co-operate with the Court. In that context I should like to quote to the House a little more detail on this matter. It is contained in paragraph 3.19 on page 32 of the auditors' report. On this important matter they say:

"The Court was able to carry out and complete these enquiries"—

that is, into VAT,—

"in the following Member States: Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. Other member States; however, refused to accept that such enquiries were within the court's sphere of authority".

That point was raised by the hon. Member for Harrow, East.

"Specifically, Italy and Luxembourg refused to provide the Court with tax statistics, France would not agree to supply all the information needed for a description of the systems and the FR of Germany, France, Italy and Luxembourg refused the Court leave to carry out compliance tests."

There we have a clear indication of at least some disagreement about powers, and one might think that those powers ought to be made clear or increased by legislation if the need arises. Our report also deals with this important matter of the burden of the past. I shall quote from our report:

"The Court also lists a number of other liabilities, either firm or contingent, and calculates that by adding these to the outstanding commitments already described, the Communities' total liabilities at the end of 1985 amounted to about 20 billion ECU (£12 billion). It comments that the way in which these liabilities were then set out was partial and heterogeneous, incomplete and hard to grasp. It sees this as leaving the Commission vulnerable to the charge of not having given a true and fair view of the community's actual financial situation. It points to specific steps which could be taken to improve presentation, and stresses that a full and clear 'calender of maturities' would oblige the budgetary authority to face up to its responsibilities, and enable it to draw the appropriate conclusions with full knowledge of the facts (paras 1.3-1.6)."

I have searched in the reply of the Commission, particularly on page 192, but I cannot see any reference to the suggestion of the introduction of "calendar of maturities". Surely, in any description of the liabilities of any firm, a calendar of maturities is something that is necessary in order to show the full and fair view of the Community's affairs.

I ask the Minister two questions. We know that the audit report has to have a discharge, and before it is discharged by the Strasbourg body it is discussed by the Council of Ministers. Why could it not recommend to the Parliament-Assembly that before a discharge is granted there should be proper powers, or at least a commitment to give the increased powers at issues, to the Court of Auditors? There is clearly some difficulty there, as I have shown by the quotation. Secondly, why could it not insist on the calendar of maturities? There, at least would be two tools whereby the necessary and proper mechanism of discharge, instead of being something that one suspects is automatic and not really taken with the necessary seriousness, could be used to ensure that we do get something of a grip, if not on the major financial difficulties with which we are familiar, certainly with the tools of the auditors' trade, which although they are in the hands of the Audit Commission, appear not to be as great or powerful as it would wish.

11.17 pm

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): The hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) asked, not for the first time, that there should be some extension of powers to the Court of Auditors. To a marked extent, he goes against the principles that he has so consistently fought for.

Those who ask for more public expenditure to be made through the EEC speak often as thought the EEC were a unitary state. They speak as though it had an apparatus of investigation, and apparatus of police, of public prosecutions and of EEC criminal law. It has no such apparatus and I suggest that it never will. Even if, for the sake of argument, he and others were successful in persuading the nation states of the EEC to allow the Court of Auditors to investigate more effectively, he would still never overcome the inclination of nation states to regard the EEC funds as a pot of gold which is contributed by others; a pot of gold into which they are very pleased to put the hands of their constituents and citizens even if at times they know that their constituents and fellow citizens are not entitled to put their hand into that pot of gold.

If the hon. Gentleman thinks for one moment that the EEC, for instance, could ever have its own police and investigation department he should think carefully. Let us suppose that he persuades the EEC to allow the Court of Auditors to serve notice on the Italians to allow people to investigate how many olive trees there are in the length and breadth of Italy. It is found, for the sake of argument, that they are claiming for olive trees which cover an area greater than the whole of Italy. Some other people haul off some distinguished gentlemen from the toe of Italy and suggest that they might be indicted for EEC fraud. There would be great disturbances in the toe of Italy. That would wreck and rock the constitution of Italy and there would be a risk that Italy would wish to withdraw from the EEC. That will never be done.

People, like my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) and the vehement supporters of the EEC in the SDP, had better understand that every time they ask for more collective expenditure through the EEC they are in effect saying that an unknown proportion of it will inevitably be misused and some of it will be the subject of fraud. There is no way whatever in which that can be stopped, because this institution does not have the characteristics or authority of a unitary state and no member state wishes it to have that.

Hon. Gentlemen may not be as dishonest as Italians, but they wish to see their constituents get a greater proportion of the EEC cake than other nations. They want to get out more than they put in. That is essentially a duplicitous, even dishonest, attitude to the EEC.

Sir Russell Johnston *rose*——

Mr. Budgen: No. So long as we extend the expenditure of the EEC, we shall have to grin and bear enormous elements of waste.

11.22 pm

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): I wish to make four points in this brief debate.

First, I congratulate the EEC on its administration of aid through the European development fund to sub-Saharan Africa in the famine year of 1985. There was a slow start to that programme, but by the end of the year the fund had disbursed the necessary assistance effectively to help the starving people of Africa. The main support from the British Government to the starving people of sub-Saharan Africa in their terrible plight came through the EEC.

The EEC arranged an airlift not only of European food supplies to the Sudan but of American food to the western part of the Sudan and to Chad to avert famine there. That is a proud record and it resulted from a great deal of hard work in the Commission in the DG VIII which administers the European development fund. That is the good news. The rest are points of criticism which I make more in sorrow than in anger. Like many hon. Members, I support the EEC and wish to see its affairs administered and conducted properly.

I wish to concentrate on the periphery—part II of the report on the administration of the European development fund.

Secondly, I shall deal with the way the European development fund is allocated. At the beginning of part II a table shows how its funds from Yaounde to Lomé 2 have been committed and then disbursed. The same problem exists in the European development fund — that of rolling forward one year's programme to another. Several hon. Members have referred to this. We are never certain how much will be drawn down on the European development fund and, therefore, how much will be debited against our aid budget so it is extremely difficult for our national aid budget to be accurate in disbursing funds. *[Interruption.]* I am hurrying, but there are four points to be made.

Mr. Marlow: There are three minutes left.

Mr. Wells: All right. My hon. Friend is just delaying me.

Table 1 in part II shows that we still have not disbursed or even committed 34 mecu from the 1976 Yaounde 1 commitment. That rolls through Lomé 1 and 2 and we are now on Lomé 3.

I should like my hon. Friend the Minister, if he is going to have a detailed discussion on the findings of the Court of Auditors, to raise one particular matter in Brussels. Officials run around trying to get an "umbrella" agreement, as it is called—a commitment to disburse a certain amount of money which has been pre-allocated on some unknown basis to each of the countries—and then there is an indicative programme. I suggest that that is the wrong way to administer an aid programme. First, the developmental needs of those countries should be identified and then a programme which is properly focused on those needs should be developed in agreement with them. But the Court of Auditors referring to the programme in some of the states in which the European development programme is administered, said in paragraph 11 of part II:

"The bottlenecks which these projects have encountered prove that an important stage has been omitted in the planning process, namely that of compiling an accurate list of the priority needs of the national economy, prior to making a judicious selection of the measures to be promoted."

I should be grateful if my hon. Friend the Minister would take up the point about the administration of the European development fund and the way in which it decides which projects it will support and what the objective is.

Thirdly, there seems to be no co-ordination between my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Treasury and my hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development. It seems to me that they do not get together to discuss the European development fund programme, so there is no British control over the second most important programme, in terms of money. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to ensure that the machinery is set up to establish the administration of the European development fund and to put right some of the aspects about which I have been talking.

Fourthly, there is no co-ordination between the objectives of the European development fund in many of the same countries in which member states of the European Economic Community also have aid programmes. I have seen on the ground the confusion between the two groups with several member states competing with the fund's objectives. Often the European development fund gets the slowest moving and worst development project simply because it is much slower at agreeing and then permitting draw-down. As the figures which I cited earlier show, it still has not disbursed money which was originally committed in 1976.

The Court of Auditors brought these important points of administration to our attention. It has complimented the European Community on disbursing the aid programme in Africa during those starvation conditions. This contrasts sharply with the court's report for the previous year which showed that disbursements were very small — in fact, only about two months' worth took place. The court was rightly critical of that.

There is good news and bad news. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will ask those questions so that we can have a more tightly administered budget.

11.29 pm

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): The Community exists. The Community will continue to exist. The Community should be about regulation—regulating those issues at Community level that are best done at Community level. It should be about deregulation, so that we may have a unified Common Market by the year 1992, which I support. But I wonder whether it should be, as it is at the moment, so much about money.

Two reasons why I wonder whether it should be so much about money are highlighted in the auditors' report that we have before us today. The first is the point made eloquently by my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) and equally eloquently by the hon. Member for Thurrock (Dr. McDonald), and that is the olive oil swindle which comes up year after year after year in the auditors' report. We know why the swindle takes place and we know perfectly well that nobody is going to do anything about it. This is the nature of Community finance.

There is another equal problem which we can see on top of the common agricultural policy, which is always a great

[Mr. Tony Marlow]

waste of money, and that is that we notice in the auditors' report that Italy, which we are told has a greater gross national product than the United Kingdom, pays a smaller VAT share. Could my hon. Friend explain to the House how this comes about? I have a pretty shrewd idea. That is because of, again, the nature of Community finance, the imprecision of Community finance and the strings that are pulled within Community finance. This is one reason why the Community should have a smaller rather than a larger area of financial control.

There are two specific points that I want to put to my hon. Friend, given the nature of the abuse and the waste of financial resources that take place through the Community and are bound to continue to take place through the Community. The first is that we know there is going to be a whip-round to get rid of the agricultural surpluses. Her Majesty's Government will be asked to fork out some of our hard-earned taxpayers' money as a loan to the Community to solve this problem, and this problem should be solved—*[Interruption.]* Could I have my hon. Friend's attention? I am perfectly prepared to give way to my hon. Friend if he wants to give me the answer now rather than in his speech at the end of the debate. Will the House be asked to approve this loan? If the House is to be asked to approve this loan, can my hon. Friend say at this stage, to make life much easier in the long run, that the repayment of the loan will be in no way dependent upon the United Kingdom Government agreeing to an increase in Community own resources? It is a question that I have asked my hon. Friend once. I am asking him a second time. I am prepared to give way if my hon. Friend wants to intervene in my speech at this stage or—my hon. Friend is nodding. I believe that he is going to come to this point when he winds up the debate later on. I am very grateful for that.

There is one other point that I would like to make before I sit down. At the moment, we are on the basis of a 1·4 per cent. VAT. Yesterday, Mr. Delors suggested that we should increase from 1·4 per cent. VAT to 1·4 per cent. of GNP which, as we know, is equivalent to 2 per cent. VAT — a massive increase in Community resources. There is no suggestion that the Community competence in terms of policies that will require Community finance should be increased, so the increase in Community resources can mean but one thing: that those policies for which the Community is responsible will become yet more expensive than they are at the moment. Given the lack of proper financial control that we see within the Court of Auditors report, I am sure the whole House would be grateful if my hon. Friend would say here and now that Her Majesty's Government have no intention whatever of following the line put out by Delors last week.

11.33 pm

Mr. Stephen Dorrell (Loughborough): I welcome the Government's deep commitment to imposing some order and financial discipline on the Community, but rhetoric itself is not enough. Those who are anxious to impose an order of priorities and a discipline on the total Community budget must also tackle the more difficult issue of how to tackle the institutions of the Community to ensure that they do not remain, as they are now in a technical sense, irresponsible. As other Conservative Members have said, they are too much the prisoners of those who want to spend. There is an insufficient central authority in Brussels whose job it is to determine the maximum level of the budget and also the priorities within the maximum. People who are concerned about the budget must address that issue in the near future.

Mr. Brooke: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall respond as briskly as I can to this interesting debate, the text of which I propose to send to Mr. Mart, the President of the court, to Vice-President Christophersen of the Commission, and to Herr Aigner, the Chairman of the European Parliament's Committee on Budgetary Control, whom I had the pleasure of welcoming to this country last year.

Inevitably, the debate has gone wider than the Court of Auditors report. I shall touch on a series of issues that have been raised. The hon. Member for Thurrock (Dr. McDonald) pressed for budget discipline. My right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) expressed some surprise about the parliamentary answer that I gave on 17 February. The budget that the Council proposed to reach in conjunction with the Parliament in the course of the past fortnight stuck very closely to budget discipline, and I am delighted that discipline was maintained. The countries that are net contributors played a large part in that process.

The hon. Member for Thurrock referred to the issue of stocks. I agree with her that, by definition, their depreciation is a problem and it is one that the British Government would wish to be attended to. However, the critical point is to prevent the stocks arising in the first place. The hon. Lady referred to the fact that the ceiling was busted in 1987. She must concert her position with her hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), because in the last debate on this subject, he criticised the Government for having left the budget unfinished when we left the presidency. The only way in which we could have concluded the budget at that juncture would have been for us to break budget discipline; we were determined not to do that. As to her likeness to a company's trading and to its auditing, the likeness is much more clearly to the Comptroller and Auditor General and to the proceedings of this House than to a company.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing asked me several specific questions relating to the co-operation of member states. The court's rights of access are clearly set out in the treaty and it is not for the United Kingdom to comment on the way in which other member states interpret that. Ultimately, that is for the European Court of Justice to decide and the United Kingdom supports the Court of Auditors in exploiting to the full its treaty powers of investigation. To a degree, that is also an answer to the question asked by the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing). I give an assurance that the matter will be discussed in ECOFIN on 9 March, in the same way that I participated in an ECOFIN discussion last year.

As to the agrimonetary agreement, about which my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing also asked a question, and on which my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) intervened, we are pressing for reform of the green rate system—especially to break the link between agricultural prices and movements in the strongest currency, which simply tends to increase prices and expenditure. I take the point about the protection of one part of the economy in terms of the fluctuations in exchange rates.

As to the issue of rolling forward——

Sir Trevor Skeet (Bedfordshire, North): Why should agriculture be protected from fluctuations in the exchange rates when nothing else is?

Mr. Brooke: I was saying that that very question informed the attitude with which we are looking at the proposals which the commission is now bringing forward.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing asked a series of questions about binding commitments. Paragraphs 1.2 and 1.3 of the court's report list the outstanding commitments and the other liabilities of the Community at the end of 1985. The major binding items are some 11,000 mecu of outstanding commitments, some of which may no longer relate to real projects — the Commission is urgently reviewing this point — and the 5,650 mecu estimated cost for the future disposal of agricultural intervention stocks, to which the hon. Member for Thurrock referred. Following the successful agricultural council, chaired by my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food last December, positive steps are now being taken to resolve that issue.

The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) raised the question of additionality. Payments from the European Community budget enable United Kingdom public expenditure programmes, including those to which the payments relate, to be maintained at levels higher than could otherwise have been afforded. United Kingdom policy is similar to that adopted by other member states. The court noted previously that most member states' reimbursements, notably from the regional development fund, were added to expenditure allocated generally for regional development.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) welcomed the report, and I welcome his sympathy for me on agricultural issues.

The hon. Member for Newham, South raised the question of the burden of the past. During my opening speech I touched on very much the same figures as he quoted. He asked whether before discharge the Council of Ministers could recommend that the Court be given more powers to investigate. Its powers are clearly set out in article 206(3) to which, to some extent, I alluded earlier. He also asked for a calendar of maturities. We are all agreed on the need for full information on all the Community's actual and potential liabilities. To the extent that policy decisions are required concerning the liquidation of outstanding commitments, they need to be taken by the Community's budgetary authority; no purely mechanistic timetable can be laid down.

At official level discussions on this issue in Brussels, the Commission agreed to the need to improve its presentation of the information already available, and the court expressed itself satisfied with that response.

My hon. Friends the Members for Hertford and Stortford and for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) made speeches that I shall certainly study. My hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford made a thoughtful speech about aid. To my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West, I say that the issue of value for money is one to which we should also pay attention, and which was not adequately covered in my view by the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber.

Finally, to my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow), who asked a specific question, I say that there is no question of additional resources being made available this year. The Community must live within its means. That is the way in which I concluded my earlier speech, and I am delighted to reiterate my remarks now.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of the Annual Report of the European Court of Auditors on the financial year 1985, together with the replies of the Institutions; and approves the Government's efforts to press for effective Budget discipline and proper financial control of Community expenditure.

CROWN PROCEEDINGS (ARMED FORCES) BILL *[MONEY]*

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Crown Proceedings (Armed Forces) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any expenses incurred by a Minister of the Crown or Government department in consequence of the provisions of that Act—*[Mr. Malone.]*

Agricultural Land

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Malone.]*

11.42 pm

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): The purpose of this debate is to highlight one of the most significant and all-embracing dilemmas relating to land use that has been faced by any Government of this country for many years. What will the British countryside look like in the 1990s? What will be there? Will there be more towns, more fields under cultivation, or just waste land, more derelict land, more factories? I believe that we are at the dawn of a new era—a new agricultural revolution. For many of us it is so close that perhaps we cannot see what is happening.

I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Minister for Environment, Countryside and Planning has thought this a sufficiently important debate to come here tonight to reply to it. It shows that the Government are seriously considering the issues that I shall raise. I also welcome my hon. Friends the Members for Torridge and Devon, West (Sir P. Mills), who is well known for his expertise in agricultural matters, and for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Heddle) who, as the Conservative Chairman of the Environment Committee, is an expert in planning and other matters. I thank the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the National Farmers Union, Strutt and Parker, the well-known surveyors, and the South Hams Society, among others, for writing to me with their views on this debate.

The nature of the problem is that, with the temporary exception of sheep, all agricultural produce is in surplus. Advances in technology, bio-engineering and veterinary science have resulted in an enormous speeding up of production, more crops, more milk and bigger and better animals. We can produce more than ever before on less and less land. The parallel is, perhaps, with the microchip. More energy is being created in smaller and smaller spaces.

In just 13 years—in the year 2000—according to John North, an agricultural expert at Cambridge, the current levels of agricultural production can be maintained but using 10 million acres less land. Even allowing for the current take-up rate of land, which is about 15 per cent. a year in new forests and woodlands, Mr. North estimates that in 13 years there will be a net surplus of 8·25 million acres of vacant land which was formerly used for agriculture. In geographical terms, that is equivalent to four times the area of the entire county of Devon. That land will be redundant for agricultural use in 13 years' time. Put another way, 35,000 productive agricultural holdings currently in use will become surplus to requirements. That means 65,000 farmers and agricultural workers, presently employed on the land, becoming redundant by the year 2000. Of course, there is a knock-on effect.

The countryside is more than a food factory. A farmer is not just a food producer but part of the rural economy and rural society. For that reason, the Government must make preparations. Just as Joseph caused Pharaoh to make provision for the lean years during the years of plenty, so, too, must we plan how to restrict our food growth before we find that it is too late. We must also plan what we must do with the land saved.

Never before in our history has this situation existed. Successive Governments have told farmers to produce more and more. Now there is so much food in surplus that the EEC spends $203 million a week on food storage, subsidy and destruction. The surpluses are fast getting worse. The ever-growing food surplus is adding approximately $13 a week to every household food bill. It is no good telling farmers that they should be grateful for EEC subsidies. Few farmers make fortunes, and most just manage to make a living. The land, which was their most important and valuable asset, is beginning to waste away.

The Government's Alternative Land Use and Rural Economy Committee rightly recognised the problem. The announcement two weeks ago attempted to suggest ways in which alternative sources of income for farmers could be provided. But will they? To what extent can the Government make up the shortfall that is lost by quotas? If the proposals are supposed to cope with the effect of reduced farm incomes from a small milk quota, what must the Government do when quotas hit every foodstuff—not just milk—and not just by 10 per cent. or 13 per cent., but by 50 per cent?

What will the countryside look like? What will Britain look like from the air, from a road, or from a train? The answer is intimately connected with what the Government will do to help farmers. The key to land use is how farms will be kept viable. How will farmers be kept solvent?

The countryside could remain largely as it looks today. There is no reason why it should not, provided a different system of subsidy is created by the European Community. If the Commission said to farmers, "Look, we shall pay you a good sum of money, and all you need to do is to mow your fields, but please do not produce any food," it would solve the problem. But at what cost? Another approach could be to pay off the 35,000 agricultural holdings which will be surplus to requirements and make redundant the 65,000 farmers and agricultural workers. But what would happen to the land if that were done? Who would look after and tend it? What would it look like?

The Government's draft circular suggested ways of switching land use to provide farmers with alternative wealth creation, but forestry will be no panacea for the problem of over-production. It is cheaper to import timber than to grow it domestically. Of course, it takes many years to grow trees. We can limit the number of forests, but can we limit the number of golf courses—that is another of the Government's proposals—and camping sites? Does the Minister suggest that a dramatic growth in the number of golf courses will solve the problems facing our farmers? The only way to create golf courses is to build at least 50 houses around the proposed sites to pay for their construction. Is that what my hon. Friend the Minister has in mind?

Will the courts sentence young offenders to so many hours on the golf course rather than to so many hours of community service? Camping and caravanning require plenty of time, leisure and money. Do the Government intend to reduce the retirement age and, instead of the £10 Christmas bonus, provide a free tent? Is the landscape to change from wheat fields to caravan parks? Are areas of outstanding natural beauty to be covered with tents? That would not, however, make up the farmers' shortfall or loss of income from agriculture.

Are we to see marginal land, especially on the urban fringe, covered with line after line of houses? What will happen to the 300,000 acres of dormant, derelict land in public ownership in the inner cities? Will it just be ignored?

These are very real planning problems. With the issue of these two circulars the Government have embarked on a very dangerous and difficult journey.

What is to be done about land use and land surpluses? Farmers must have an alternative use for their land and buildings to supplement their incomes, but what will the landscape look like as a result? There will be a direct connection between the extent to which the Government subsidise unproductive farms and the new look of the countryside. The extent to which the Government permit new development on land formerly used for agriculture and how that is spelt out to planning authorities is crucial. Planners have a habit of doing their own thing. Liverpool, for example, could hardly have looked worse if there had been no planners.

Despite every conceivable designation to protect the environment, the planners will be recommending to a district council in south Devon next Tuesday that a 90-van caravan site be approved in one of the 36 areas of outstanding natural beauty in this country — itself on one of the 39 heritage coasts and in an area of great landscape value. The Government may despair of planners and councils and say that it is not the Government's fault. But it is for the Government to spell out exactly what is permitted and what they will encourage and to tell their inspectors, on appeal, what they will not have.

The better use of redundant farm buildings by small business enterprises and starter workshops would help to augment farmers' incomes. The Government must be far more liberal in their planning regime with regard to the use of redundant buildings. All those who cherish the unique qualities of the English countryside have a duty to involve themselves in the debate. The Government's responsibility is to protect our heritage and countryside. But the farmers must not be abandoned in their hour of need, nor should we delude ourselves that golf courses, a clump of trees here and there, a nature trail, or a caravan park will solve the problem. It will not. A long-term strategy is needed to protect the finest parts of our environment from the threat of tasteless development and the ruination of this green and pleasant land.

The conflict is between pensioning off the farmers — making some of them into museum pieces, subsidising them to keep their fields neat and tidy, bringing in busloads of tourists to visit a genuine English farm, meeting the farmer with his slippers and pipe — and exploiting the rapidly growing land bank so as to augment the farmers' depleted income and put off the evil day when 60,000 farmers will have to be made redundant. It is an entirely new problem. I do not pretend to have a solution, but I can air the grievance and point out the dangers which, if not sympathetically handled by the Government, could cause loss of support among a wide cross-section of people — farmers and farm-related people — who are dedicated to the preservation and conservation of our environment and the national parks.

It is strange tht we should be raising this critical matter so late on a Wednesday night, but I believe that our countryside is at risk. The whole nation looks to my hon. Friend the Minister and the Government to find a solution to this inolerably difficult problem.

Sir Peter Mills (Torridge and Devon, West) *rose*——

Mr. John Heddle (Mid-Staffordshire) *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I see two hon. Members rising. Do they have the consent of the hon. Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) and of the Minister to take part in the debate?

Mr. Steen *indicated assent.*

The Minister for Environment, Countryside and Planning (Mr. William Waldegrave) *indicated assent.*

11.54 pm

Sir Peter Mills (Torridge and Devon, West): I wish to thank my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) for raising this important subject in the House.

We should consider three points. In making plans for diversification or new policies for agiculture or land use, we have to remember that farming is a business. It is not there just for other people's pleasure. We have to consider the bank manager, the returns on investment and the support of the farmer's family. It is too easy for some people to forget those. Many people would be horrified if farmers said to them that their businesses shoud be treated simply as things of beauty or as places for recreation. It is important in all these matters to get the right balance. Excessive movement one way or the other is not the way forward. We must remember that farming is a business.

Secondly, farmers and others must beware of what I call false trails. My advice to farmers is to stick to what they know best and to introduce alternatives gradually by planting up a few acres, growing new crops or doing some of the other things that the Government have suggested. We have to consider what is needed, grow it well and, above all, see that it is marketed properly.

Thirdly, as my hon. Friend said, this is a difficult time for farmers and the rural scene. We must allow farmers to use old buildings and, indeed, the whole group of buildings which are no longer necessary for the modern farming that they practise. Rural industries can be developed tastefully in those buildings. We must set up industries to help rural people to live and work in their own villages. I say this not unkindly because I am about to become a retired person. A village is not just for retired people; it is for people to work in. Let us stop the continual drift into the towns. The measures that the Government have suggested will help. They are only a start. Much more needs to be done. I hope that on all sides those who wish to conserve the rural areas, the farmers and the politicians will take a balanced view of all these matters and move forward together. As my hon. Friend said, I believe that we are at the beginning of a period of great change in the rural scene.

11.57 pm

Mr. John Heddle (Mid-Staffordshire): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) for allowing me to speak. I shall take up just one point that he made, the third point referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Sir P. Mills)— the use of redundant agricultural buildings. Reference has been made to the flexibility that should apply to the use of these buildings for the benefit of rural industries.

I believe that the Department is considering the long overdue revision of the use classes order which was introduced in 1972. There are 10 use classes ranging from very heavy industry to very light industry and to warehousing and servicing. In the 15 intervening years the changes in industry, with the decline of the manufacturing base and the rise of service industries, have made the revision of the use classes order necessary.

[Mr. John Heddle]

When it comes to the alternative use of redundant farm buildings in the context of the revision of the use classes order, I must put to the Minister my fear that sweeping away classes 1 to 10, and making it easier for buildings to be converted for use by heavy industry to light industry and vice versa, will allow an unwelcome free for all in the use of some agricultural buildings and could herald the introduction of heavier and intrusive industry into village communities. That is my concern, coupled with my belief that the revision of the use classes order is absolutely necessary.

I look forward to my hon. Friend's comments on the matter, if not tonight, perhaps by correspondence later.

12 midnight

The Minister for Environment, Countryside and Planning (Mr. William Waldegrave): I believe that my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) has done the House a service by giving us the first opportunity to discuss this topic. I gather that there was some discussion following the statements made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Unfortunately, I was ill in bed at the time and therefore I am grateful for this opportunity to join in discussions, belatedly, on this matter.

If I may make a physical comment about my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams, he is slim and far from the fat boy in the famous novel by Dickens. However, just like that fat boy, my hon. Friend did try to make my flesh creep tonight as he reminded us of a whole range of catastrophes that may occur if the Government get everything wrong. My hon. Friend was correct when he said it is no good for us to pretend that an historically important and, in many respects, irreversible shift is not under way regarding the contribution of agriculture to rural employment. The response of the Government and local authorities to planning applications is also important. It is no good for us to believe that we can bury our heads in the sand and that things can go on as before.

We must get that point across to people. I hope that we do not concentrate too much on the disasters that may befall us, because change is inevitable. If we remain shivering on the brink and do not strike out with policy initiatives — even though each policy carries risks — events will take their course and we shall be swept aside. As a result, the outcome may be worse than if the Government had adopted the proposed policies. I am sure that my hon. Friend was not urging the Government to be so terrified of the possible mistakes that we do not enter the game as a player. It would be a grave dereliction of the Government's duty to the rural communities if we did not rise to the events.

Mr. Steen: I was not suggesting that the Government should do nothing, but whatever the Government do they should make it clear that the planners and the politicians at the local level understand the Government's intentions. It is even more important that the inspectors within the Minister's Department do not have misapprehensions about the Government's policies.

Mr. Waldegrave: That brings me on to the second point that I wish to make. I do not believe that anywhere in the United Kingdom, even within the walls of the Department of the Environment, where is to be found much wisdom, anybody knows what the British countryside and the structure of the rural economy will be as a result of the great transition period. We must go step by step and not try to lay down a blueprint that may be swept away.

The impetus for change, as always, must come from the people at the bottom. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and West Devon (Sir P. Mills) that one of the great groups of players in the transition, the farmers and the others in agriculture, should not think that their historic role is finished and that they must try to become something different.

We must take steps to widen the base of the rural economy and various inputs to that economy are important. One is the planning system — I shall come back to that shortly in relation to the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Heddle) and the initial comments of my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams but other Government agencies are involved. Some are directly responsible to the Minister of Agriculture, such as the Agricultural Development and Advisory Service. Other agencies include the Council for Small Industries in Rural Areas, which is responsible to my Department, and the Small Business Services of the Department of Employment. In some of our west country areas there is a crucial player on the board — the tourist authorities and tourist boards — but above all there is private and individual ingenuity and hard work. We shall not be able to predict the outcome. My hon. Friend the Member for South Hams is right to make my flesh creep. We can see some of the things that can go wrong. We must try to guard against them.

I should like to make a few comments about the planning aspect of the package that was announced the week before last. I thoroughly agree with what my hon. Friend the the Member for Torridge and Devon, West said. What we have announced so far is not the end of the matter; it is hardly the beginning. We are beginning to fit pieces into the jigsaw puzzle. We are beginning to see some of the things that need to be done. This is the beginning of the turning round, of a great shift, which will need much more effort right across Government to see that we get it right in the years ahead. It did not start just a couple of weeks ago.

There have been some things that we have done, which are right, over the past couple of years. An example is the first circular, on the critical point referred to by all three of my hon. Friends — the Members for Torridge and Devon, West, for South Hams and for Mid-Staffordshire. The sensitive conversion of redundant farm buildings is crucial to the provision of income for the farmers who so often are the leaders of the local business community, as well as the provision of jobs, particularly semi-skilled and craft jobs in the rural communities. We are still not getting that message across to many district councils, but when we published the first circular a year ago we took a deep breath and said, "even in green belts." Normally that would bring the roof down about our ears. Even a mention of green belts would do that. But that did not happen this time. We were supported by the Council for the Preservation of Rural England and hon. Members who are sensitive on green belt matters, and rightly so. We said that even in green belts we must have sensible reuse of buildings. It is to nobody's advantage, environmentally or in any other sense, to have derelict buildings that could be used to create real jobs in the villages. How I agreed with

my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West when he said that we must not let the villages become just retirement homes or dormitory areas for the local economic centre somewhere else.

Some powerful trends are running our way. If we can use them correctly, they will give us some of the muscle power with which we can get all this right. The most recent census showed that for the first time perhaps for half a century or more the population of the rural areas, except in the remotest areas, is recovering; it is increasing. That is not just because of retirement homes and so on, although that is part of it. It is also because some of the trends in modern technology are running in our direction. One does not now have to work in a great warehouse of people in a city to conduct a wide range of what traditionally would have been office-based jobs, because of the techniques of modern information technology. I know people who, with their telex machine in their front hall in the country, are running good little businesses, which, once upon a time, would have been inconceivable except in the town.

One should look at what the Development Commission and English Estates can describe in the range of activities that their efforts can produce in the rural areas. There is a capacity to spread the economic base away from great concerted centres, which is one of the great hopes for the maintenance of the small towns and villages. I can see it well in those in Somerset, which I know well from my family background.

Let me be clear about what the new planning circular did. It was a marginal change. It is correct. Even those who were anxious about it to start with are coming round to see that it is correct. It said that when we look at applications for development in the countryside in future, we should, as we always have done, do the difficult balancing of environment versus development, with agriculture in the agriculturally important areas still a material consideration. We have retained protection for the best land, which is a national resource, like mineral resources and so on.

When the district council has come to the conclusion that a development is right, and is needed in a particular area, the extra bias of the steer is now not necessarily away from the most productive agricultural land. The fields of rye grass which sadly, have lost their ecological and environmental interest, may be the right place to put the development for the local community. Those fields may be of less overall interest in social terms than the agriculturally scruffy piece of land that may be full of heath fritillaries and so on. It seems to create the right balance to put environment and agriculture and development alongside each other. That will not make decisions any easier—they will often be agonising—but we must not give that final push and say, "I am afraid this is highly productive land, so this is out of it; you have to go down the road where it is only old gorse bushes." Sir Derek Barber, the chairman of the Countryside Commission, was right to say last week that he knows of developments which have gone like that, where we have lost environmentally and ecologically interesting things because we were still following the agricultural production imperative in a way which we have to admit now was out of date.

This can be of some help to those farmers in terms of looking at environmentally sound developments which are non-farming developments. Development includes all kind of things other than building bricks and mortar, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams rightly said. He was slightly scathing about golf courses. The CLA was making a little joke when it said that 20,000 golf coursess would solve the problem. I do not think that the economics of golf courses work on that basis. However, there is a range of recreational and other uses for land which can be sensible environmentally. An interesting study was carried out by one of the London environmental trustees which showed, encouragingly, how many of the golf courses around London had done good work in preserving the ecological land that they had used. Golf courses can be environmentally satisfactory, and so can a range of recreational functions, which can provide local jobs and pleasure to local people and visitors.

Some of the hostility to development in recent years has been because of the constraints which have been put on those developments and which have made them shoddy, over-dense and unsatisfactory in terms of the way that they fitted in with settlements. Perhaps a little more land taken to give people slightly bigger gardens, a little better landscaping and perhaps some more trees would have saved the hostility that people felt to so many new developments that have fitted in a rather urban way into the sides of the small towns and villages and created this great hostility——

The Motion having been made after Ten o'clock on Wednesday evening and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at eleven minutes past Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 26 February 1987

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

WEST GLAMORGAN BILL *[Lords]*
Considered; to be read the Third time.

YORK CITY COUNCIL BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

CITY OF WESTMINSTER BILL *(By Order)*

TEIGNMOUTH QUAY COMPANY BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON DOCKLANDS RAILWAY (BECKTON) BILL *(By Order)*
Orders for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time upon Thursday 5 March.

Oral Answers to Questions

NATIONAL FINANCE

Unemployment Costs

1. **Mr. Rogers** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if, further to his answer of 29 January, *Official Report*, column *376*, he will take steps to prepare estimates of the cost to the Exchequer of the current level of unemployment in Wales.

2. **Mr. Michael Cocks** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if, further to his answer of 29 January, *Official Report*, column *376*, he will take steps to prepare estimates of the costs to the Exchequer of the current level of unemployment in the south-west.

3. **Mr. Patchett** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if, further to his answer of 29 January, *Official Report*, column *376*, he will take steps to prepare estimates of the cost to the Exchequer of the current level of unemployment in Yorkshire and Humberside.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. John MacGregor): I regret that such estimates could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Rogers: Would it not be reasonably easy to calculate the cost of the 180,000 unemployed in Wales, especially as that figure has grown by at least 3,000 in the past month? When will the Chancellor take real steps to solve the unemployment in the valleys of Wales?

Mr. MacGregor: The disproportionate cost of making regional calculations of the kind that the hon. Gentleman wants comes not from calculating unemployment benefit but in relation to supplementary and housing benefit. The hon. Gentleman will know that with six years of steady growth in the economy, overcoming all the difficulties of the 1970s, the improvement in many of the basic industries in Wales and the attraction of new firms to Wales on a large scale, we are making considerable progress in turning the Welsh economy round on a basis that will ensure regular prosperity for the future.

Mr. Cocks: The Minister referred to disproportionate cost, but has he considered the disproportionate cost of the tens of thousands of people who are on the dole in the south-west? Would it not put into perspective the Chancellor's possible concessions in tax relief if we had some idea of what it costs to keep all those people out of work?

Mr. MacGregor: I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman will have observed that since the 1983 election there have been 100,000 new additional jobs in the south-west, which shows that employment is increasing. In addition, considerable employment and training measures are being used in the south-west, involving 80,000 people. That leads to an average overall unemployment level of 9·7 per cent. I believe that the best prospects for the south-west lie in the continuation of the Government's financial and economic policies.

Mr. Patchett: Is the Minister aware that more than 250,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost in the Yorkshire and Humberside region since 1979 as a result of the Government's policies? What is he prepared to do to reverse that trend?

Mr. MacGregor: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is also aware that there have been 74,000 new jobs in Yorkshire and Humberside since 1983. The hon. Gentleman will no doubt have seen the survey which came out this morning from the Association of British Chambers of Commerce. It is one of the most optimistic recent surveys of industry in Yorkshire and Humberside and shows that things are moving in the right direction.

Sir Anthony Meyer: In view of the rising number of jobs in Wales that are dependent on inward investment, what effect would the Labour party's policies in that regard have on future employment prospects?

Mr. MacGregor: I am sure my hon. Friend is entirely right in saying that, just as Wales has been one of the major beneficiaries on inward investment, often in high-tech and high-growth industries for the future, so nothing is more likely to make those industries and investors think less of investing in the United Kingdom than the kinds of policies that we are beginning to see emerge from the Opposition.

Mr. Speller: Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is a great problem associated with lumping these three questions together? The right hon. Member for Bristol, South (Mr. Cocks) lumped the whole of the south-west together. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that epitomises the problem, because the prosperity of Bristol drags up the apparant prosperity of the south-west? Does my right hon. Friend agree that his Department should consider the south-west as Devon and Cornwall, perhaps, which have a smaller population than Bristol, rather than lump them together so that, in economic terms, the best pulls up the worst?

Mr. MacGregor: I take my hon. Friend's point, but he will realise that the question was not one that I tabled or

wished to see. He will also know that present and future improvements in infrastructure in his constituency are among the most important means of helping to ensure prosperity in his part of Devon.

Mr. Hickmet: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the substantial Government investment in South Humberside, which has three enterprise zones, developmeent area status and substantial assistance from Europe? Is he further aware that unemployment in my constituency has fallen faster than in any other, bar five? Does that not demonstrate the Government's commitment to regions such as Yorkshire and Humberside?

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend is right. Scunthorpe has undoubtedly benefited from designation as an enterprise zone. The much better targeting of regional development policies to concentrate on areas of greatest need has helped my hon. Friend's constituency considerably. It received more than £12 million in the earlier regional development scheme after June 1983, another £4·2 million in the latest development scheme and a further £4·8 million in regional selective assistance. Those sums have contributed substantially to the results that my hon. Friend has described.

Mr. Duffy: Will the Chief Secretary confirm that the 74,000 jobs that he claims for Yorkshire and Humberside were not in manufacturing? Can he confirm that the unpublished Government report to which he is privy said that matters would get worse in South Yorkshire? Does he agree that relief can come only from economic expansion at home and overseas? Why did the Chancellor not seek a co-ordinated economic expansion when he had the opportunity at the Group of Five meeting last weekend?

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman will know that South Yorkshire, like many other parts of Europe, has experienced problems with the decline of heavy industries. That is one reason for the fall in manufacturing employment. I hope that he will read the Association of British Chambers of Commerce survey, published this morning, which shows that in Yorkshire and Humberside there are substantially better expectations for home orders and export orders and confidence in manufacturing industry generally.

Mr. Holt: Does my right hon. Friend agree that employment in Yorkshire and Humberside and Teesside could be vastly improved if the Government were to harmonise with the rest of the EEC and have light duties charged centrally so that we have fair competition? Does he agree that that would enable jobs which have been lost because of lack of harmonisation to come back to the north-east?

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend knows that that is not a matter for me, but I shall ensure that his question is passed on.

Mr. Hattersley: The Chief Secretary will recall that in his first supplementary answer he made claims about the past six years, that in his second supplementary answer he made claims about the past three years and that in his third supplementary answer he made claims about the past four years. Does he not find it demeaning to spend so much of his time manipulating the figures in that way?

Mr. MacGregor: Not in the slightest. I am not demeaning the figures—I am giving the figures. I have given the employment figures since the June 1983 general election, when the electorate gave the Government a resounding vote of confidence in our previous policies.

As for economic growth, between 1979 and 1981 we experienced a world recession and the difficulties of restructuring the British economy after the effects of the Labour Government's policies. The past six years have been the longest period of sustained, balanced growth for a long time. I should have thought that the right hon. Gentleman would be pleased about that.

North Sea Oil

4. **Mr. Hunter** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of total revenue has been derived each year since 1979-80 from North sea oil.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Ian Stewart): I shall arrange for the full figures to be printed in the *Official Report*. The figure for 1985-86 was 11 per cent. and that for the current year is expected to be about 4 per cent.

Mr. Hunter; I believe that the figures will reveal that North sea oil has declined in relative importance in revenue terms, and also, by impliction, that there is a buoyancy in other areas of economic activity. Will my hon. Friend comment on that proposition?

Mr. Stewart: It is undoubtedly the case that the decline in the oil industry following the reduction in the oil price has been substantially offset by the strength of the rest of the economy. One of the great achievements of the Government is that such a major reduction in the oil price has been taken in our stride and we have the strength of the economy that we see today.

Mr. Donald Stewart: Is the Minister aware that there will be no achievements from the Government, apart from the lifeline of the revenue from Scottish oil, and that the spin-off for Scotland has been minimal, bearing out the forecast that Scotland has been the only country which has had oil discovered in its territory and has ended up worse than it was before the oil was discovered? Will the Minister take into account the fact that unemployment is rising in Scotland when it is falling in England and that we have had nothing out of Scottish oil?

Mr. Stewart: There will be a short-term effect on oil and oil-related industries in Scotland immediately after a change in the oil price of the scale that we have seen, but Scotland is a part of the United Kingdom which benefits from the reduction in overseas debt, from increased net assets overseas—now £80 billion plus—from the annual yield of more than £5 billion that that brings to the United Kingdom, and from the reduction of the public sector borrowing requirement, which has been one of the important facts in the strength of the British economy as a whole.

Mr. Tim Smith: Does my hon. Friend recall that only a year or two ago people were asking what would happen when the oil ran out? Oil revenue has run right down, but Government revenues are more buoyant than ever. Is that not the clearest possible evidence of the strength of the non-oil economy?

Mr. Stewart: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. He may recall a phrase in the last Budget speech of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor about having lost half the oil

revenues in 25 weeks, not 25 years, as some people had been suggesting. In fact, since my right hon. Friend's Budget speech last year, the strength of the non-oil economy has exceeded expectations and bears out very strongly what my hon. Friend has said.

Mr. MacKenzie: Does the Minister accept that, although there has been a reduction in oil revenue, it is still very substantial, and that most Labour Members would much rather that that revenue was spent on building up our infrastructure and on creating more manufacturing jobs than on paying out unemployment benefit?

Mr. Stewart: The right hon. Gentleman overlooks the fact that the benefits of the oil revenues to the balance of payments and to the Exchequer over the past few years have enabled a major restructuring of the British economy and that that is one of the things that has contributed so much to the present strength of the economy.

Following are the figures:

Annual figures for North sea revenues

	£ billion	*as percentage of total Consolidated Fund revenue*
1979-80	2·3	4
1980-81	3·7	6
1981-82	6·5	8
1982-83	7·8	9
1983-84	8·8	10
1984-85	12·0	12
1985-86	11·4	11
1986-87 (Autumn Statement Forecast)	4·4	4
1979-80 to 1986-87	57·0	8

Share Ownership

6. **Mr. Forman** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the latest information he has on the extent of employee share ownership in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The number of all-employee share schemes has increased from less than 30 in May 1979 to over 1,200 now. Under those schemes 1·5 million employees have acquired shares or options.

Mr. Forman: I warmly welcome the progress that is reflected in those figures and urge my right hon. Friend the Chancellor to go further in that direction. Does my hon. Friend accept that the time has perhaps come to consider carefully some form of time-limited tax relief to give a substantial boost to this particularly attractive form of democratic capitalism?

Mr. Stewart: I note what my hon. Friend says. I shall not comment about the future, but on past performance the profit-sharing and savings-related share option schemes that are already in force have proved very successful and popular. Indeed, there is no let up in the flow of new proposals for them.

Mrs. Roe: Is my hon. Friend aware that the Stock-Exchange has recently produced information suggesting that 42 per cent. of individual shareholders are women? Since many of these will be married women whose tax position at the moment is unfair, as I think most people would accept, does not this welcome statistic emphasise the importance of the reform of personal taxation as outlined in the Green Paper?

Mr. Stewart: I note my hon. Friend's comments. I am delighted to hear that such a high proportion of personal shareholders are women, but matters of that kind are not for now.

Interest Rates

7. **Mr. Alan Howarth** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the current level of interest rates.

13. **Mr. Sedgemore** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has had recently on the level of United Kingdom interest rates.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Nigel Lawson): Bank base rates are currently 11 per cent.

Mr. Howarth: My right hon. Friend will be aware that the very favourable configuration of public finances, upon which he is to be congratulated, is giving rise to much optimism about the future course of our interest rates. Does he agree that we now have an important opportunity to lower the Government's prospective borrowing requirement and that a prudent course of that sort, in contrast with the degrees of extravagance proposed by the various Opposition parties, would give the best prospect of fulfilling those hopes for lower interest rates in the long term?

Mr. Lawson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks about the state of the economy, which is indeed in a particularly sound condition, as is widely recognised by everybody, even including now—for the first time that I can recall—the National Institute of Economic and Social Research. As to the question of the public sector borrowing requirement, as my hon. Friend knows, it is an integral part of the medium-term financial strategy that the public sector borrowing requirement should be reduced—as it has been. That has clearly brought great benefits in its wake, just as there would be great disasters were the public sector borrowing requirement to be inflated in the way that all the Opposition parties wish it to be.

Mr. Roy Jenkins: Will the Chancellor tell us the comparable rates of interest at present in Germany and in France, the two major countries which are fully within the European monetary system?

Mr. Lawson: I am not at all clear that the difference between interest rates in this country and those in France and Germany is attributable to the fact that those two countries are in the exchange rate mechanism of the EMS and we are not. It is perfectly true that interest rates are higher in this country. That is well known. That is necessary at present in order to secure a steady downward pressure on inflation. Interest rates will be lowered only as and when it is safe to do so.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the most important factors for manufacturing industry is not so much a reduction in tax as a reduction in interest rates? Does he also agree that one of the most helpful things that could happen would be to reduce Government borrowing so that 2 per cent. could come off interest rates rather than 2p off income tax?

Mr. Lawson: I note my hon. Friend's suggestion that there should be a further reduction in Government

borrowing. It is difficult, however, to draw the precise connection between a particular reduction in Government borrowing and a particular effect on the interest rate. It is far more complex than that. The level of public sector borrowing is one factor that determines the level of interest rates, but there are many others as well, as I have pointed out on a large number of occasions. As for British industry, I am sure that my hon. Friend will welcome the fact that British industry is exceedingly healthy. That is one of the reasons for the strong improvement in the Government's tax revenues, which are coming from increased profitability and increased corporation tax.

Mr. Robert Sheldon: If the Chancellor believes in the success of the Plaza II agreement, does he not also accept the consequences of that for lower interest rates in this country?

Mr. Lawson: I share the right hon. Gentleman's hope that the Plaza II agreement, in which I participated, will be successful. I think that it will be helpful in a number of ways. So far the signs are that it is succeeding, but I think that it is premature to reach a final judgment on that.

Mr. Andrew MacKay: At this time, when the country is greatly anticipating a cut in interest rates due to the Government's prudent economic policy, would my right hon. Friend care to speculate on how much interest rates would be likely to increase if the full public expenditure committed by the Opposition were implemented through an increase in borrowing?

Mr. Lawson: Of course, there would have to be a massive increase in interest rates if there were to be the misfortune of a Labour Government, which, of course, there will not be, not merely, although partly, because of a massive increase in public expenditure and public borrowing, to which they are committed, but because their policies would completely forfeit the confidence of the world financial community. There would be a major exchange rate crisis, which would force up interest rates still higher. It is fortunate, indeed, that that nightmare will never become reality.

Mr. Skinner: The Chancellor referred to the many factors involved in interest rates going up or coming down. Is it fair to say that the Government may follow the pattern of what happened before the 1983 general election, when they timed a cut in interest rates to precede the election but having managed to return safely to office they then carefully and dutifully put them up again?

Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that another factor is that Brazil has suspended payments on the $108 billion debt and that, coupled with all the other Latin American debt, could have a serious effect on interest rates? What discussions did he have at the recent conference on that matter?

Mr. Lawson: On the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question, I am, of course, grateful to him, as ever, for the helpful hints that he has given me. On the second part, we did have a discussion about the Brazilian debt problem in Paris last weekend, and I shall be seeing the Brazilian Finance Minister, Mr. Funaro, on Monday.

Sir Michael Shaw: Does my right hon. Friend realise that among all the difficulties that face small farmers in my constituency, nothing would do more good and help to relieve the position in which they find themselves than the lowering of interest rates?

Mr. Lawson: I entirely take the point that my hon. Friend has put, and I am confident that, over time, the success of the Government's economic policies will lead to interest rates coming down, but, as I have said on a number of occasions, they will come down only when it is prudent for them to do so.

Dr. McDonald: Why are United Kingdom real interest rates so high?

Mr. Lawson: That is a rich one coming from the Opposition Benches, because it was the Opposition who got real interest rates so low that they were negative, and they did that by getting inflation going through the roof, and we are not going to go that way.

Public Expenditure

8. **Mr. John Townend** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has had any further correspondence with political parties on proposals for increases in public expenditure.

Mr. MacGregor: No further correspondence, but I note a stream of pledge-laden documents from the Opposition in the past few weeks.

Mr. Townend: Does my right hon. Friend agree that paying for the election promises of the Opposition, which exceed £24 billion and increase every time a shadow Minister makes a further commitment, would necessitate such a large increase in taxation that the brain drain, which has been reversed in recent years, would soar and there would be a haemorrhage of brains and talent such as the country has never seen before, which would adversely affect our ability to compete abroad?

Mr. MacGregor: There is no doubt about that, coupled with the effects on industry of much higher interest rates, the effect on inward investment and the loss of overseas confidence in our policy as a result of the overall programme put forward by the Labour party.

I know that the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) is making some assessments of what Labour party policy should be on jobs and the poverty package, but it is clear that the Labour party is still highly committed to a large range of spending programmes in other directions.

Mr. Wrigglesworth: Is it because of the Government's anxieties about public expenditure that the exchange rate cover has been taken from loans from the European Investment Bank? Is the Minister aware that that has hit small and medium-sized businesses very hard and has meant the loss of thousands of jobs? Will the Treasury reintroduce exchange rate cover for those loans?

Mr. MacGregor: I have no plans to do so, but that is certainly not because of anxieties about the levels of public expenditure. We believe that they should be prudent, and that is what we are pursuing. We believe in establishing priorities for extra expenditure, and that is what we have done. I think that the anxieties rest rather with the hon. Gentleman. It is clear from the latest Liberal/SDP document that the alliance is not prepared to cost any of its policies because it fears that, in the words of the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen),

"A ragbag of listed policies is not in itself likely to be attractive to the electorate".

I think that the right hon Gentleman has learnt the dangers into which the Labour party got itself.

Mr. Hind: In the light of the promises made by the Labour party to increase public spending in a year by £28 million, will my right hon. Friend tell the House what that would do to the rate of VAT?

Mr. MacGregor: If that were done on VAT alone, of course it would raise VAT to more than 41p in the pound. I note that one or two Opposition Members have said that we suggested fanciful VAT figures. I am sure that that is simply a smokescreen to cover up the levels of VAT or of income tax that would arise under the Labour party's policies.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Is the Minister aware that since the Al Fayed brothers took over Harrods the Exchequer has lost £20 million a year in corporation tax? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that Labour will change the law in many of these respects to ensure that companies pay their taxes? That is how we shall fund our public expenditure programme.

Mr. MacGregor: I note what the hon. Gentleman says, but he will note that, as a result of the increased profitability of British industry and British companies generally, there is now a bigger yield from corporation tax. That is largely the result of the improved profitability of British industry, which would not occur under a Government pursuing the policies suggested by the Labour party.

Mr. Roger King: Will my right hon. Friend spare just one moment to consider the plight of many of the hapless politicians who may soon face the wrath of factory workers coming out of the factories, including in my constituency, with promises of skyjacking their taxes?

Mr. MacGregor: I suspect that my hon. Friend is referring to the policies that the Labour party will put before the electorate at the election. Labour Members are trying to pretend that they would not put taxes up, but there can be no question that the kind of spending programme advocated by the Labour party could be met solely by increased borrowing—the money would have to come from substantially increased taxes as well. My hon. Friend is therefore entirely right.

Mr. Gould: Will the Chief Secretary confirm that the material which he uses to describe what he calls "Labour's spending plans" is supplied by a political party—that is, by the political advisers employed by Conservative Central Office — and not by the Treasury, as is so often represented? Is the work on the increase and extension of VAT being done by those advisers or, on this occasion, by the Treasury?

Mr. MacGregor: I can confirm that the material comes from a political party — the Labour party. It is documented in many of the spending pledges made by the Labour party over a period. I have constantly made it clear that I would take items off if the Labour party showed that it was no longer committed to them. In the past few weeks we have seen the following policy documents from the Labour party: "Investing in People", "Caring for People", "Towards a new Agriculture", "Jobs and the Environment", "For the Good of All", which deals with aid, and "Fresh Directions". Either the Labour party is still committed — I believe that it is — to its massive spending programmes, or it is undertaking a massive con on the electorate.

Immigrants (Remittances)

9. **Mr. Greenway** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the value of money sent to private individuals in *(a)* India, *(b)* Pakistan, *(c)* Bangladesh and *(d)* all other countries by people settled in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister of State, Treasury (Mr. Peter Brooke): The Government do not hold any estimates of these amounts. My hon. Friend might like to seek the advice of the London embassies of the countries concerned.

Mr. Greenway: I am grateful for that helpful reply. Does my hon. Friend agree that those countries and others benefit as a nation and as individuals by many millions of pounds of investment a year by companies in this country run by expatriate Indians, Pakistanis and the rest? Does he agree that these countries will suffer greatly if there were a Labour Government, because they would prevent companies from sending money on this basis and recall British investment already in those countries?

Mr. Brooke: My hon. Friend is quite right to warn his constituents who control such companies about the draconian vindictiveness with which they are threatened by Labour policies on overseas investment.

Mr. Pavitt: When the Minister is looking at the vast amounts of money that go to companies overseas, will he bear in mind that it is invidious to choose these three countries? That is because most people who are lawfully settled here still have family ties with those countries and often like to look after their elderly parents and their children who remain in the countries of origin.

Mr. Brooke: I do not think that any value judgment was implied in my hon. Friend's question.

Mr. Watts: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is strange that the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) should go around making speeches about massive increases in overseas aid, which would be at the taxpayers' expense, while intending to cut back on the opportunities for individuals to invest their money in developing countries?

Mr. Brooke: The policies of the Opposition are matters for them. I share my hon. Friend's distaste for the siege mentality that they imply.

Mr. James Lamond: If it is true, as Conservative Members assert, that considerable sums are sent abroad to these countries by individuals, could the Minister draw that to the attention of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Home Office, as it demonstrates once again the validity of the claim by many of my constituents whose families are not allowed to join them in this country and who send money abroad to try to support them in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan? Will the Minister also bear in mind that that admirable trait should not be used as a further stick against those people whom Conservative Members resent living and working in this country?

Mr. Brooke: If I may say so again, the hon. Gentleman has misunderstood the purport of my hon. Friend's question.

Personal Equity Plans

10. **Mr. Bright** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what further evidence he has of the latest response to personal equity plans.

Mr. Lawson: The response to the new personal equity plans has been most encouraging. Latest available figures suggest that in the first month of the scheme more than 2,000 people a day invested in personal equity plans.

Mr. Bright: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the present regulations, which mean that people can invest only in 30 or 40 major companies, are too restrictive? Would he look at the possibility of trying to extend this list so that they could invest in some of the smaller public companies and in some of the unquoted companies? Obviously this would help more investors, and especially employees in companies that are not covered at the moment by the scheme.

Mr. Lawson: The Government do not dictate the particular shares that are being invested in. Different plan managers have different arrangements and, indeed, there is a large variety in the number of shares in which people have invested. I do not believe that any change is needed in this scheme. As I pointed out, this scheme, which is the third leg of popular capitalism after the growth, first, of employee share schemes and then the growth of shareholders by privatisation, is proving extremely successful despite the doubting Thomases that there were at the beginning.

Mr. Wrigglesworth: Does the Chancellor not agree that this mouse of a scheme is attractive only to those who are already paying capital gains tax and to those who are already investing in shares? Will he look at the scheme again and make it much more attractive? Will he adopt the proposals that we tabled in the Finance Bill in order to make it attractive for newcomers to buy shares, and not only for those who already have shares?

Mr. Lawson: The hon. Gentleman is mistaken. First, far from being a mouse of a scheme, as I said, in the first month alone—which is the latest figures for which we have records—over 2,000 individuals a day started up personal equity plans. As for the question of making it more generous, the scheme does not apply only to those who pay capital gains tax or to existing shareholders. Indeed, Barclayshare, one of the largest of the plan managers, has already estimated that roughly a quarter of those who subscribe to its personal equity plan are first-time shareholders.

Income Tax

12. **Mr. Fallon** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has on the starting rates of income tax in other European Community countries.

Mr. Brooke: The United Kingdom has the second highest starting rate of national income tax in the Community and the third highest rate, after Denmark and Ireland, when local income taxes are included. I shall arrange for further information to be placed in the *Official Report*.

Mr. Fallon: Are the starting rates of tax not too high? Will my hon. Friend reinforce his determination to cut tax for the low-paid by paying particular heed to the advice in last week's *Militant* newspaper that

"Labour leaders are at last realising the electoral damage being done by their pledge to reverse Tory tax cuts and that ordinary employed workers fear"—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must summarise, not quote.

Mr. Fallon:

"that ordinary employed workers fear that Labour will increase their already heavy tax burden."

Mr. Speaker: Order. I repeat that the hon. Gentleman must summarise, not quote.

Mr. Brooke: Answering my hon. Friend's question sub specie aeternitatis, I think that my right hon. Friend has indicated that he proposes to cut tax. In the narrower context of St. Patrick's day, it would be wrong for me to quote. The quotation from *Militant* did not appear to be one which the Opposition enjoyed.

Mr. Winnick: Has the Minister seen the memorandum from the Tory Reform Group—a number of Cabinet Ministers are associated with that organisation—which has argued strongly that, instead of cutting taxes, the Government should make further substantial investment in housing, education and the rest? Is the Minister aware that what we complain about are not tax cuts for the lowest paid, who should certainly get relief, but the tax cuts that have benefited the wealthiest people under the Tory Government?

Mr. Brooke: I have read a wide number of representations, from *Militant* to the Tory Reform Group, but that does not allow me to anticipate my right hon. Friend's Budget.

Mr. Maples: The disparity in the starting rates of tax highlighted by my hon. Friend's answer is serious. Many of us hope that he will soon find himself able to do something about it. Does he not agree that tax revenues are not maximised by high rates of tax? Is that not borne out by the fact that over the last seven years the yield of higher rate tax in real terms has risen by 40 per cent. over a period when rates of tax have been reduced?

Mr. Brooke: My hon. Friend is quite right to draw attention to that element of buoyancy.

Following is the information:

Starting rate of income tax (per cent.) for a single person and for a married couple without children

EEC Countries

	(a) National rates		*(b) National and local rates combined*	
	Single person	*Married couple*	*Single person*	*Married couple*
Belgium	19	22	21	23
Denmark	21	21	49	49
France	26	19	26	19
Germany	22	22	22	22
Greece	5	7	5	7
Ireland	35	35/60	35	35/60
Italy	12	12	12	12
Luxembourg	11	11	11	11
Netherlands	15	16	15	16
Portugal	2·5	2·5	2·5	2·5
Spain	8	21	8	21
United Kingdom	29	29	29	29

1. The rates relate to employment income.
2. The starting rates are in all cases the lowest applicable when tax actually becomes payable. The figures reflect the latest enacted rate

scales, as far as is known.

3. The rates shown may differ from the nominal rates of tax in the countries concerned because, where appropriate, they take account of employment income reliefs, minimum expense deductions, tax credits for personal allowances and other standard reliefs.

4. In Belgium and Denmark local income taxes are payable in addition to the national rate. The combined figures for these two countries assume, in the case of Belgium, that the local tax is payable at the rate applicable to the majority of the population; in the case of Denmark at the Copenhagen rate, which is about average.

5. The higher starting rate for a married couple in Ireland (60 per cent.) reflects the marginal relief just above the exemption limit. Where there is no longer any marginal relief, the rate reduces to 35 per cent.

Privatisation

14. **Mr. Nellist** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what lessons he has drawn from the recent privatisation of British Airways for future flotations of publicly owned companies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lawson: The main lesson from the British Airways sale is that there is very considerable popular support for the privatisation programme. Over 1 million people became shareholders in British Airways, including over 90 per cent. of the company's employees.

Mr. Nellist: Why does the Chancellor not admit that the deliberate undervaluation of British Airways cost working people, that is, his beloved taxpayers, £300 million, and that £50 million profit was made on the first day, including Lord King's personal profit of £13,000 in 24 hours? Is it not just like all the other privatisation exercises of the Government—legalised theft?

Mr. Lawson: On the contrary, it is public ownership in the true sense of the word. It is returning savings to the people. As for the hon. Member's expertise in the pricing of new issues, I would have had a little more respect for that if he had predicted what would happen.

Mr. Yeo: Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is one clear lesson to be learnt from the British Airways share sale, and that is that, even without the benefit of a large advertising campaign, there is massive public interest in and support for the Government's policy of privatisation? Is that not conveniently highlighted by the Oppositions determination to reverse our policy?

Mr. Lawson: My hon. Friend is right. That is precisely why we shall continue with this programme throughout the remainder of this Parliament and well into the next Parliament.

Mr. Blair: Is it not the case that foreign speculation on gas, British Telecom and British Airways alone creamed off over £350 million on first-day profits, more than a full year's cost of the Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) to give free TV licences to pensioners? Why are the Government so mean with pensioners and so generous with foreign bankers?

Mr. Lawson: The hon. Member's xenophobia, which he cultivates for the benefit of certain elements in his own party, because he himself does not believe in it for a moment, is entirely without the statistical foundation which he attempted to give to the House.

Pensioners (Income Tax)

15. **Mr. Dubs** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many pensioners pay income tax; and what is the total revenue involved.

17. **Mr. Fry** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many persons in the last financial year for which figures are available, in receipt of retirement pensions, paid income tax of £300 or less for the relevant year; and what were the comparable figures in the two preceding years.

Mr. Brooke: The available information relates to single people and married couples aged 65 or over. About 2¼ million pay income tax totalling nearly £4 billion per annum. However, in each of the last three years about four and three quarter million had no liability to income tax while a further three quarters of a million paid tax of £300 per annum or less.

Mr. Dubs: Does the Minister understand the sense of injustice felt by those pensioners who have a small occupational pension on top of their basic pension and still have to pay tax on it? Does not justice to pensioners demand that those poor people should be exempt from paying income tax?

Mr. Brooke: Single pensioners can have income up to £16 per week over basic pension before paying tax, and married pensioners can have around £25 per week.

Mr. Fry: Does my hon. Friend not appreciate that the figures that he has provided this afternoon show that it is dangerous to lump all pensioners together and that some pensioners are not quite in the category described by the Labour party? None the less, does he appreciate that it must cost the Inland Revenue a considerable amount to collect the taxation from the three quarters of a million pensioners he mentioned? May we hope for further moves in the direction that the Government have taken to remove those people entirely from the income tax net?

Mr. Brooke: Between 1979 and 1985 pensioners' total net income increased on average by 2·7 per cent. a year more than prices, whereas the average net income for the population as a whole increased by 1 per cent. per annum. I note what my hon. Friend said, but that again is a question for the Budget.

PRIME MINISTER

Mr. Speaker: Before we start Prime Minister's questions, I remind the House that questions should be related to the Prime Minister's responsibilities.

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Franks** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her offical engagements for Thursday 26 February.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Franks: Has my right hon. Friend noticed the latest optimistic forecast from the National Institute of Economic and Social Research concerning jobs, inflation, growth and output? Will she confirm that the Government's policies, which have secured those improved prospects, will be continued, not only in this Parliament but in the next, despite the efforts of the Opposition to undermine national prosperity?

The Prime Minister: I had noticed that report from the National Institute of Economic and Social Research,

which said that the economy would expand by nearly 3 per cent. this year. It has been accompanied by other optimistic reports at the same time from the Association of British Chambers of Commerce and the Institute for Fiscal Studies and by excellent construction figures. I confirm what my hon. Friend said, that the policies that have led to a healthy industrial and commercial base will be continued in the next Parliament.

Mr. Kinnock: When £3 billion spent on high quality health and education services and building homes would generate at least four times as many jobs as an equal sum spent on tax cuts, does not the course of prudence dictate to the Government that they should be using whatever resources they have to generate jobs in Britain rather than using them for pre-election give-aways?

The Prime Minister: More jobs are being generated in Britain, as the right hon. Gentleman knows. The healthy state of the economy, which I have just indicated from the reports today, has been brought about partially by the incentives that have been given by some of the income tax cuts. Most of us want to keep, at the top end too, some of our best brains in this country and one does not do that by high taxation.

Mr. Kinnock: Does the Prime Minister not recognise that, whenever they are asked, the vast majority of British taxpayers say that they would rather have dependable, high quality services, decent old-age pensions and jobs for people in this country than a few pence off income tax? Is it not clear that their sense of prudence and patriotism is much greater than that of the Government?

The Prime Minister: We have high quality services in this country. The Health Service is excellent, and, with regard to pensioners, Britain's spending on the elderly is the third highest in Europe as a proportion of the national income. With regard to what the right hon. Gentleman said about tax cuts, may I remind him of what the last Labour Chancellor said about these. He said:

"With the rate of inflation remaining low, and with these substantial tax reliefs"—

he was referring to some small cuts on 11 April 1978—

"modest increases in earnings should ensure that real living standards can continue to rise over the year ahead without unduly increasing our industrial costs."

He went on:

"This is the best possible recipe for commercial and industrial success. It is the only recipe for curing unemployment."—[*Official Report*, 11 April 1978; Vol. 947, c. 1207-8.]

That was a Labour Chancellor.

Mr. Kinnock: Yes, and does the Prime Minister recall that when that Labour Chancellor said that there were 1 million, not 3 million, unemployed, that we had a surplus in our manufacturing trade, that we had lower interest rates and that everybody — old-age pensioners and others alike—was in relative and absolute terms better off? Will she accept that that Chancellor, also had a 25p band for income tax? Will she introduce that and use any other money she has for generating jobs, instead of trying to bribe at election time?

The Prime Minister: Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman has forgotten a few facts. We now have a higher standard of living than this country has ever known and the highest standard of Health Service that this country has ever known. The day that we were returned to No. 10 Downing street spending on the National Health Service was £7¼ billion a year and now it is £18¾ billion a year. The standard of pensions has never been higher than it is now.

Mrs. Peacock: Has my right hon. Friend had time today to study the report from the Association of British Chambers of Commerce, which suggests that four regions in the north of England, including Yorkshire, have above average investment? Will she congratulate those companies in my constituency that have invested over £20 million in manufacturing industry?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right. The Association of British Chambers of Commerce has confirmed that manufacturing industry is doing well in the north as well as in the south, that exports are also doing well in the north, that a considerable number of people are taking up enterprise allowances in the north and that half the increasing number of self-employed also find their place in the north.

Q2. **Mr. Nicholas Brown** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 26 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Brown: When the Prime Minister next bats for the north in Cabinet, will she thump her right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy with her bat and tell him to get on with ordering coal-fired power plants from the north's engineering industry? What is the point of planning tax cuts for people to spend on imported electrical consumer goods when there will be no electricity in the mid-1990s with which to run them?

The Prime Minister: I notice that the Labour party is a party of high income taxation at all levels. We happen to believe that people are entitled to the lion's share of their own earnings and that that gives rise to better incentives and a better standard of living for all people. With regard to power stations, my right hon. Friend the Energy Secretary will be taking decisions in the near future about what power stations, if any, he will be ordering.

Q3. **Mr. Latham** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 26 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Latham: When my right hon. Friend met the American arms control negotiators yesterday, did she stress that the stars wars project, in its limited research form, has already been immensely helpful to the West in bringing Mr. Gorbachev to the negotiating table and, we hope, keeping him there?

The Prime Minister: I believe that it is the strength and resolution of the West, including this Government, that have brought the Russians to the negotiating table at Geneva. It is continued strength and resolution that will in the end ensure balanced reductions of nuclear and other weaponry. Indeed, that is one reason why the Labour party's policy of one-sided nuclear disarmament is so dangerous and will be totally rejected by the British people.

Mr. Steel: When the Prime Minister told the Institute of Directors on Tuesday that she believed it wrong for the state to take and spend so much of people's earnings, did

she not recognise what a poll in the *Today* newspaper shows, which is that a clear majority of people would rather see money spent this year on jobs, education, pensions and health than have two or three pence off their rate of income tax? Does that not show that the people have a rather higher concept of responsibility to their neighbours than has the Prime Minister?

The Prime Minister: No. I am interested to learn that the Liberal party also wants higher income tax for people such as nurses and teachers. We do not wish to have higher income tax. We believe that a Chancellor does not give away money on Budget day, but decides how much of people's money he will take away.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating the aerospace industry on achieving a 12·5 per cent. increase in exports last year, reaching a record £4·74 billion? Does this not show the strength of manufacturing industry in high-tech, and does it not give the lie to what has been said by the Leader of the Opposition, who is doing a great disservice to manufacturing industry?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I gladly congratulate the British aerospace industry and the company. It had a good year the year before last, which was shown in the company's annual report in March last year. I understand that it has had another very good year this year and we congratulate all concerned.

Q6. **Mr. Terlezki** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 26 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Terlezki: Will not the trade union reforms announced this week be welcome in the whole of the country because they will ensure that no longer will the trade union barons have the power to dictate to our industries? Should not power belong to the ordinary trade union members, who should be the people to decide the future of their labour?

The Prime Minister: Yes, all our trade union reforms have been designed to give more power to ordinary members of trade unions against the trade union bosses. They have led to a new atmosphere in industrial relations, with the lowest number of strikes for a long time and an excellent, profitable industry with good prospects for the future.

Mr. Flannery: Will the Prime Minister take note of the hurriedly organised lobby of teachers' unions outside the House today? The lobby is asking for the right to negotiate as a union—a right of which it has been deprived by a Bill introduced by a Minister who does not understand what he is doing. Will the Prime Minister do something so that the unions generally know that this is an attack not only on the teachers' unions but on the trade union movement, to deprive it of the right to negotiate?

The Prime Minister: The overwhelming majority of teachers, and of parents, know that teachers have had a better deal from this Government than from any other Government. The increase in pay is outstanding and takes teachers way above what used to be their old bench-mark of the Houghton award. This settlement goes way above that and defines their pay and conditions of service for the first time, ensuring that better teachers get better pay. It is a temporary arrangement until permanent arrangements for negotiating can be worked out.

Q7. **Mr. Robert Atkins** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 26 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Atkins: With regard to the Government's recently announced policy on the future of Leyland Trucks, will my right hon. Friend take time today to consider the division within the Liberal party? Its employment spokesman is in favour of Paccar, and its industry spokesman is in favour of DAF. Is this not——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Was the hon. Gentleman not here when I made my announcement? Questions must relate to the Prime Minister's responsibilities.

Mrs. Clwyd: Does the Prime Minister recall Question Time on 22 January, when she described Mr. Duncan Campbell as ferreting around and as a threat to national security? Will she now apologise to him and to all those smeared by her accusations?

The Prime Minister: No. The matters referred to were accepted by both Front Benches as a threat to national security. Yesterday Mr. Campbell gave the High Court a binding undertaking not to publish sensitive information about the secret defence project — *[Interruption.]* The injunction against him was accordingly discharged in the light of that binding undertaking.

Q7. **Mrs. Virginia Bottomley** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 26 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mrs. Bottomley: With 15,000 deaths and 24,000 new cases of breast cancer a year, does my right hon. Friend agree that the announcement of a national screening service is further demonstration of the Government's commitment to women's health?

The Prime Minister: Yes. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services said yesterday, the Government have accepted the recommendation of the Forrest report in full. This is greatly to the advantage of many women and greatly to the relief of many others, not only in relation to breast cancer, but with regard to cervical cancer. It was a very good statement yesterday and it is a further earnest of the way in which this Government constantly look after the Health Service and constantly improve it.

Business of the House

3.31 pm

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): May I ask the Leader of the House to state the business for next week?

The Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Biffen): Yes, Sir. The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 2 MARCH—There will be a debate on Welsh affairs on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Motion relating to the Milk and Dairies and Milk (Special Designation) (Charges) Regulations.

TUESDAY 3 MARCH—Second Reading of the Local Government Bill.

Remaining stages of the Rate Support Grants Bill.

WEDNESDAY 4 MARCH—Progress on remaining stages of the Abolition of Domestic Rates etc. (Scotland) Bill (1st Allotted Day).

THURSDAY 5 MARCH—Completion of remaining stages of the Abolition of Domestic Rates etc. (Scotland) Bill (2nd Allotted Day).

FRIDAY 6 MARCH—Private Members' motions.

MONDAY 9 MARCH—Opposition Day (10th Allotted Day). The debate will arise on a motion in the names of the leaders of the Liberal and Social Democratic parties, subject for debate to be announced.

Mr. Kinnock: Does the Leader of the House recall that just five weeks ago the Prime Minister was describing Mr. Duncan Campbell as a ferret interested in revealing "information of use to our enemies".—[*Official Report*, 22 January 1987: Vol. 108, c. 1021.]

But the Government have now—as the Prime Minister just said—accepted the undertakings of that same Mr. Campbell and not sustained the injunction against him. Would the Leader of the House arrange next week for the Solicitor-General to come to the House to explain why, instead of engaging in eight months of inactivity and two weeks of bullying, the Government did not seek much earlier to take that course of action and obtain an undertaking which Mr. Campbell has made clear he was willingly ready to give?

Can the Leader of the House also arrange for the Solicitor-General or the Solicitor-General for Scotland to come to the House next week to give the Government's reaction to the legal opinion which the BBC has obtained from the Dean of the Faculty of Advocates in Scotland, to the effect that the special branch raid on the Glasgow office made at the instruction of the Government was almost certainly unlawful?

Will the right hon. Gentleman accept that there is great and growing concern both in this House and outside about people alleged to be Nazi war criminals who are apparently still living in our country? Names have been sent to the Prime Minister by the Simon Wiesenthal Centre and I understand that the Home Secretary will be meeting representatives of that organisation next Monday.

Will the Leader of the House ensure that, as soon as possible after that meeting, the Home Secretary will make a statement to the House about any further action which the Government propose to take in respect of any people about whom there may be reasonable suspicion of involvement in war crimes?

Does the Leader of the House recognise that there is urgent and growing need for a wide-ranging debate on foreign affairs? The escalation of the Iran-Iraq war, the renewed Syrian involvement in the Lebanon, the continued incarceration of Mr. Terry Waite and other hostages, developments in South Africa, the Government's use of their Security Council veto against comprehensive sanctions, the threat to the anti-ballistic missile treaty posed by the development of the Strategic Defence Initiative and the implications for Britain of the Tower commission's report to the United States' senate today, are all matters which the House should be able to examine as soon as possible. Can the right hon. Gentleman make appropriate arrangements for such a debate?

Finally, the right hon. Gentleman may recall that last week I asked for an early debate in Government time on the British motor car industry, especially in the light of the Government's readiness to write off debts of £750 million and to make a present of Leyland Trucks to DAF of Holland, which has seven out of nine members of the supervisory board. In view of that, and of the continuing pressures on other parts of the motor vehicle industry, including Bedford Commerical Vehicles Ltd., can the right hon. Gentleman tell me now when such a debate will take place?

Mr. Biffen: On the first point, the right hon. Gentleman will have heard my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister explain the circumstances in which the action was taken by my right hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor-General in respect of Mr. Campbell. But I take note that he would like consideration to be given to a statement also covering the legal opinion from the Dean of the Faculty of Advocates; perhaps that is something that we might consider.

The right hon. Gentleman's point about the allegations—I emphasise that we are talking about allegations—of wartime crimes is certainly very much with my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. I can confirm that it is planned that he will meet members of the Simon Wiesenthal Centre next week. I shall bear in mind the interest that the right hon. Gentleman expressed that the House should be kept informed of these matters.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned the range of issues which compel consideration of a general foreign affairs debate, and perhaps that is something which we may consider through the usual channels. Finally, when the right hon. Gentleman talks about making a present of Leyland Trucks, he makes it clear that there could be a genuine educative role for any debate on the motor industry. Again, perhaps we could look at that through the usual channels.

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham): Is it not time that we had a debate on farming and land use?

Mr. Biffen: Yes, I agree with my hon. Friend. Several Government publications will come out next month and in that context we could well arrange a debate.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I thank the Leader of the House for agreeing to debate the prayer in the name of my right hon. and hon. Friends relating to the dairy industry and I am sure that it will attract interest on both sides of the House. It is now more than two weeks since the Secretary of State for Transport announced the increase in light dues and said that an order would be made in due course. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that that has attracted considerable criticism and opposition from

many sectors, especially those concerned about the future of the British merchant fleet? Can he tell us when the order will be laid and the House can have an opportunity to debate it?

Mr. Biffen: I note and acknowledge the compliment that the hon. Gentleman pays the Treasury Bench on the speed with which the debate on dairy charges has been arranged. I shall look into his second point and be in touch with him.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Could my right hon. Friend arrange a debate on rates before next Thursday so that the House may consider the planned rate rise in Ealing of 80 per cent. by the hard Left Labour council which has the support of the Leader of the Opposition for its high spending on obnoxious policies? Will he table any motion relating to such a debate so that we can consider the awful pressure and agony of that, not only on pensioners, poor people, ordinary working people and everyone else, but on industry which is required by law to be consulted by the local council but which has been refused that consultation so far by Ealing council?

Mr. Biffen: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for once again reminding us of the difficulties that are created by the activities of Ealing council and, indeed, the wider problem that commands attention — the action of the far-Left in these matters. As to next week's business, there is a debate on Friday on the inner cities and my hon. Friend may wish to make his speech on that occasion.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): Will the Leader of the House explain today's major retreat by the Government, which will remove the dishonest cloak of a transitional period from the Government's proposal to impose a poll tax in Scotland? Is it not extremely sharp practice for the Government to table no fewer than 40 major and controversial amendments to a Bill which is subject to a guillotine, only 12 hours after the Business Committee had agreed to dispose of that part of the Bill within two hours? May we have additional time to debate those amendments?

Mr. Biffen: I shall look into the hon. Gentleman's point, but I suspect that there is a good precedent for it.

Sir Paul Bryan (Boothferry): When can we expect a debate on the Green Paper on the future of radio?

Mr. Biffen: I cannot say this afternoon, Sir, but I shall look at the point that my hon. Friend makes.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Has the right hon. Gentleman had a chance to read early-day motion 649?

[That this House expresses concern at the irregularities and discrepancies in the management and funding of the Community Programme in the West of Scotland; deplores the fact that the Government has prevaricated and procrastinated in its answers to questions on this matter tabled by the honourable Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow and that it has refused to publish a report, compiled by officials of the Manpower Services Comission which has revealed mismanagement and misallocation of public funds in relation to certain projects funded under the Community Programme; and calls for an urgent public enquiry into these allegations so as to remove the uncertainty which is undermining confidence in the Community Programme in an area which desperately needs more jobs and investment.]

That elegantly worded motion, which has been signed by over 100 hon. Members, is concerned with irregularities and discrepancies in the funding of the Manpower Services Commission community schemes in the west of Scotland. This important matter is causing considerable concern because, inter alia, it reveals weaknesses in the scheme of funding. May we have an early debate on this important issue?

Mr. Biffen: I understand that the Manpower Services Commission has carried out an investigation. I take note of the hon. Gentleman's request for a debate. I can offer no early prospect of that in Government time, but perhaps he will seek the other opportunities that are available.

Mr. Allan Stewart (Eastwood): Further to the question of my hon. Friend the Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson), is my right hon. Friend aware that my constituents will be delighted that the Government have decided to end the transitional period and move more swiftly towards the implementation of the community charge? Is he also aware that the Labour regional councils in Scotland have announced massive rate increases? Does he agree that next week's debate will be an opportunity for Opposition Members to join Conservative Members in condemning those acts of political spite?

Mr. Biffen: I am sure that my hon. Friend speaks armed with the most compelling of arguments. However, I said that I would look at the matter in procedural terms, and I shall leave it there.

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston): If it is the Government's contention today that it was necessary to apply for the injunction against Mr. Duncan Campbell only to obtain an undertaking that he would not reveal technical information, will the Leader of the House explain why the Government sought to obtain an injunction against myself and 13 colleagues, since, patently, we have no technical information and would probably be incapable of understanding it if somebody sought to give it to us?

Mr. Biffen: I do not think that that comes under next week's business and I cannot add to what I said to the Leader of the Opposition.

Sir Bernard Braine (Castle Point): May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to early-day motion 450, which stands in my name and that of 74 other Members of all parties?

[That this House notes the written replies given recently by the Secretary of State for Social Services concerning the Infant Life (Preservation) Act; notes the reference in these replies to the fact that the Department of Health and Social Security has circulated to regional health authorities copies of a report by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists entitled, Foetal Viability and Clinical Practice, the publication of which was encouraged by the Department; points out that this report highlights the fact that developments in medical science make it possible for babies of increasingly earlier gestation to be born alive; reminds the Secretary of State that it is an offence under the Infant Life (Preservation) Act to kill any child 'capable of being borne alive'; draws attention to the statement in the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists report that 'in 1984 72 per cent. of live-born infants of 22-27 weeks' gestation born at the Bristol Maternity Hospital survived'; reminds the Secretary of State that many of the late abortions currently performed are, therefore, contrary to

[Sir Bernard Braine]

existing law; and urges him to re-examine existing departmental procedures to ensure that prosecutions are brought against those who perform such illegal abortions and to ensure that all centres where abortions are currently performed are contacted in order make it clear to them that late abortions are illegal.]

The motion draws attention to a report from the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, which the Department of Health and Social Security has circulated to health authorities, which suggests that many late abortions are taking place illegally. As a recent decision in the courts may have thrown considerable further doubt and anxiety on the subject, is it not the Government's duty to make a clear statement to the House on the present legal position, and, if it is unclear, to take appropriate action?

Mr. Biffen: I note what my right hon. Friend says. I shall convey his request that the position be the subject of a Government statement to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Security. However, we are approaching a situation where little Government time is available certainly for any new primary legislation.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip, Northwood): May I repeat to my right hon. Friend my previous request for an early statement on the British national space programme, as it is imperative that Her Majesty's Government make clear Britain's role in Europe's manned future in space and enhancement of Europe's launcher capability? This is the third and last time of asking.

Mr. Biffen: I am not sure whether to be encouraged by that, but my hon. Friend's request is in respect of a profoundly important aspect of our national economy and I shall certainly bear it in mind.

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): Will the Leader of the House at least undertake to try to coax the Solicitor-General into the House next week to make a statement on the injunction agreement that was made yesterday? If he is unable to make a statement at the beginning of next week, will the right hon. Gentleman persuade him to undertake to make a statement once the Committee of Privileges has completed its deliberations on these matters?

Mr. Biffen: I note what the hon. Gentleman says and I think that I would best help the House by leaving the matter where I did in my reply to the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (Thanet, South): Has my right hon. Friend noticed the latest spot of bother for the Channel tunnel project, the spillage of a large quantity of dangerous and poisonous industrial waste at the old workings — an environmental issue of considerable concern for those in the area, including my constituents? Will my right hon. Friend arrange for an early statement to be made on the matter and could that statement please include an explanation of how this sensitive environmental issue, which has been known to the Department of Transport for some months, was suppressed throughout the hearings of the Select Committee and the proceedings of the Standing Committee on the Channel Tunnel Bill?

Mr. Biffen: My hon. Friend should not gloat. I shall draw his point to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and, in any case, he will be available for questions on Wednesday of next week.

Mr. Hugh Brown (Glasgow, Provan): I welcome the right hon. Gentleman's assurance that he will look into the problem with regard to the business on Wednesday and Thursday next week, but is he aware that, although the Business Committee met yesterday, it is only today that we have found out through some press statement that more than 60 amendments are now being submitted by the Government? Does that not confirm my previous view that the Government have acted with arrogance and in ignorance in treating the House in this fashion?

Mr. Biffen: I could not accept such a description of my hon. Friends and myself, but I have said that I shall look at the matter procedurally and that I shall do.

Mr. John Browne (Winchester): Does my right hon. Friend accept that the report of the Environment Committee of the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England points to a real concern in the nation about the physical condition of our churches, particularly our cathedrals and abbeys, which are, after all national assets? Does he also accept that many of us feel that it would be reprehensible to have to pay to pray, even on a direct donation basis, and that something must be done about the funding of these great buildings before it is too late? Is it not time that we had a debate on this subject?

Mr. Biffen: Any debate should properly follow the receipt of the Government's observations on the report; once that has been undertaken, I shall look at my hon. Friend's point.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): May I draw the right hon. Gentleman's attention to early-day motion 365 on the subject of Play Board, in the name of myself and 89 other hon. Members from both sides of the House?

[That this House reiterates its support for the advancement of children's play, as expressed in Early Day Motion 363 which was tabled on 23rd March 1982; welcomes the establishment in 1983 and continued funding of Play Board as the national organisation dedicated to the development of children's play; applauds the achievements of Play Board during the past three years in co-ordinating effort, conducting research producing good-quality publications and especially in providing a much valued advisory and information service to local authorities and their Communities; and urges Her Majesty's Government during its review of support for children's play, to ensure that Play Board is appropriately positioned and adequately resourced to continue to provide these important functions in the interests of all children.]

Will he assure the House that no decision will be taken to change the independence or the status of Play Board before the matter has been discussed and hon. Members have had an opportunity to express their views?

Mr. Biffen: I shall look at the motion to which the hon. Gentleman refers and I shall refer it to the relevant Minister.

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): Referring to the Leader of the Opposition's question about war criminals, does my right hon. Friend agree that there is something distasteful and abhorrent about the activities of so-called "Nazi hunters"? We must look seriously at any genuine

evidence that is produced, but will my right hon. Friend confirm that there is no intention to bend or change our law in order to accommodate their clamour?

Mr. Biffen: I am sure that those considerations will be uppermost not only in the minds of Ministers but in the minds of all hon. Members who wish to live by the rule of law.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): Does the Leader of the House agree that it is both distasteful and abhorrent to hon. Members on both sides of the House that people guilty of war crimes should be living in freedom in Britain and not be brought to justice?

Mr. Stanbrook: Alleged to be guilty.

Mr. Janner: Will the right hon. Gentleman give the House an undertaking that he will ask the Home Secretary to make a statement to the House on how those people entered Britain, how they obtained British citizenship and what the Government propose to do about them now?

Mr. Biffen: I hope that we will not find that assertions of guilt by hon. Members or others are taken as tantamount to guilt. I said that I shall refer the matter to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary in answer to the Leader of the Opposition, and I believe that that also covers what the hon. and learned Member has in mind.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): Will my right hon. Friend arrange for our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science to make a statement next week on the policies of the London borough of Haringey in relation to the promotion of homosexual and lesbian positive images, which allow it to employ four workers at £17,000 a year to promote openly gay or lesbian tendencies and which is likely to lead to the death by fasting of the Rev. David Rushworth-Smith?

Mr. Biffen: Of course I shall refer to my right hon. Friend the point that my hon. Friend has now raised. I am sure that it is one which will excite a great deal of anxiety in the House and outside.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Is the Leader of the House aware of the extreme concern felt by hon. Members on both sides of the House at recent developments in football in London? The Fulham football ground is being forced to merge with Queen's Park Rangers and the asset-strippers that have got hold of Craven Cottage will develop it for luxury flats. Is the Leader of the House aware that, despite the great interest and anxiety in the House, London and among football supporters throughout the country, it has proved impossible for us to raise this matter on the Floor of the House? I know that the right hon. Gentleman is not very keen on the arts. He claims to be a great philistine. I hope that he is not also against the more muscular sport of soccer. Will he therefore arrange for us to have a debate at the earliest possible opportunity?

Mr. Biffen: It is rugby from the Welsh valleys which is the true art form in these matters. I shall consider the hon. Gentleman's request, but I think that he is right that there is no obvious and immediate ministerial responsibility. If the situation in prospect could lead to development plans which would be the subject of appeal to the Secretary of State, that would be even more inhibiting.

Mr. Michael Forsyth (Stirling): When he considers the Opposition's complaint about business for Wednesday and Thursday, and especially the amendment which removes the phasing out of the community charge, will my right hon. Friend bear it in mind that, in Committee, the Opposition argued for precisely that measure?

Mr. Biffen: I am sure that all considerations will be borne in mind.

Mr. Nick Raynsford (Fulham): Further to the right hon. Gentleman's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), will he please give his attention to early-day motion 653 which has been signed by 78 hon. Members and expresses grave concern about the implications for football?

[That this House notes with concern and alarm the reports suggesting that the Chairman of Fulham Football Club is proposing to merge Fulham with Queen's Park Rangers Football Club, and that this would mean the end of Fulham Football Club's existence as a separate club playing football at Craven Cottage; notes that any such proposal would involve a flagrant breach of the undertakings given by the Chairman of Fulham Football Club late in 1986, that under his Chairmanship the Club would enjoy a period of at least two years stability playing at Craven Cottage; notes also with concern the interests of the Chairman of Fulham Football Club in Stamford Bridge Football ground where Chelsea Football Club's continued occupation is also under threat; considers that his intentions through Marler Estates and SB Properties to redevelop both grounds for luxury housing is incompatible with the interests of the football clubs; and calls for an urgent statement from the Minister of Sport on the steps which the Government propose to take to protect the interests of the three football clubs immediately affected, Fulham, Chelsea and Queen's Park Rangers, and other football clubs whose future may be threatened in a similar way in the future.]

Does he accept that the Minister with responsibility for sport should take account of the wider implications for the survival of our national game, which is under threat from the activities of unscrupulous asset-strippers?

Mr. Biffen: The topic is being invested with somewhat lurid rhetoric. I tried to give a reasonably helpful, albeit modest, answer to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), and I think that I have to leave it there.

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Nottingham, North): May I refer my right hon. Friend to early-day motion 63, which calls on the Government to introduce a legally enforceable right to interest to combat the growing problem of the late payment of debts?

[That this House, whilst noting that the Government recognises the increasing difficulties caused by the late payment of debts and congratulating it on its voluntary code contained in the booklet Payment on Time, believes that legislation giving a legal enforceable right to interest on the late payment of debts should be introduced to give teeth to the voluntary code; and notes that in a survey carried out by the Forum of Private Business 84 per cent. of its members supported the introduction of such legislation and that in a survey carried out by the Confederation of British Industry 83 per cent. of its members thought that the existence of a statutory right to interest would result in the faster payment of bills.]

It has the support of 168 hon. Members on both sides of the House. In view of the Government's perceived change of attitude to this issue, is it not time that we had a debate on it?

Mr. Biffen: I shall bear that request in mind. Once we get the Finance Bill, the scope for discussing practically every aspect of the national economy is limitless, and I hope that my hon. Friend can contain his impatience until then, when perhaps we can both be satisfied.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I wonder whether the Leader of the House has seen the City page of last week's *London Evening Standard,* which refers to the setting up, with the blessing of the Bank of England, of a lifeboat for Morgan Grenfell. As he knows, the Government are reluctant to make statements about lifeboats, as was evidenced by their refusal to make a statement about Johnson Matthey banks for about six months. Can we have an assurance that the right hon. Gentleman will press the Chancellor of the Exchequer to make a statement so that we do not have the laggardly behaviour that we had with JMB and so that we know precisely what role the Bank of England played in the establishment of the lifeboat, especially in view of Morgan Grenfell's close connections with the Guinness fiasco? While he is about it, perhaps we can know exactly when those people at the head of the Guinness affairs, those crooks, will be dealt with——

Mr. Speaker: Briefly.

Mr. Skinner: —in the same fashion as those 9,000 miners in 1984-85?

Mr. Biffen: First, I was not aware of the cutting to which the hon. Gentleman refers. Clearly my reading is much more limited and doubtless that much more deprived on that account, but on the issue of substance ——

Mr. Skinner: It is your paper; it is a Tory paper.

Mr. Biffen: I think it depends on what sort of Tory one is. I shall refer the points of substance that were made by the hon. Gentleman to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Mr. Richard Hickmet (Glanford and Scunthorpe): On the Zircon matter, will my right hon. Friend note, in considering whether to ask the Attorney-General to come to the House, that a lot of bogus indignation is being expressed? The terms of the undertaking are extremely wide. They may even be wider than the original injunction, but they relate to technical information and data and to the——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is business questions. Hon. Members must ask about debates or statements.

Mr. Hickmet: I will try to put my question in order, Mr. Speaker. When considering whether to ask the Attorney-General whether to come here, will my right hon. Friend bear in mind the fact that, if Mr. Campbell should breach that undertaking, the effect would be the same as if he had breached the injunction?

Mr. Biffen: I take the point that my hon. Friend makes. It is a perfectly valid one.

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): Since there is continuing public disquiet about the circumstances surrounding the Zircon affair and it is believed that the injunction against Mr. Campbell and others was an attempt to intimidate and stifle public discussion on the main allegation, that Parliament was deceived, and that the military spent a considerable amount of public money on this project——

Mr. Speaker: Order. We must not go into the arguments on this matter. The same principle applies to the hon. Lady as to the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Hickmet). She must ask about time for a debate or a statement.

Mrs. Clwyd: Certainly, Mr. Speaker. Given those circumstances, and since many questions should be answered, to which the public and Members of Parliament want answers, will the Leader of the House consider having a debate on the issues raised by the Zircon affair?

Mr. Biffen: I wholly reject the hon. Lady's opening words, which were not designed to contribute to a calm judgment of this matter, but merely to exacerbate passion. I have given a response to the Leader of the Opposition and I cannot add to it.

Mr. Patrick Ground (Feltham and Heston): In considering whether there should be a statement on the Zircon matter, will my right hon. Friend bear in mind the fact that the Government accepted an undertaking from the *New Statesman* about a month ago that was worded in very similar terms to those that had been given by Mr. Campbell recently? Will my right hon. Friend say or ask whether the Government would have accepted an undertaking from Mr. Campbell after the *New Statesman* undertaking was given in the same terms?

Mr. Biffen: I note what my hon. and learned Friend says. That is a helpful comment, but in a sense I am not here to judge on merits, but only to take note of the request that there may be a statement.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): I want to reinforce the points, made by Labour Members who represent Scottish constituencies, about next Wednesday's business on the guillotined Abolition of Domestic Rates, etc. (Scotland) Bill. It is extraordinary to have 40 amendments tabled to the earlier clauses of this timetabled Bill and to have only two hours in which to debate the matter—including a major change in the timetabling of the Bill itself. I press the Leader of the House to be much more forthcoming than he has already been and to see to it that the Business Committee either withdraws most of those amendments or agrees to a change in the timetable.

Mr. Biffen: I note what the right hon. Gentleman says. I responded in good faith when the question was originally put, and I have to leave it at that.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): My right hon. Friend will recall the sense of outrage in the country recently over sentencing policy. In the light of that, does my right hon. Friend not believe that we should have an early debate to see whether the view expressed by the official spokesman for the Labour party in the other place—that sentencing in this country is too severe and too long—is the official policy of the Labour party? Does my right hon. Friend also agree that prisoners ought to be given more pocket money?

Mr. Biffen: If I disappoint my hon. Friend by not being able to provide Government time for such a debate, none the less, the issue that he has mentioned is of such topicality that I am certain that he can find one way or another of giving it greater expression.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Mine is meant purely as an innocent question. In view of the rosy optimism of the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the

Exchequer regarding the economy, will the Leader of the House arrange next week for an early statement to be made to try to explain to the House and to the country why the Tory vote in Greenwich has apparently collapsed?

Mr. Biffen: I note what the hon. Gentleman says, but I think that comment in all quarters of the House might be more entertaining tomorrow than today.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Darlington): Does my right hon. Friend accept that there are considerable implications because of the Leyland-DAF deal for employment and competition in the motor components industry? Will he undertake that the terms of that deal will be debated in this House before the final joint venture agreement is signed?

Mr. Biffen: I shall look at the point that my hon. Friend has in mind in the more general context of a debate on the motor industry that has been requested by the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): If I can use my words with great care, Mr. Speaker, may we have a statement on the allegations of Captain Holroyd and Mr. Colin Wallace? Is the Leader of the House aware that, in August of last year, the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) corresponded with and telephoned Mr. James Morgan-Harris of Thomas Eggar and Son, solicitors in Chichester——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is asking for a debate. He must not go into the detail of what he might say if there were a debate.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Yes, Mr. Speaker. This concerns allegations unfairly being made against the right hon. Gentleman by security officers in the mid-1970s. Do not these matters require a statement from the Dispatch box and the fullest possible examination, leading to a full judicial inquiry?

Mr. Biffen: It was a request for a statement. I cannot respond immediately without having more information than the hon. Gentleman has given. Perhaps in due course he will give it, and then I shall be able to let him know.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East): Is my right hon. Friend aware that three semi-dangerous patients have escaped from the Towers hospital's regional secure units at Arnold Lodge? As a matter of urgency, will my right hon. Friend arrange either for a statement to be made to the House by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services or at least for a debate during the early part of next week? I consider this matter to be so serious that I have had to forgo voting in the Synod.

Mr. Biffen: God moves in a mysterious way. I shall of course draw the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services to the point that my hon. Friend makes, and I shall be in touch with him.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Will the Leader of the House, as the sort of Tory who believes in honour and true law and order, have an urgent word with the Home Secretary to ensure that the Home Office co-operates fully with solicitors wishing to represent those Tamils who are seeking political asylum here? Will he also ensure that Home Office officials do not make public pronouncements on this case? Members of Parliament are prevented from commenting on this case because of the sub judice rule. Why on earth are Home Office officials allowed to make most disparaging comments?

Mr. Biffen: First of all, I do not, as a Tory, aspire to any of the virtues with which the hon. Gentleman is most anxious to invest me. It is merely that, as a Shropshire Tory, I do not read a London evening newspaper. As to the hon. Gentleman's points about the Tamils, I shall draw all of them to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Will my right hon. Friend consider again the answer that he gave to our right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine)? Is he aware that, in addition to early-day motion 450, there are two other early-day motions on the Order Paper calling attention to the illegality of late abortions? Does my right hon. Friend agree with me that it is not a question of primary legislation being introduced but that it is perfectly clear, even according to official figures, that hundreds of babies are being aborted each year who are well able to be saved, in accordance with medical developments today? We need an urgent debate to find out why the present legislation is not being implemented.

Mr. Biffen: I take note of what my hon. Friend says. However, opportunities exist for the House other than the provision of Government time for a debate. I realise that this topic causes a great deal of concern across the House and in several directions.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): No hon. Member is more alert to occurrences throughout the Kingdom than the Leader of the House, so there is no need for me to ask him to call to mind the incident concerning Mr. Bob Brookes, who admitted the falsification of quality assurance records on welds at Hinkley Point 16 years ago. He will also be aware of early-day motion 656. It was tabled yesterday and already has 25 all-party names attached to it.

[That this House affirms that the integrity of all industrial plant is of prime importance in ensuring that risk to surrounding environs and adjacent communities is minimised; is gravely disturbed therefore to learn of reports that Mr. Bob Brookes has admitted openly that he colluded at the falsification of quality assurance records of arc-welds in pressure pipework at Hinkley Point Power Station some sixteen years ago; pays tribute to the said gentleman for having after all this time the courage to confess the fault by approaching the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate to urge the re-inspection of the welds in question so as to ascertain their present state; urges the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate to arrange such reappraisal immediately; and instructs Her Majesty's Government to grant Mr. Bob Brookes immunity from all prosecution and protection from any victimisation that may result from his public spirited declaration and to offer an unconditional amnesty to any other worker who in the past has felt compelled to bend to similar pressures and now comes forward with the information to redress the wrong.]

The Leader of the House will also know that there was a ministerial statement that welcomed this admission and the making of a clean breast, and it expressed concern about it. However, he should also know that today the CEGB has issued a circular about the incidents that is very prejudicial and highly misleading. It is virtually obstructing an independent inquiry. Will the Leader of the House please ensure that we have some kind of statement

[Mr. Frank Cook]

next week so that we can question the Minister with responsibility for these affairs and explore the matter further?

Mr. Biffen: I take at once the importance of the topic that the hon. Gentleman has raised, and I note what he says about the activities of the Central Electricity Generating Board. I understand that it is carrying out an inquiry at Hinkley Point, but I shall refer to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy the hon. Gentleman's anxiety that there should be a statement.

Mr. John Watts (Slough): Has my right hon. Friend received a request from the Official Opposition for time to be made available for a debate on the popular propositions in their new transport document "Fresh Directions", including the renationalisation of British Airways? If he has not had such a request—the Opposition seem to be reluctant to debate these policies — will he consider providing time for a debate on transport policy generally so that these matters can be considered by the House, as many of my constituents who work for British Airways and who have bought shares recently would like this matter to be clarified in the House?

Mr. Biffen: I must ask my hon. Friend to be patient. I am sure that the Opposition will be so pleased with their policy child that they will be using an Opposition day to have it debated quite soon; but if my optimism proves to be false, perhaps we shall look at it again.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): Is the Leader of the House aware that I rise late in these questions because I seek a statement from the Government next week on a matter that concerns me personally and my right hon. Friend the Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) who served with me in Northern Ireland 10 or 11 years ago? Allegations are going around; there are tapes; there are papers. I shall not go into them, out of deference to what has been said. However, they are extremely worrying to me and to my right hon. Friend. Everybody seems to have a copy of them. I understand that there are to be radio programmes about them. I am not seeking the protection of the Official Secrets Act 1911 to prevent them from being reported, but I am seeking a Government statement about them.

I understand that all the documents in the Holroyd-Wallace case have been sent to the Prime Minister. I listened to the House when the Attorney-General said that they were being investigated. What did that mean? The Attorney-General is a Law Officer of the Crown. I read in the paper this morning at breakfast time that the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee is being asked to receive evidence on the matter next week. I want something to be said publicly about it, because it is extremely disturbing. It is not a fiddling matter. It is as worrying to me personally as the Wright case is in Australia. The Government or the Prime Minister have got to say something about it, otherwise we shall sit and watch it all being said on the "telly", because nobody is concerned.

Mr. Biffen: Of course I take account of what the right hon. Gentleman said and I shall immediately refer those points to my right hon. Friends.

Mr. Rob Hayward (Kingswood): Further to the answers that my right hon. Friend gave to my right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine) and my hon. Friend the member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls), does he recognise the concern that there should be time for a debate on the whole question of abortion, especially as the recent court case raised questions about the time scale of abortions, the rights of fathers and the award of costs when complex legal matters are discussed?

Mr. Biffen: Yes, I take all those points to heart.

BILLS PRESENTED

Parliamentary and Other Pensions

Mr. John Biffen, supported by Secretary Sir Geoffrey Howe, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Hurd, Mr. Secretary Walker, Mr. Secretary Younger, Mr. Secretary Baker, and Mr. Peter Brooke, presented a Bill to provide for the continuance in existence of the Parliamentary Contributory Pension Fund; to confer power on the Leader of the House of Commons to make regulations with respect to that Fund and with respect to the application of the assets of that Fund in or towards the provision of pensions; to amend Mr. Speaker King's Retirement Act 1971; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 90.]

Drug Companies (Accounts)

Mr. Harry Cohen, supported by Mr. Tony Banks, Mr. Richard Caborn, Mrs. Ann Clwyd, Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, Mr. Tony Lloyd, Mr. Max Madden, Ms. Clare Short, Mr. Robert N. Wareing, and Mr. Eric Heffer, presented a Bill to amend the law relating to the accounts of drug companies: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 27 March and to be printed. [Bill 92.]

Orders of the Day

Teachers' Pay and Conditions Bill

Lords amendments considered.

Clause 2

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON SCHOOL TEACHERS' PAY AND CONDITIONS

Lords amendment: No. 1, in page 1, line 16, after "an" insert "Interim".

4.10 pm

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Kenneth Baker): I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Speaker: With this we shall discuss Lords amendments Nos. 12 and 13.

Mr. Baker: These three amendments, which were agreed in the other place, insert the word "interim" into the full title of the Interim Advisory Committee on School Teachers' Pay and Conditions. It allows us to make a clear statement of where the Government stand on the issue of school teachers' pay and why we believe that the interim advisory committee will have an important contribution to make.

I shall not rehearse at length the history of discord and lack of progress over the past few years, but attempts to reform the outdated salary structure have a long and undistinguished history. In 1981, a Burnham agreement established a joint working party to review the salary structure. That went on for five years without reaching a negotiated settlement satisfactory to all parties.

In July 1986, the ACAS-assisted Coventry negotiations led to heads of agreement signed by five out of the six teacher unions. On 30 October last year I made a statement setting out the Government's conditions, promising a huge amount of extra money and outlining a pay structure that we regarded as necessary to reward and motivate good teachers. On 21 November, an agreement was signed by four unions, but within a fortnight two of the initial signatories had withdrawn.

In January, the chairman of the Burnham committee wrote to me saying that a majority of both the management and teacher panels wanted to see the ACAS proposals implemented if the Government would provide the resources. I had made clear the Government's position from the start and the fact that an effective pay structure was needed to recruit, retain and motivate good teachers. As there was no significant move towards meeting my concerns, I made it clear that the Government would not be prepared to make funds available to support the ACAS proposals. Teachers have to recognise the uncomfortable truth that their representatives were unable to agree on a set of proposals that I could defend to Parliament, the parents and the taxpaying public.

I have been considering the alternative proposals about pay structure that have been put forward, including suggestions by the National Association of Head Teachers and the Professional Association of Teachers. I have also been considering the implications of the settlement in Scotland where the outcome is similar in many respects to the Government's proposals for England and Wales. Once this Bill has received Royal Assent, the Government intend to bring forward proposals quickly on both pay and conditions of employment so that the time before teachers receive their 1 January increase is kept to a minimum.

I do not intend in this debate to spell out the Government's proposals other than to say that there will be some important modifications to our earlier proposals on pay while retaining essentially the same structure. The proposals on conditions of employment will be based closely on the ACAS conclusions.

I shall now turn to the Bill. We gave this Bill careful scrutiny in this House last year, where it was debated for very nearly 30 hours. It was also debated for over 20 hours in another place. No guillotine has been used in either House, and is not being used now. It returns to this House with 14 amendments, all of which were agreed without Division. These amendments agreed in the other place were proposed by Members speaking for the Opposition and the alliance, and were accepted by the Government without hesitation.

I want to set out four reasons why an interim advisory committee is the right solution at the present time. First, I do not believe it to be possible for us to establish satisfactory new permanent arrangements while there is such discord among the teacher unions. The ACAS proposals were supported by five, then four, then two, of the teacher unions. In January, when the deputy general secretary of the National Union of Teachers wrote to me on behalf of the teacher unions about future pay determination machinery, PAT and the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers protested about the letter that he had written.

Lord Houghton, who is one of the prominent Labour figures in education, agreed in the other place that an interim arrangement was necessary so that there is time for there to be

"a better order in the arrangements between the unions themselves."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 27 January 1987; Vol. 483, c. 1283.]

He recognised that with such rivalry and discord it would not be possible to arrive at new permanent arrangements now.

The National Union of Teachers and the NAS/UWT have now become united in one respect, in initiating ballots about strike action: an initiative which Lord Houghton described as a "futile form of protest" and which Lord McIntosh, the Opposition spokesman in the other place, described as "unhelpful".

A second reason why the interim advisory committee is the right solution is the lack of any consensus about permanent arrangements. In the other place, the alliance suggested an independent review body. That was its last proposal—a slight variation at the beginning—which I believe is its official position. The Labour party proposed a national joint council that looked remarkably like the existing Burnham arrangements. Both sets of proposals were ambiguous about the right role for the Secretary of State. I am clear that the new arrangements should not be a repeat of Burnham.

However, it is too early to say what will be the right solution—

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): I want to comment on the right hon. Gentleman's remarks about the ambiguity of the role of the Secretary of State. If the right hon.

[Mr. Paddy Ashdown]

Gentleman took the trouble to study *Hansard* or the newspaper articles written by myself and others, he would discover that there is no ambiguity about the role of the Secretary of State, which within our proposals, was fully recognised and given full expression.

Mr. Baker: I have a note of the proposals that were put forward by the alliance in another place. In Committee, the alliance proposed an independent review body, but gave no details, and the hon. Gentleman must recognise that. The alliance did not call a vote. On Report, the alliance proposed an elaborate structure, in which the interim advisory committee was turned into a temporary review body. That is an interesting suggestion. Representative bodies of local authorities and teachers were to be set up, which could each make alternative recommendations to those of the review body by a two thirds majority. The Secretary of State could also make alternative recommendations. If no agreement could be reached, there would be binding arbitration.

My point is that that proposal is elaborate because it sets up a review body and also other committees. The Secretary of State makes recommendations. There is no recognition of something that successive Governments have rightly had to recognise—that in the determination of pay a Government must take a view of the actual amount of money that is available for teachers' pay, because it is such a very large sum.

Mr. Ashdown *rose*——

Mr. Baker: The hon. Gentleman will have a chance to make his point in the debate.

It is too early to say what will be the right solution for the longer term. Some will continue to advocate an independent review body. Others will want pay determination without the involvement of an outside body. What we need now is a breathing space and experience of the interim advisory committee machinery before decisions are made about the longer term. I hope that all parties will be willing to think radically and constructively about the longer term after experience of the interim arrangements in the Bill.

A third reason why the Government favour the arrangements in the Bill is the balance that they provide both for the introduction of an independent voice and for a clear process of consultation involving the parties directly involved. The interim advisory committee will be independently minded. It will receive some guidance from me, but it will not be my poodle. Its reports will be published and will form the basis for thorough consultation.

I have not personally been part of the Burnham proceedings but I am willing to give a commitment that Ministers will see the relevant local authority associations, teacher unions and organisations representing the governors of voluntary schools to discuss reports from the interim advisory committee. I am very willing to become directly involved in the consultations required under the Act which will inevitably have the character of negotiations.

Mr. Christopher Hawkins (High Peak): It would be of considerable benefit to many of the teachers whom I have met if my right hon. Friend would explain the difference between the independent advisory board and an independent review.

Mr. Baker: An independent review body would operate in the way that such bodies now operate—for example, for Members' salaries, for certain officers in the armed forces, for nurses and for doctors. In the interim advisory committee we have provided for a halfway house between negotiations as they were known under Burnham — which have not worked — and an independent review body. An independent review body would, in effect, take away the negotiating rights that the unions specifically want, as expressed by them to me. I have made it clear, and I stress this, that the interim advisory committee is just that —an interim advisory committee. The Government do not look upon it as a permanent solution. But with the experience of recent months and years, it is simply not possible at this stage to find agreement between the various unions. I hope that in the coming months we shall find ways of agreeing to establish a negotiating procedure.

Within the past few weeks, the National Association of Head Teachers has made it clear to me that it wants a separate voice in any future negotiating arrangements. That view has not been put to me by the Secondary Heads Association, which is the other union of head teachers. There are also head teachers in the NUT and the NAS/UWT. The controversial matter has come up many times in teachers' negotiating discussions. This week, when I saw Mr. Jarvis and the delegation, it was said to me quite strongly that the NUT has never agreed with that view. But this sort of issue must be hammered out. The interim advisory committee will give us time for hammering out. I stress that this is a breathing space. It is the sensible way forward.

I emphasise again that, when the interim advisory committee makes its recommendations, I shall be personally involved in the consultations required under the legislation and in the consideration of those recommendations, which will inevitably have the character of negotiations.

The proposals in the Bill—*[Interruption.]* May I just take this a stage further, because there are various stages in how the interim advisory committee will work, as hon. Members know because they now know the details of the Bill. The unions will have an opportunity, when the interim advisory committee is meeting and considering its proposals, to make representations either individually or collectively. When the recommendations emerge from the interim advisory committee, the unions will obviously make representations either individually or collectively. There is nothing to stop them from working with the local authority employer associations if they wish.

The proposals in the Bill allow Parliament to have the final say before there can be a pay increase for school teachers or a change in their conditions of employment: no such parliamentary approval is required under the existing procedures.

A fourth reason why the Government are putting forward the interim arrangements is that further consideration needs to be given to the position of head teachers — the very point which I just mentioned. Of course, the salaries for heads cannot be wholly detached from salaries for teachers, but I envisage that the advisory committee might receive a separate reference on the

position of head teachers. Any new machinery that may be set up might need to provide some separate consideration for head teachers' pay.

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): This morning I was at the mass meeting of the teachers who deplored the absence of the National Association of Head Teachers and the Professional Association of Teachers. They will grab the money when it comes, not having done anything about it. The right hon. Gentleman talks about an interim breathing space. But if someone not unlike the Secretary of State has a grip on one's throat, three years is a curious breathing space because one might be dead at the end of that time. The teachers are determined to struggle against what has been imposed on them. Therefore, the right hon. Gentleman and his Government are responsible for the struggle—*[Interruption.]* I know that rowdy Conservative Members will not allow me to say what I want to say. Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that he and his Government are responsible for the disruption in our classrooms, not the teachers, who want an honourable settlement?

Mr. Baker: I am always pleased to give way to the hon. Gentleman, who is a leading member of the National Union of Teachers, because he is a peripatetic personification of what is wrong with attitudes in the teachers' unions. In his first sentence he said that he was at the NUT-NAS/UWT rally, but was fed up with the National Association of Head Teachers and the Professional Association of Teachers. He could not resist having a go at two of the other unions.

Mr. J. F. Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): It is symptomatic of the whole problem.

Mr. Baker: It is symptomatic of the problem, as my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey), who is the chairman of the Conservative education committee and knows about these matters, said.

In reply to the second point raised by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery), may I say that the Bill provides for the interim advisory committee machinery to operate at least until 31 March 1990. An amendment to require the Bill finally to expire on that date was overwhelmingly defeated in the Lords. But the Government were ready to agree that any year-by-year extension of the Bill beyond 1990 must be by affirmative resolution.

It would be optimistic to expect that conclusions about the longer term will be agreed quickly. We need experience of the interim machinery in the Bill. As the Government spokesman in the House of Lords made clear,

> "If in a new and more settled climate the Government were able to reach a conclusion by early 1989 on the form of future permanent machinery"—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 27 January 1987; Vol. 483, c. 1293.]

new legislation could be introduced which would set up that permanent machinery in good time for the 1990 settlement.

The Government will work towards permanent machinery for March 1990. But if we are to reach conclusions acceptable to the Government, the local authorities, teacher unions and church bodies, there will need to be thorough and radical thinking. It is highly unlikely that conclusions can be reached if we are beset by discord and disruption. The teacher unions must demonstrate that they can act responsibly and take seriously the interim arrangements which the Bill will set up.

In the meantime, we need an interim advisory committee and full opportunity for the employers and the unions to represent their views, with outcomes subject to the approval of Parliament. The education of the nation's children is so important that we cannot afford the futile gestures of strikes against a Bill which has had substantial majorities in both Houses of Parliament. Parents will condemn any such industrial action by teachers who will, in total, be receiving an average 25 per cent. pay increase between March 1986 and October 1987. It is only when the Bill receives Royal Assent that I can bring forward the orders that will allow for those increases to be paid.

4.30 pm

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): By the very nature of our procedure, at this stage we can only debate or amend amendments carried in the House of Lords and, to our great regret and disappointment, the amendments carried in the Lords were relatively trivial, although the debates there were often of high quality. I found the arguments against the Bill totally convincing, but the Government whipped in their overwhelming majority of Peers to vote down the Opposition amendments. As a consequence, the Government have been able to preserve the Bill almost entirely in the shape in which it left this House in December. That means, of course, that it is still a bad Bill.

The Bill still infringes basic rights, in that it removes the ability of local authorities and teachers' organisations to determine teachers' pay and conditions. It still gives unacceptable power to the Secretary of State, including the power until the end of September to impose a settlement under the negative resolution procedure and after September by positive resolution. On Second Reading I described the advisory committee, the nature of which we are debating in this amendment, as the Secretary of State's poodle. Clearly, he does not want a pet, but nothing that I heard during our subsequent proceedings or during the Bill's passage through the Lords has persuaded me to change my mind.

I remind hon. Members about the powers of this so-called advisory body. Its members and its chairman and deputy chairman will be appointed by the Secretary of State, who can also dismiss them. It will be paid for by the Secretary of State and its agenda will be set by him. He can turn down or modify the committee's recommendations.

The Secretary of State made great play of his generosity in consulting the teachers and local education authorities —if they are good boys or something—but I remind him that there is a crucial difference between consultation and negotiation. That difference means that the Secretary of State does not have to take a blind bit of notice of what the LEAs and the teachers say. He can consult them and then impose his own solution and, of course, that is what he intends to do.

Mr. Hawkins: Is it not true that the chairman of a review body would equally be appointed by the Government? This does not appear to be terribly different from a temporary review body—if the hon. Gentleman sees what I mean.

Mr. Radice: I think that even the Secretary of State admitted that this was not quite a review body. A

[Mr. Radice]

Secretary of State must take very seriously the recommendations of a review body, but I am not certain that he will look upon the advisory committee in that way. Most people would agree that independent review bodies are genuinely independent, but I do not think that anybody would seriously contend that this review body will be independent. That is the crucial difference.

Provided the Secretary of State wins the support of Parliament, he can impose whatever settlement he likes. Therefore, the advisory committee not only remains the Secretary of State's poodle, but it is a dog that cannot even bark. If that body is to be as powerless as I believe it will be, that is all the more reason why its life should be short. Unfortunately, the Government did not listen to the arguments advanced by the Opposition and by Cross-Benchers in the House of Lords, or to our arguments in this House to restrict the duration of the Bill to one year. The Secretary of State was not entirely candid in what he said about this. If it were restricted to one year, it would be genuinely temporary. Instead, the Government have insisted that the Bill, and therefore the life of the advisory committee, should continue until 1990.

Despite the amendments tabled in the Lords, the Government have even refused to allow the Bill to lapse after 1990, thus making a mockery of the Bill's long title, which refers to its temporary nature. It could last well into the 1990s. Inserting the word "interim", or the word "temporary" as we suggest, will not change the fundamental nature of the Bill. The only argument for accepting the Lords amendment is that it reminds the House of the Government's half-promise that the Bill, the advisory committee that it sets up and the powers that it gives to the Secretary of State will be replaced by legislation which will return pay determination, at least in part, to teachers and their employers.

Whatever the Government's intention, the next Labour Government will repeal the Bill. We shall set up a new negotiating committee on which teachers and their employers will be represented together, and they will determine pay and conditions. The Secretary of State will be represented on this committee and, subject to parliamentary approval, he will have reserve powers. Unlike the Conservative party and certainly unlike the Secretary of State, we believe that in a democratic society all employees, including employees in the public sector, must have and must retain the right to bargain collectively with their employers. The Bill removes that right and makes no provision to bring it back. That is our charge against it.

Mr. Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden): Is the hon. Gentleman telling the House that he wishes to retain the right of a future Labour Secretary of State for Education and Science—if such a Minister were ever to appear—to invite Parliament to reject a settlement reached through the process which a Labour Government would set up? Does he accept that perhaps a Labour Secretary of State would have to impose his own view?

Mr. Radice: The hon. Gentleman is aware that under present legislation the Secretary of State has power, with the support of Parliament, to set aside an arbitration award. That is the kind of power we are speaking about. There is a case for the Secretary of State under present legislation having some reserve powers. That is not in dispute. We are arguing whether we should give public sector workers, in this case teachers, the right to negotiate and bargain with their employers about pay and conditions. The Bill removes that right.

The Secretary of State tries to justify the fundamental step of removing teachers' bargaining rights by reference to the shortcomings of the Burnham committee and to the need to achieve a lasting settlement of the teachers' dispute. I shall deal with both those matters because the Secretary of State spoke about them again in the debate. As I have said before and have said in this debate, we accept the need for a new negotiating structure. Many times, I and the local authorities and the TUC have reminded the Secretary of State that one of the key features of the ACAS deal was a new agreement on a negotiating structure which for the first time brought together pay and conditions. It also respected the role of the Secretary of State. However, he has not been prepared to discuss these proposals seriously.

In the autumn the Government decided to write the teachers and their employers out of the script for the conceivable future and to replace them by a system of ministerial diktat. The various meetings that the Secretary of State held with the TUC and local authority representatives were sequences in an empty charade in which he has done little more than practise his by now well-known grin. All along, the Government have been determined to do away with collective bargaining. As they see it, that is the end of the matter.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The hon. Gentleman is saying that the negotiations and discussions that I have been having now over two months—in fact, going back three months—are an empty charade. In that case, they were empty as regards the proposals being put to me. Mr. Willis came to see me with the two teacher unions which are affiliates of the TUC. In the document that he left with me, he said that they wanted a joint negotiating council but that many major details were left out.

It is the major details that are so important when a negotiating council is being set up. So important are they that in the past unions have gone to court to try to determine the details of Burnham negotiations. For example, a vital matter was left out as to whether the Secretary of State should establish the parameters of the negotiations, which was the original position under Burnham. I listened carefully to what the hon. Gentleman was saying a moment ago about what the Labour party would do if it was returned to power. He did not address that question. I take seriously the allegation that he is making——

Mr. Radice: I want to make my speech.

Mr. Baker: I am intervening on the hon. Gentleman because he accused me of indulging in an empty charade. I am pointing out that many of the proposals that were put to me were empty.

In reply to the question about the speed of the charade, Mr. Willis wrote to me on 23 January saying that he wanted to discuss urgently the present position; he said that his office would be in touch with mine to make the necessary arrangements. That did not happen until a month later, on 23 February.

Mr. Radice: If he had been honest with the House, the Secretary of State would have admitted that the new

negotiating body for the first time discussed pay and conditions together. It also recognised the position of the Secretary of State. It is up to the Secretary of State to say how many seats he wants on the body. My view is that the concordat which was torn up, with the support of the Conservative local authorities, was an acceptable way of recognising that the Secretary of State is responsible for 46 per cent. of pay. That was a retrograde step, because that should happen.

The Secretary of State did not negotiate seriously. He did not say, "I would like to have *x* number of seats." He just said, "I am not being offered anything serious." Of course he was not interested, because he had made up his mind what he would do. He had his Bill and he did not want to change it. Why should he keep trying to pretend? He is not serious. He may convince one or two people from the newspapers, but he does not convince the House. He should say, "I made up my mind. Of course, I am always a polite man, so I like to meet people who want to see me, but I was not prepared to move." That is the truth of the matter, and he knows it.

The second reason why the right hon. Gentleman wants to get rid of teachers' collective bargaining rights and impose his own solution is the need to get a long-term settlement. We all agree that we badly need a long-term settlement. For well over two years, our schools have been disrupted by the teachers' dispute. I think all of us in the House can agree on the paramount need to restore peace and calm in our schools.

When, in October, after two years of prevarication, the Government adopted a more generous attitude to teachers' pay, there was a glimmer of hope. But since then, that hope has died away. Instead of building on the achievements of the ACAS agreement, the Secretary of State dismissed that settlement out of hand. He did not want it to succeed, and he knows it.

Mr. Pawsey: At some stage in his speech, will the hon. Gentleman join me in condemning the action which has been taken by teachers in disrupting children's education and acknowledging the damage that that disruptive action has done to our schools?

4.45 pm

Mr. Radice: I acknowledge straight away the damage that has been done to children's education over the last two and a half years, as any reasonable person must. I deeply regret the prospect of further disruption. I have said that clearly, but the Secretary of State, who after all is the Secretary of State, has a responsibility. It is his job to try to reach a lasting settlement, but I do not believe that he is going the right way about it. He dismissed the ACAS settlement out of hand. He proceeded to remove the bargaining rights of teachers and put himself in a position to impose his own settlement.

On Second Reading, I warned the Secretary of State —if he looks at *Hansard* he will see that this is the case —that an imposed settlement could lead to renewed disruption. As everybody knows, the three major unions are balloting their members on strike action. As I have said, we deeply regret the prospect of renewed disruption. Schools have suffered enough. But if disruption takes place, the Secretary of State must bear responsibility. He dismissed the ACAS settlement which was freely agreed by employers, teachers and teachers' organisations, instead of building on it. He has not tried to minimise the differences between his position and that of ACAS. He has tried to maximise them. Every time he comes to the Dispatch Box, he emphasises the differences. He has not tried to reach a compromise. He has ignored our warnings about what could happen. Instead, he is intent, as he has just said, on imposing his own settlement.

There was a prospect of lasting peace in our schools. My hon. Friends and I have worked hard to bring that about. Whether because of arrogance, vanity or obstinacy, the Secretary of State has thrown away that prospect. Nobody can pretend that the Lords amendments will significantly improve the Bill or make it easier to achieve lasting peace, but amendment No. 1 will at least be a symbol of our rejection of the disastrous policy which the Government, against our advice, are trying to pursue. It will remind parents and voters that there is an alternative to the Secretary of State's authoritarian policy. That alternative is far more likely to lead to the lasting peace which is so essential if we are widen opportunities and raise standards in schools.

Mr. Pawsey: My only area of agreement with the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) is on the point that Burnham is outdated. I would have liked the hon. Gentleman to be fairer to my right hon. Friend and at least to have acknowledged the considerable sums that my right hon. Friend has found and made available for teachers' pay.

Mr. Radice: I did.

Mr. Pawsey: It would have been good to hear the hon. Gentleman make that point more clearly. My right hon. Friend has put on the table 16·4 per cent, which totals 25 per cent. over 18 months. That is a real achievement which should be acknowledged in all parts of the House.

I have a sense of déjà vu. Therefore, it might be helpful to remember that the basic reason for the Bill was the failure of the Burnham negotiating machinery to deliver a package on pay and conditions that was acceptable to unions, employers and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. Months of meetings, days of deliberation, and hours of argument in London, Coventry and Nottingham only served to highlight the differences between unions. Those differences were highlighted by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery) in an earlier intervention. The inescapable conclusion is that Burnham is finished and must be replaced. As Lord Houghton said in another place on 9 February, "Why is this Bill"——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. The hon. Gentleman must paraphrase any speech made in another place unless it has been made by a Minister.

Mr. Pawsey: I am obliged to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for your advice.

The speech made by Lord Houghton of Sowerby sought to bring out the fact that the normal machinery, after a considerable period, had broken down and it was therefore necessary for something new to be introduced in its place. The noble Lord was saying that it was appropriate for us to be considering alternative machinery. That seems to be an entirely reasonable point.

Mr. Ken Weetch (Ipswich): The hon. Gentleman will know that in November 1986 the teachers' unions agreed on a national joint council. That was a consensus view that emerged from teachers. Can the hon. Gentleman tell me and the House what is likely to emerge in 1990 that is

[Mr. Ken Weetch]

substantially different from what has emerged now as a consensus position on the teachers' side, or is the Secretary of State waiting for the balance of power among teachers to alter?

Mr. Pawsey: The hon. Gentleman is the chairman of the Labour party's Back-Bench education committee and a distinguished Member of the House. However, he must wait and see. He said that he wondered whether relative teacher strengths might alter. I found that to be an interesting and not insignificant point. I notice that the Professional Association of Teachers has been steadily increasing its membership at the expense of some of the older and more archaic-minded trade unions, so let us wait and see. Let us see what happens in two and a half or three years' time.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State proposes an advisory committee that will be reporting to him on teachers' pay and conditions. The amendment before us proposes the inclusion of the word "interim". That seems to be an entirely reasonable suggestion. It provides for real consultation to take place between unions and employers. As Lord Boyd-Carpenter said in another place—I shall not quote his words precisely—there is nothing in the Bill that would prevent teachers and local authorities from negotiating to their hearts' content. He was certain that a suitable and sensible alternative would come forward. The point that he was making was that if a sensible alternative suggestion comes forward, why should any reasonable Secretary of State turn it down? There is no logic in assuming that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State would turn it down.

Mr. Flannery: Does the hon. Gentleman believe that an advisory body from a union over a period of three years is any substitute for free and direct negotiation? Is that his view of democracy?

Mr. Pawsey: The hon. Gentleman must understand the chaos that has existed in our schools over the past two, three or more years. Does he accept that what has taken place over that period is a reasonable way of thrashing out teachers' pay or conditions? The hon. Gentleman must be reasonable sometimes. If he is reasonable, he must accept the fact that Burnham is outdated and that an alternative is needed. He must also accept that a period of two or three years is a reasonable time in which a new system could be put in place.

Mr. Flannery *rose*——

Mr. Pawsey: With the greatest respect, I am not giving way again. I have given way three times already. I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman this time.

Mr. Flannery: Answer my question.

Mr. Pawsey: The hon. Gentleman clearly was not listening. The right to join a trade union remains; the right to strike remains. The right to receive a 16·4 per cent. increase remains. Only the right of membership of a discredited body is taken away.

While the advisory body itself is interim, it gives an opportunity to consider the pay, conditions and status of teachers and to decide what more permanent arrangements might be made to avoid the problems of the past. That interim arrangement will give a reasonable period for thought. It will provide an opportunity to consider the various options and to produce a permanent settlement and solution to the advantage of teachers, the education service and, above all, the nation's children.

Earlier, I referred to the rights of teachers. I subscribe to the view tht the status of the profession has suffered a great deal since teachers became more militant in the early 1970s. I find it significant that it was during the period of their greatest militancy that the greatest erosion of pay took place. I ask teachers to take careful note of the fact that more militancy does not equal more pay; more militancy does not equal more respect; more militancy does not equal greater status. Put more simply, if militancy works, why are teachers, arguably, underpaid and undervalued? Militancy is far more political than practical and I ask teachers outside the House to take careful note of that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. This group of amendments lends itself to a fairly wide debate, but I hope that before long, I shall hear more about the amendments from the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Pawsey: I am grateful, as ever for your exceedingly wise guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the way in which you carefully keep hon. Members on track and are anxious that we refer specifically to the amendments before us and for the fact that we should stress the importance of the word "interim".

Those teachers considering disruptive action——

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Bob Dunn): In the interim.

Mr. Pawsey: Yes, as my hon. Friend says, in the interim —should consider how much that action will further damage their standing in society. They should consider the impact it will have on the opinions of parents and children.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley (Surrey, South-West): Does my hon. Friend agree that those teachers who want to show their concern about the interim measures do so much more effectively today, which is half term, than they do when they make their point and lobby Members of parliament during full term and sacrifice the education of the children entrusted to their care?

Mr. Pawsey: I am obliged to my hon. Friend for that helpful intervention, but I suspect that both she and I agree that the overwhelming majority of teachers are exceedingly responsible and care deeply for the children in their charge.

Above all, I ask teachers to consider the damage that will be caused to children's education should they continue with their disruptive action.

I notice that in an article that appeared in an evening newspaper last night there was reference to the Professional Association of Teachers. I find it significant that that association has come out strongly against next week's half-day strikes. Mr. Peter Dawson, the general secretary, says that the issue of negotiating rights is "light years" away from teaching. That seems to be a particularly apt comment.

I have said before—I am not straying from the amendments—that a teacher's job is a great deal more than long holidays and free periods. Teaching is genuinely a demanding and most responsible job. The 25 per cent. increase in pay that has taken place over 18 months acknowledges two important points. The first is how far teachers' pay had slipped behind and the second is that the

Government recognise and appreciate the work that teachers do. That point was made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in his excellent speech.

I understand the concern expressed by teachers but I urge them to give the advisory committee a fair chance. To reject it out of hand will not help their case. The committee will not have a long life. That point has been emphasised over and over again in the other place. As Lord Elton said —I can quote him directly since he is a Minister:

"What we have here is an interim Bill. I was glad that my noble Friend emphasised that on two separate occasions in the record when we were in Committee, and also amended the Bill either twice or three times on the face to make clear that it was interim, and he has a further amendment today. There is no question that this is an interim Bill."

5 pm

My noble Friend went on to say:

"I feel the noble Lord, Lord Houghton of Sowerby, is absolutely right in saying that this is a functional little Bill to deal with a major problem, not in a dictatorial way by telling the profession and its employers, 'This is how you will do it', but in a permissive and liberal way—using the word in a different sense — permitting the profession and the employers to work out their own solution for as long as it takes, or over a period of three years according to what your Lordships may later decide. That seems to me to be the stark alternative to a dictatorial imposition."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 9 February 1987; Vol. 484, c. 434-35.]

The interim and advisory committee will take evidence from unions and employers alike and there will be a clear duty upon the Secretary of State to consult both sides before acting on the advice given by the Committee. That consultation will play a significant part in the pay process. My right hon. Friend has an obligation to the nation's children. This Bill, I believe, will do much to ensure that that obligation is discharged.

Mr. Ashdown: I listened with some care to the speech of the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey). We all know that this place is well founded on the words of Humpty Dumpty, who said in "Alice in Wonderland" that words meant what he intended them to mean. The hon. Gentleman, in describing this Bill as a liberal measure, seemed to exceed the normal practice in this House of making words mean what one wants them to mean.

On one point, however, I can agree with and commend the hon. Gentleman. He took some care to identify the fact that teachers do a superb job, by and large. I wish we heard more of that here from the Secretary of State. I have heard no such thing as that said by the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth from the Front Bench or anybody in authority in the Government. On the contrary, for the past eight years teachers have been consistently reviled, denigrated and insulted. Many of us believe that, given the attacks on their morale, the lack of resources with which they have to work and the disgraceful conditions in some of our schools, 90 per cent. of our teachers do an extremely good job. Of course there are some bad teachers, but there are some bad politicians too, and I suggest that the balance is in favour of teachers—there are more bad politicians than there are bad teachers.

Mr. Pawsey: Clearly the hon. Gentleman knows a great deal more about bad politicians than I do, but if he had been spokesman on education for a longer period he would have known that my right hon. Friend has consistently said that the teacher force is based on the fact that the majority of teachers do an exceptionally worthwhile job. My right hon. Friend has said that over and over again.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I do not see any reference to bad teachers or bad politicians in these amendments.

Mr. Ashdown: I take the point, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was simply commenting on the speech of the hon. Gentleman who raised this matter in the first place, as is the custom in the House. I will merely say that, if what he says is true, it is a truth which has certainly not got through to the teachers or the general public, or indeed to Opposition Members, so perhaps it ought to be said more clearly and loudly.

The amendment now before us was, of course, put down by my alliance colleague Lord Ritchie on behalf of the alliance parties in the House of Lords. It was one of the two most substantial amendments to get through, the other, of course, being to overturn the Government's original intention to enable the Bill to be extended on a negative resolution of the House. I welcome the amendment for that reason. It is at least some small amelioration in the Bill in a direction which must be welcome to all who are concerned about what the Bill does.

That is not to say, however, that the Bill as amended is one which we find acceptable, and we would wish this matter to be pushed much further. Unhappily, during the process of this debate we have no such opportunity, but I ask the Secretary of State, when he sums up this section of the debate, to give more flesh to what he means by the word "temporary" than he has so far been prepared to do, because this is the centre of our concerns about this Bill.

This Bill is not just about pay and conditions. It is about the fact that the right to negotiate pay and conditions has been removed from a substantial section of the work force. I do not seek to deny the constitutional right of a Secretary of State, in extremis and with the backing of Parliament, to move to impose his will for what he considers to be, and Parliament agrees to be, the good of the nation. But a decent Secretary of State with a proper respect for democracy and the institutions of this country would, at the moment when he sought to take that dire action, be prepared at the same time to limit tightly the extent of his powers and to put in place, or at least start to put in place, a mechanism which would ensure that he did not have to take that extreme power again.

The Secretary of State has refused to do either of those things and our opposition to this Bill is based upon that fact. What is being taken away now is the right of 400,000 teachers throughout Britain to negotiate their pay and conditions on what is potentially a permanent or at least a long-term basis. Rights which they have enjoyed since 1919 are now being removed from them. It is an extremely important and dangerous act by the Secretary of State.

Mr. Christopher Hawkins (High Peak): I am not trying to make a cheap party political point; I am trying to understand the alliance position on this. As I understand it, we are setting up an advisory panel that will recommend pay rises for teachers to the Secretary of State, who can only disagree with those recommendations with the approval of both Houses of Parliament. The alliance is not suggesting free union-local authority negotiations; it is suggesting a review body with a chairman appointed by the Secretary of State, and the Secretary of State can

[Mr. Christopher Hawkins]

disagree with the recommendations of the review body if he wishes, with the approval of both Houses of Parliament. What is the great difference between those two schemes?

Mr. Ashdown: I must ask the hon. Gentleman to study our proposals more carefully. If he does, he will understand that it is perfectly clear that the review body has not been set up as a substitute for negotiations; we see negotiations going ahead within both formal and informal frameworks outside that review body and prior to its consideration. It is there in case those negotiations should fail, in order to assist in unblocking blockages. After the review body has made its recommendations there will be a full process of negotiations and ultimately, if necessary, arbitration on a pendulum basis. These are details of the policy that I can touch on later if the House wishes, but they are perfectly clearly outlined and stand on the debates on this matter in the House of Lords.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I am very glad to be illuminated, to the extent that one can be illuminated by listening to the hon. Gentleman's proposals, as to what his proposals are. What he has described is not a review body. He has described an advisory committee, with collective bargaining somehow going on in the background. It is a most vague and absurd idea.

Mr. Ashdown: If the Secretary of State has taken the trouble to look at these matters at all closely he should know that that independent review body will be independent and will be in existence for consultation and may well take on other matters as well, but in no sense and in no way does it limit the right to or possibilities for full negotiations outside that body. These proposals have been carefully drawn up after consultation. They have been detailed in the House of Lords amendments and in various other articles as well and have received the support of a number of unions: the National Association of Head Teachers, the Assistant Masters and Mistresses Association, the National Confederation of Parent-Teacher Associations, the Professional Association of Teachers have all supported them. The Secretary of State said that he put some weight on the opinion of the National Association of Head Teachers, and it has supported these proposals as a realistic and appropriate way to proceed.

The issue now before us is not pay but civil rights. The removal of the rights of teachers to negotiate their own pay and conditions is an action that I regard as highly provocative, and it is bound to encourage counteraction from those who believe that their rights are being removed. I accept that some in the trade union movement and the teachers' trade unions have thirsted for industrial action, and there may be many who look forward to that idea with some relish. I regret that, but the removal, without replacement or at least a time limit on the Secretary of State's powers, of their rights to negotiate pay and conditions is a deliberately provocative act which is bound to increase the possibility of action that he and I, and no doubt others, hope does not come about.

I hope, as I said to the teachers earlier, that they will decide not to strike, because a strike would damage the schools and their cause. The Bill can be overturned only in the process of a general election, and I much fear that if the teachers were to decide to take strike action they would bring about a result that neither I nor they would seek — the possibility of the Bill's provisions being continued. However, I can understand the teachers' frustration and anger, and their determination to defend their civil rights. Their feeling is only encouraged by the provisions of the Bill.

I shudder to think what would happen if a Labour Government brought before the House a Bill such as this, which sought to impose, without defined limits, the pay and conditions of those who work in the City of London. What a roar of protest would then arise from the Conservative Benches about the imposition of state control on an eastern European model. The Secretary of State has offered two defences. The first is that he will listen to the advisory committee. The second is that this is a temporary measure, a point on which he concentrated a great deal in his speech. Let us look at the history of so-called temporary measures brought before the House. When income tax legislation was first introduced, it was as a temporary measure. The same is true of the Defence of the Realm Acts, the Official Secrets Act 1911 and the Import, Export and Customs Powers (Defence) Act 1939.

We as politicians know that actions ranging from the painting of double white lines by the local authority to major Government laws are called temporary when they are instituted but are, all too frequently, kept going for as long as the powers that be find them convenient. We are properly suspicious in a matter of such importance, and suspect that when the Secretary of State says "temporary" or "interim" he does not mean what he says.

The hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth said that the Secretary of State had made this matter clear, but I merely quote the Secretary of State, who said on Second Reading that he saw the Bill lasting "until 1990". Is three years' duration temporary? The Secretary of State said that the Bill would last

"until 1990—though with powers for its life to be extended on a year-by-year basis". —[*Official Report*, 8 December 1986; Vol. 107, c. 43.]

Is that a reasonable interpretation of "temporary"? Are we not right to suspect that the Secretary of State's intention is to extend the Bill, and the removal of bargaining rights from that group of workers, to a much more than temporary basis?

If that is not so, why did the Secretary of State give himself powers to extend the powers of the Bill on a negative resolution alone? Why has he not set a time limit to the Bill, which would show his earnest to put something else in its place? Why has he not already set in train negotiations or put forward the Government's thinking about what structure might take the Bill's place in a White Paper or a Green Paper or some appropriate forum before bringing it before the House? Why does the Bill give the advisory committee the power to consider long-term matters such as the possibility of regional disparities in pay?

Why is it that when it comes to talking about negotiations, the Secretary of State uses weasel words? For example, he will discuss these matters with the trade unions and with others involved, and these discussions will have the "character" of negotiations. What does the Secretary of State mean by that? Either they are negotiations or they are not. No doubt the unions could conduct industrial action which they could say was not

strikes, but in the character of strikes. What would be the difference? These are weasel words designed to hide the Government's intentions behind a smokescreen.

5.15 pm

The Secretary of State assures us that he will take great note of what the advisory committee says, but the House must reflect on the fact that the members of the advisory committee are appointed by the Secretary of State. They can be removed summarily by the Secretary of State. Their terms are set by the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State tells the committee what it can and cannot discuss, and he can, finally, simply ignore its recommendations. I ask the Secretary of State, and every Conservative Member now present, whether they would be prepared to place their civil rights in the hands of such a committee, appointed by a Labour Secretary of State, which would be the child or poodle of the Secretary of State.

Mr. Christopher Hawkins: The salaries of Members of Parliament are determined in almost precisely the same way as teachers' salaries under the Bill. There is an independent review, and recommendations are made to Parliament that Parliament can turn down. The only difference is that Parliament always turns down the recommendations of the committee set up to look into Members' pay.

Mr. Ashdown: The hon. Gentleman tests the patience of the House when he equates the pay of Members of Parliament with that of teachers. We have the right to discuss our pay and vote on it. Those whose rights lie in the care of the House expect us to speak not for ourselves but as their representatives. I note, because it is a matter of some evidence, that not one Conservative Member has said that he would be prepared to place civil rights of his constituents in a body such as this, with such control over it by a Labour Secretary of State. No silence could be more eloquent.

I cannot understand why the Secretary of State does not understand that by creating this advisory committee, he is creating an instrument that others could use most effectively against what he is seeking. I remind the House that the Secretary of State has the right summarily to dismiss from the advisory committee anybody he wishes. What would happen if there were a change of Government in the next few months and a Labour Secretary of State had the power over the committee that the Secretary of State wants for himself? What would happen if the Labour Government chose to put on the advisory committee people such as Frances Morrell, Deirdre Wood, Councillor Pearman, Derek Hatton or David Blunkett? Is that the instrument that Conservative Members want to create?

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): If by any extraordinary chance the hon. Gentleman's party found itself participating in government, would he propose to abolish the review bodies that make recommendations on nurses' pay or police pay? The existence of such review bodies is important as a safeguard of the independence and interests of the groups of workers with whom they are concerned.

Mr. Ashdown: I take the hon. Gentleman's point, but he knows that the independent review body has been proposed by the Opposition and is not proposed in this Bill. This is an advisory committee. The hon. Gentleman seems not to have followed these matters or to have listened when they were discussed earlier.

My party has put forward detailed proposals in the Lords amendments and I will not go through them now with the House. Suffice to say that they have been supported by the National Association of Head Teachers —on whose opinion the Secretary of State put so much store — by the Assistant Masters and Mistresses Association, the Society of Education Officers, the National Confederation of Parent-Teacher Associations, the Professional Association of Teachers and others.

Our proposals offer a genuine way forward to restore to teachers the right to negotiate over their pay and conditions, and gives the Government an appropriate and proper say in these matters, including the right to determine the overall cost envelope.

When the Secretary of State criticised the proposals on the basis that they were ambiguous about his role, I asked him for details. He then complained that the proposals were too complicated and detailed about the role of the Secretary of State. He cannot have it both ways. The proposals lay out very clearly the role of all parties in this dispute in a way that could set the framework for the future.

This Bill is bad, sad and potentially dangerous. It is bad because it is an instrument to damage goodwill even further amongst the teachers. The Secretary of State can introduce 19 or 1,900 points to define teachers' contracts, but if he does not have the good will of the teachers he cannot put this into effect and cannot produce a decent education system.

It is sad because the Secretary of State, who is sometimes regarded outside this House as having a faintly liberal conscience in this Government, is now seen once again to be doing the bidding of his mistress in No. 10 Downing street in both attacking civil liberties and the role of local government, as he did in his previous job.

This Bill is dangerous because it takes away the civil rights of some people in this nation and places that control in the hands of the Secretary of State. I have no doubt that those powers will be used in future by others if they are established here today.

This is the Secretary of State's last chance genuinely to allay those fears by instituting a replacement for the Bill and some time frame in which that replacement can be made. This is a disgraceful Bill which we oppose. Although we accept this amendment to improve it, our opposition to the Bill as a whole is in no way diminished.

Sir John Farr (Harborough): I address my remarks directly to the amendment which came from another place and has been accepted by my right hon. Friend. I am probably the only Member in the House who does not agree completely with the insertion in these three points of the words "temporary" or "provisional" or "interim", which have the same meaning. If there is merit in this advisory committee and consultation is found to be adequate, why insert the word "interim", which would indicate that it has a limited future?

One uses the word "interim" in various ways. One has to remember in this House in particular that the Stormont Government was an interim Government which governed Northern Ireland for a long time with varying success. If this advisory committee is a success and is meeting the

[Sir John Farr]

demands of the profession and the parents and the governors, and is getting on with the job more successfully than is feared, I would not like to see it swept away.

Other advisory committees have been mentioned; one of them is the University Grants Committee, and it is no push-over. That committee is looked upon with fear and trepidation by the Secretary of State because it is its own master. It is given money, but try to suggest to it—as I used to do years ago before I learned better—that a university or college should get more. One is very soon told that the committee knows its own business and that it is independent, it has its own money and it is up to it to allot it.

There is a chance that after a year or two this advisory committee will make a name for itself. Later we shall be dealing with amendments relating to its composition. Schedule 1 sets out the way in which the advisory committee is to be constituted and to proceed. It may well be found that the committee is fair-minded and is doing a first-class job. I hesitate to accept the Secretary of State's suggestion that we should insert in the Bill, at the behest of another place, the word "interim".

I am pleased to welcome this Bill and to see it on its way because there is so much dissension and strife within the teaching profession in this country. Teachers should get on with the task of teaching children. There have been numerous complaints in my constituency. I have received a letter today from 63 secondary teachers in Leicestershire. They say:

"The Secretary of State in the Teachers' Pay and Conditions Bill is removing the rights of teachers and their employers to negotiate on pay and conditions of service."

Having listened to my right hon. Friend and the debates in the other place, and having accepted the advice of the noble Lord, Lord Houghton—who is still a very skilled and alert and independent parliamentarian, whose word is not to be taken lightly, as my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) said—I would say that the Secretary of State, far from giving himself dictatorial powers, will receive and publish the views of the interim advisory committee and consult the teachers' unions, local education authorities and representatives of the voluntary schools. Any change in pay or conditions of employment will have to be approved by both Houses of Parliament.

This advisory committee could eventually prove to be a winner. I strongly urge the Secretary of State to press on with the excellent job he is doing, because most of the parents in this country are thoroughly fed up with teachers and will never forgive them for the years of education which have been lost to our children. The Bill gives the teaching profession a chance to restore its self-respect.

5.30 pm

Mr. Gordon Oakes (Halton): I tend to agree, but for different reasons, with the hon. Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr) when he wonders why the word "interim" has been inserted. I wonder why it has been put in, because it is purely and simply cosmetic. Would the hon. Gentleman agree that the word "temporary", although it appears in the long title of the Bill—which the word "interim" does not—is meaningless? I was surprised that the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) said, no doubt in support of his SDP colleague in the other place, that two amendments were made there. To my astonishment he said that this was one of them. I was equally astonished that the hon. Gentleman named the process of having the affirmative procedure rather than the negative procedure as the other amendment. What has happened is a disgrace. A thoroughly unacceptable Bill came before the House, the Government marshalled their troops and passed the Bill through its first stages. I was amazed when the Secretary of State said that there was not a single Division in the other place and that everything seemed to be done by agreement.

The Minister of State, Department of Education and Science (Mrs. Angela Rumbold): There was no Division on the "interim" provision.

Mr. Oakes: In that case, I withdraw my remarks. I find it amazing that the other place let many of these provisions through. It has a dual role as a revising Chamber and as a guardian of the nation's constitutional rights against dictatorial action. I suggest that this is dictatorial action.

Today at Question Time the Prime Minister seemed to say in a reply that teachers had never had it so good. No doubt the tens of thousands of teachers outside the House today, did not come to lobby their Members of Parliament but to thank them for never having had it so good.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Teachers have it better than they did under the Labour Government. I know because I was in the profession then.

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton (Fife, Central): The teachers call the hon. Gentleman a ventriloquist's doll.

Mr. Oakes: I think, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I have the Floor.

The unions dislike the Bill intensely, and not for some of the reasons that have been given by Conservative Members. They dislike it, not because they are squabbling among themselves, but because it is a fundamental attack by the Government on free collective bargaining. Even if the other place saw fit to let it through, I doubt whether the International Labour Organisation would be happy to see such legislation introduced in a democratic country.

Mr. Hawkins: Will the right hon. Gentleman explain for the benefit of the public the negotiating rights and collective bargaining involved in the pay settlement of the police, of judges, generals, nurses, doctors, dentists and Members of Parliament?

Mr. Oakes: The hon. Gentleman keeps talking about hon. Members' pay. We determine our pay. For the other groups, that has traditionally been a matter for negotiation. They have different types of review body. With this review body the Secretary of State has powers to appoint, dismiss and ignore. He can do anything with a report from this interim body.

The hon. Member for Yeovil also said that the other place had taken the important step of changing the procedure by which the legislation can be extended from the negative to the affirmative procedure. I raised that point on Second Reading. Many years ago, we passed legislation on protection against terrorism. Every year it is subject to the affirmative procedure and year after year it is renewed by the House. If the Government genuinely believe that this is a temporary Bill to overcome a temporary crisis, why have they in both Houses refused amendments from my hon. Friends and insisted on retaining that power of continuation? That would prove

more conclusively than the word "interim" that they believe that the measure is for only two or three years. The Government insist on retaining the provision because they want the Bill to be permanent and the Secretary of State to have this power.

The measure affects 400,000 teachers at present. I have no doubt that the Secretary of State for the Environment would dearly love to emulate this legislation for local authority unions. It is not insignificant that when the Government want to change the rating system they use Scotland as a guinea pig. They have decided to try it on the Scots and see what happens, and we shall debate that next week. If we have the misfortune to have a Conservative Government after the general election, they will introduce a similar change in the rating system in England and Wales.

As a member of the Transport and General Workers Union I must warn the trade union movement at large that this, too, is a guinea pig measure. It is the teachers' unions this time, but it will be other unions next time. The measure, far from being an expedient to deal with critical circumstances, is a guinea pig for introducing yet more anti-union legislation. It is a disguise and a cover.

I am surprised that the other place passed the Bill and I am amazed that another clause was not amended in either this House or the other place. That is the clause that allows regional discrimination. On Second Reading I suggested that, if the Government intended that, they should use the phrase "local education authority" or words to that effect. Instead——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman is anticipating later amendments. He must stick to the amendment that we are discussing.

Mr. Oakes: I agree that I am straying. I know that time is pressing and I shall return to the point.

The word "interim" is purely cosmetic. This is an extremely bad Bill and I hope that by a vote later we can demonstrate our contempt for what the Secretary of State is doing to trade union negotiations.

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): I welcome the amendment made in the other place, stressing as it does the interim character of the advisory committee which it is proposed to establish. The right hon. Member for Halton (Mr. Oakes) cast doubt on the genuineness of the Government's intention that it should be an interim arrangement, but I am perfectly certain that no one has been more reluctant than my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to resort to the powers that the Bill vests in him.

Obviously, it is preferable that teachers' pay, conditions of service and career structure should be determined through negotiation rather than by order. However, in the event, my right hon. Friend had no choice but to take these powers. Indeed, it was his duty to do so. It was imperative that a settlement of this long-running, damaging and distressing dispute should be achieved. The teaching profession needs to have questions resolved about its career structure. Given the atmosphere that had developed, it was plainly necessary to provide a breathing space to enable passions to cool. Moreover, all are agreed that the Burnham structure must go.

The problem has been the failure to achieve agreement within the Burnham committee, the proceedings of which have been characterised, sadly, by vitriolic disagreements between the teachers' unions at, for example, Coventry and Nottingham. An impasse had been reached and my right hon. Friend was right to require an interim set of new arrangements to be introduced, giving us time to reflect coolly and to make progress on a new set of arrangements. That became plainly necessary when the negotiations under the aegis of ACAS failed and the pressure for it was particularly strong because of continued disruption.

Within Burnham, a search for a new structure had gone on for five years. It must be reasonable at the end of a five-year unsuccessful search for better arrangements to approach the matter in a new way. Sadly, over the past two years we have seen sporadic but fairly intensive disruption of schools. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery), who I am sorry to see is no longer present, sought to blame the Secretary of State for that disruption. Indeed, the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) also attempted to lay responsibility for disruption at the door of my right hon. Friend and perhaps his predecessor.

In reality, those who make that assertion demean teachers. Teachers are responsible adults who must take their own decision whether or not in any circumstances it is acceptable to pursue a pay dispute by dint of damaging the interests of the children who are their charges. In my judgment, that cannot be right. That view is widely and strongly held by the public. The teachers have done their professional standing and esteem no good in the eyes of society through their disruption. If they again resort to such disruption they will do themselves further damage, and I hope that they will not.

It became inevitable that my right hon. Friend would have to take interim powers at the moment when the Labour-controlled employers threw over the concordat that had existed for so long, which gave the Secretary of State's representatives on the Burnham committee adequate leverage to represent his proper responsibilities and concerns. They are real. The Secretary of State must have leverage in any negotiating machinery which is established. He is the trustee of the nation's interests in a variety of respects. He is a trustee of the taxpayers' concerns. He is a trustee for our children and their education. He is a trustee on behalf of the community. The community has an interest in the undisrupted provision of high-quality education for a range of reasons, including the well-being of the economy and law and order.

The local education authorities, similarly, should regard themselves as trustees of the nation's interest in the quality of education, as should the teachers. It was deeply regrettable that the employers plucked a figure out of the air and said that they were not satisfied with the substantial extra amount of money that my right hon. Friend had laid on the table. They wanted an extra £85 million. It is easy to say, "We will have an extra £85 million," when they are not footing the bill. Sadly, teachers' representatives refused to accept a career structure that offered sensible incentives.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is straying rather wide. He must address his remarks to the amendments.

Mr. Howarth: I am grateful for your caution, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

In the interim phase that my right hon. Friend is proposing, during which we can think more calmly and

[Mr. Howarth]

fruitfully, the teachers' unions can reflect better on the question whether there should be a career structure that gives incentives — for example to teachers who are willing to take on extra responsibility, and whose skills and qualifications are in short supply.

The fears of Opposition Members and the teaching profession that this will not prove to be an interim arrangement can be allayed. If they speak the truth as they know it, they know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has great personal good will towards the education profession and teachers. That is manifest in his impressive achievement in negotiating with the Treasury to make it possible to offer an extra £608 million for teachers' pay.

Mr. Ashdown: I am sorry to have to disabuse the hon. Gentleman of his belief that the Secretary of State enjoys the confidence of teachers. I have travelled up and down the country — only for about a month since I took on my present job — and spoken to many people. The constant message that I have received is that the only person who could have made the previous Secretary of State for Education look like a good guy is the present one.

5.45 pm

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Gentleman is entitled to make his cheap debating points and make personal and defamatory assertions about by right hon. Friend in the interests of gaining some political advantage and playing to the gallery. However, nobody will admire that intervention.

The good will of my right hon. Friend has been manifest in the money that he has made available and in his urgent desire to offer more incentive posts to the teaching profession than the other parties in the negotiations have sought to offer. My right hon. Friend will correct me if I am wrong, but I understand that under his proposals, which are still available, he will make available 140,000 additional incentive posts, compared with the mere 85,000 that the ACAS negotiations put on offer. Indeed — this is the most extraordinary matter — that compares with a current figure of 105,000. The ACAS proposals would have reduced the number of incentive posts available for good teachers.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is discussing details of the proposed arrangements. That cannot be in order on this amendment.

Mr. Howarth: I will do my best, in my remaining few remarks, to keep strictly in order.

The anxiety being expressed by teachers' representatives is less about whether this is an interim arrangement than about whether negotiating rights will be restored. I am sure that my right hon. Friend intends to do his best during this interim period to set up the machinery for genuine negotiation. In the meantime, I am willing to accept, as are many teachers — this is a widespread view — that he will wish to make consultation a genuine reality. By his willingness to accept that the recommendations of the advisory committee should be published, he indeed makes that inevitable. The good points that the teachers' representatives will put in the process of consultation with the advisory committee, and subsequently with my right hon. Friend, will be published and cannot be ignored. The independence of the advisory committee need by no less than the independence of, for example, the University Grants Committee.

I ask my right hon. Friend to tell the House that he will search urgently to find a new structure, and that it is his hope that we shall find a new structure within the three-year interim period. The Government will, I am sure, search urgently to shorten this interim phase, but one of the conditions of success of that undertaking must be that members of the teaching profession put pressure on their unions and representatives to bury their differences and be more constructive in their approach to achieving a structure in which all parties can be sensibly and appropriately represented; in which all parties can genuinely negotiate and build on the good progress that has been made; in moving the teaching profession closer towards salaries that adequately reflect the importance of what they do and the good quality of their work; and which establishes clear definitions of their responsibilities and of the manner in which they will fulfil society's legitimate and optimistic expectations of them.

Mr. Weetch: I shall be very brief in my speech and state my conclusions in the introduction.

My first point follows the one made by the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth), who said that he believed that the Government would search urgently for a more appropriate and apposite form of negotiating machinery. Experience is doubtful on this point. When people assume dictatorial powers with promises to hand it back to democracy later, the hon. Gentleman will find that it is seldom handed back. Experience suggests that, when people assume dictatorial powers, those powers, if they prove convenient, are consolidated; they do not disappear.

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Gentleman mentioned democracy. Will he acknowledge that the proposal in the Bill that any new pay settlement should be approved by the House is an advance? What could be more democratic than that?

Mr. Weetch: The hon. Gentleman has been in the House long enough now to know that, when the Government say that they have the approval of Parliament, they mean that they have the support of the Whips' machine in getting the requisite number of votes through the Lobby with a built-in Government majority. It is true to say that the Remuneration of Teachers Act 1965 had some disadvantages in that respect and this represents a small advance.

But let me draw the attention of the hon. Gentleman and the Secretary of State to the Government's statement on Second Reading in the other place. The point was made that most of the fundamentals of the dispute with the teachers have already been settled — the place of the Secretary of State in the negotiating machinery, the fact that there must be an equitable balance of power and the fact that conditions and pay must be negotiated at the same time. I would be the first to concede that rough edges remain and more negotiations are needed, but nevertheless the landmarks have been put down and it would not have been beyond the wit of man to reach some consensus.

In November last year, a consensus emerged with the support of ACAS, whose expertise is to be directed in such an area. But the Secretary of State, in a one-sided statement, said that what had emerged as the consensus in

November was the same thing as the old Burnham machinery. I doubt whether that was correct. That statement has not been challenged, but I do not believe that that is so.

The hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon concentrated on the right things, so let me take up another of his points. Why is the Secretary of State doing this? The dispute has a certain amount of artificiality about it. The Secretary of State wants to determine the financial structure of the profession. I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman should say that 140,000 posts of responsibility would be better than 80,000. In other spheres of policy, the Government are trying to draw comparisons with a commercial and industrial model—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I pulled up the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) and I must do the same with the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Weetch: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker; I shall not stray any further.

We have had today one of the biggest teachers' demonstrations and rallies. The teachers are amazed that the dispute still stands, when they are so willing to compromise on a settlement. The Government are trampling across the negotiating machinery for ulterior purposes. If the Bill is an attempt to lift the low morale in the schools at the moment, the Government will fail because the Bill is a recipe for continuing discontent.

Mr. David Crouch (Canterbury): This is the first time that I have attempted to speak on this important measure. It is not a Bill that I like much, but I voted for it. That is the part that I have played so far, I do not like the Bill because I do not like having to take such measures. The right hon. Member for Halton (Mr. Oakes) spoke of 400,000 teachers being put at a disadvantage. I voted for the Bill that I do not like because several million children have been put at a disadvantage for the past three years, along with their parents. I cannot believe that any hon. Member is not concerned first about our children's education. We have for so long watched the negotiations and talks drag on and fail and fail that eventually it was necessary for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to take some measure.

I am speaking in response to a lobby of teachers from my constituency of Canterbury. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will know that I wrote to him some weeks ago when I received a similar lobby of 68 teachers from one school in my constituency of all political shades and all extremes and non-extremes of view expressing their anxiety about the Bill. I told them what I said again this afternoon, that the Bill is necessary.

I now realise what is really sticking in the teachers' gullet. It is not that the Secretary of State is taking powers to do their job for them to negotiate their pay. They are worried that this might become a permanent arrangement. They are worried that, when the Bill becomes an Act and goes on to the statute book this afternoon, it might stay there. In the telling phrase of those highly intelligent teachers, whom I respect, the Bill is like a red rag to a bull to the moderate teachers in my constituency. They further told me that it had unified the teachers' unions against the Bill, not because of any proposed pay settlement—that was not the problem—but because they felt that the Secretary of State appeared to be taking draconian measures.

I told the lobby that the Bill is only a temporary measure. I took the words that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister used this afternoon when she described the Bill, I think absolutely properly, as a temporary measure. I see it as an interim measure. That is what this important amendment from the other place is about. It would insert the word "interim" to describe the advisory committee and that is an important addition, because it could help to calm the present anxiety, even anger, of the teachers. They are angry about the Bill going on to the statute book and staying there; that is not the intention of my right hon. Friend and the Government and that was reinforced by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's statement this afternoon.

I strongly welcome and support the amendment. If it is understood in the mass lobby and in the common rooms throughout Britain that this is a temporary measure, the steam might be taken out of the present pressure on the Government. We should stress the temporary nature of the Bill and that is why I have sought to make this brief intervention.

I told the lobby this afternoon that it is not in the nature of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to act as a dictator. He is the last person whom I would ever expect to act in such a manner and the lobby agreed with me. I can tell the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) that the teachers did agree with me. It is not in the nature of teachers in my constituency to behave in a disruptive manner. Canterbury is not that sort of place. I see to it that it is not.

Mr. Flannery: What about Thomas à Becket?

Mr. Crouch: I do not think that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would allow me to digress on St. Thomas à Becket, but perhaps there will be another occasion when I can draw attention to the difficulties that he encountered with the monarch of that time.

Mr. Radice: Is the hon. Gentleman trying to talk out the Bill?

Mr. Crouch: No, I am not. I shall even take advice from the hon. Gentleman and not try to delay the House.

Let us proceed, because it is important that the Bill should be put on the statute book as a temporary measure. "Interim" is the key word. I stressed that this afternoon to teachers from my constituency. Unlike the hon. Member for Yeovil, I am not suspicious about my right hon. Friend's intentions. I do not think any hon. Member is suspicious of my right hon. Friend's intentions on this.

I said that I rose to speak in response to a lobby. It is not wrong to sit here waiting to be called to speak when one has been approached by a lobby. That is how Parliament works, and that is how it should be. That is what I am doing tonight. That is my response. The Bill is a response to the failure of the teachers' unions in the past three years to find a solution to their problems. That is why I welcome the Bill and the amendment.

6 pm

Mr. Flannery: The hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Crouch)—that place of murder—always makes a highly civilised speech and he knows that I have great respect for his approach. He gave a speech with the wrong conclusion. The tenor of his speech was to recognise that teachers, who are on holiday at the moment, saw fit to come here because they feel so deeply about the Bill. They came here at just

[Mr. Flannery]

a few days' notice to make their feelings clear. They did not say that they would take any form of action other than the democratic procedure.

The Secretary of State and his predecessor have achieved something that I in a lifetime in teaching have never managed—they have unified the profession. Never before have the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers, the National Union of Teachers, the Assistant Masters and Mistresses Associaton and the Secondary Heads Association come together on one issue. If that is not a lesson to the Secretary of State, I do not know what is, but I doubt whether he has learnt the lesson.

The Secretary of State has embarked on a venture which can only be catastrophic for all of us. I have great difficulty supporting the amendment. We could argue about the difference between interim and temporary. The amendment is a palliative. We do not know precisely what it means, but it serves notice on the right hon. Gentleman that there is a struggle of which he should take notice.

The struggle is about the deprivation, for the first time that any of us can remember, of a union's right to direct negotiations. That happens all over eastern Europe, the Soviet Union and China, and it has occurred under some very Right-wing regimes. It is salutary and terrible that it is about to happen here. The entire trade union movement is watching this slender debate, because we are effectively discussing the right of a union to exist.

Unions exist to negotiate freely and fully with employers. That is the result of 200 years of struggle. The Government are blithely reneging on promises that they have previously made. Teachers will struggle on. The Conservative party talks piously about children and how it does not like them being harmed, but only it is harming children. I hope that the Government heed better counsels, reach a proper agreement with teachers and withdraw the advisory committee, just as we shall withdraw the entire Bill when returned to government.

Mr. Greenway: It is nice to hear the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery) talk about the children. That is more than can be said for the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), who rightly spoke of good teachers. We have good teachers. I have heard my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State say that often. The hon. Member for Yeovil did my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister a serious injustice and failed to mention children at all. He must learn to take account of them.

Mr. Ashdown: The hon. Gentleman is wrong. He should read my speech tomorrow.

Mr. Greenway: Children must come first. Education in schools is about them and their needs, aspirations and futures. It concerns what they can achieve for themselves and the country, how the teaching profession can assist them and how teachers can be rewarded properly.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Crouch) that we must stress the short-term nature of the amendment. That is crucial, as is the content of the advisory committee.

I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will take account of the vital need for the advisory committee to represent people who understand the teaching profession, how it works and the needs of schools. I hope that there will be teachers on it. The committee must comprise weighty people. The fact that the measure is short-term puts extra pressure on my right hon. Friend to ensure all parts of the profession are represented. It is crucial to make this point although it may be made again later. If the House forgets that this is not a permanent arrangement and falls into the trap of letting my right hon. Friend forget it, the profession will face unnecessary problems.

The Bill has become necessary as a result of the profession's disunity. Lord Glenamara, no less, a former Labour Secretary of State, told me in more than one conversation that the teachers, because of disunity between unions and within unions, had themselves scuppered Burnham. The great problem is what should succeed it.

The amendment concentrates the mind on the fact that the arrangement is interim, on the importance of the content of the advisory committee and on what should succeed Burnham. The unions should already have discussed the successor to Burnham, but they have been too busy fighting a rearguard action. If they do not get down to considering that serious matter, they will not be ready for the next stage after this interim arrangement has ended, as it surely will.

Mrs. Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): I would not be prepared to support the amendment if it was a permanent arrangement. I am aware that many admirable people, such as doctors, nurses and members of the armed forces, have no direct say in their pay negotiations, but teachers always have and I hope that they will have such rights again in the near future.

Teachers have unfortunately been unable to agree on a package of pay and conditions.

Labour Members have said that there was consensus at Nottingham. That is simply not so. Only two out of the six unions represented there supported the ACAS agreement. In those circumstances, we need the breathing space that this Bill will provide to sort out the new negotiating machinery for the teaching profession. It is on that basis, that it is an interim arrangement, that I support the Bill tonight.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: My hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Mrs. Kellett-Bowman) spoke with great spirit. I understand that the House does not want to divide on this amendment, but it would be a discourtesy if I did not very briefly acknowledge the points that were made by several hon. Members on both sides of the House. The points varied between those made by the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) and by other Labour Members who said that they did not want a committee under any circumstances, to the points made by Conservative Members who said that they were prepared to support the Bill on the understanding—I mention particularly my hon. Friends the Members for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey), for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway), for Lancaster (Mrs. Kellett-Bowman) and for Canterbury (Mr. Crouch), who all made exactly the same point that it was an interim proposal. I wish to emphasise how important that is in the Government's thinking.

I have had to act to bring in the measure because of the failure and the background of the negotiations with Burnham during the past few years, which my hon.

Friends the Members for Rugby and Kenilworth and for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) mentioned. I had to do it. I do not seek dictatorial powers. I wish to emphasise that. I will search for a new structure because we need it. There is no doubt about that, but we must have a negotiating mechanism that works.

I listened to the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown).

Mr. Ashdown *rose*——

Mr. Baker: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I shall not give way to him now because I gave way to him earlier.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) *rose*——

Mr. Baker: I have just said that I will not give way. The hon. Member for Yeovil can ask me his question later in the evening. I listened carefully to his views and I also read the debates containing the arguments that the Liberals and the alliance put forward in the House of Lords. They moved from an independent review body in Committee to a different set of proposals on Report——

Mr. Ashdown: That is simply nonsense. I wish to ask the Minister a single question. Would he consign the civil rights of any one of his constituents to a Secretary of State for Education and Science who came from the Labour party, and who was invested with the powers to which he has helped himself in this Bill? Yes or no?

Mr. Baker: The hon. Gentleman has not read the Bill. The Bill is not a question of consigning civil rights. If the hon. Gentleman read the Bill, he would understand that the rights of trade unions are not changed in any way, shape or form. He does not know the Bill any more than he understands the proposals put forward by the Labour party. The hon. Gentleman was putting forward proposals in which he tried to combine collective bargaining with an independent review body. The proposals that have been put forward by the alliance in this matter simply will not work.

The reason why we need an interim advisory committee —I emphasise to Conservative Members that this is an interim measure — is confirmed very much by Lord Houghton, whose words I paraphrase. He said that it seemed to him that finding a suitable form of machinery would probably take a little longer than 1988 because there were two issues to be solved before satisfactory negotiating machinery could be devised. First, there was the role of the Secretary of State—he recognised that—and secondly, there had to be a better order in the arrangements between the unions themselves. The latter part of that would be very difficult indeed, said Lord Houghton.

When that emerges, we can move to a more permanent structure involving negotiating.

Question put and agreed to.

Lords amendment: No. 2 in page 1, line 20, at end insert

"( ) The members of the Committee shall include persons having relevant knowledge of or experience in education."

Read a Second time.

6.15 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I beg to move, as an amendment to the Lords amendment, at end add

'and who have served on the Burnham Committee'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient also to take, amendment (b) to the Lords amendment, in line 3, at end add

'and shall include members or employees of organisations representing school teachers, associations of local education authorities, bodies representing the interests of governors of voluntary schools and organisations representing the interests of parents.'.

Mr. Bennett: The procedure that we have had to go through this evening is not especially satisfactory. It might have been far better had we had the opportunity to vote, as we used to have, on whether we should consider Lords amendments, rather than having to weave our remarks around the amendments today. I am conscious of the fact that it would be convenient for the House to try to vote at about 6.30 this evening. Therefore, I will speak briefly to this amendment and try to ensure that Labour Members especially get a chance to express their concern about the legislation.

The Minister has again given us his half-performance, all front and Hollywood set and Mr. Smiles, but his performance had no depth. He has not told us what he intends to do. It has now been four months since the Government announced this legislation. That is four months in which most Secretaries of State could have got on and got negotiations going. However, all that the Secretary of State has done is to tell us that, even at this stage, he is not sure whether the new advisory committee will take on the character of a negotiating body. He told us that he does not know what he will do for the long term. He certainly cannot give us any evidence that he is trying to bring harmony back into our schools.

The right hon. Gentleman is left with a position where he is creating bitterness and anger in most of our secondary schools and creating a great deal of apathy in the primary sector. He is left with a position where it will be difficult to persuade teachers to go back to giving their enthusiastic best, which is what we need for all our children.

The Secretary of State must get back to a negotiating position, and to do that he must get back some of the expertise of the Burnham committee. He may feel that he can impose a settlement, but he must remember that the negotiations on teachers' pay are extremely detailed and complex, and although we may all have had criticisms of the Burnham committee, it has, on the whole in the past, been able to sort out the nitty-gritty. The purpose of our amendment is to stress to the Government that they must call on that expertise in this interim period.

The House now wants the opportunity to vote for this amendment and to express its disgust at the way in which the Government have treated the negotiations. The Government have taken no steps to restore good will, and to create the partnership that we so badly need between teachers and parents, so that children will get back to a first-class education system. That is what we all need.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I understand that the House wants to come to a fairly quick decision on this matter. Therefore, I will not seek to detain it with a long speech.

On Second Reading in another place, a variety of views were expressed about whether members of the interim advisory committee should be independent or whether they should be representatives of particular groups. Lord McIntosh, who repeated the views of the main Opposition in Committee, was among those who said that they would

[Mr. Kenneth Baker]

like the advisory committee to have a representational membership. That was a minority view in the other place as a variety of speakers referred to the importance of the independence of the advisory committee. The Government believe that it is essential that the interim advisory committee should be an independent and not a representational body.

I assure the House that I shall appoint independent-minded members to the interim advisory committee as I have done with bodies such as the University Grants Committee, which performs a controversial task without evidence of political bias. I will take that responsibility seriously and I shall consider any suggestions about the membership that are put to me.

It would not be right to appoint nominees or representatives of groups with direct interest in the committee's recommendations. In particular, a system of nominated members might lead to the use of mandate and recall, quite contrary to the principle of an independent committee.

Although we do not accept that members of the interim advisory committee should be appointed in a representational role, we fully recognise that some of its members will need to have relevant knowledge or experience of education. Hence our willingness to see an additional subsection in the Bill stating:

"The members of the Committee shall include persons having relevant knowledge of or experience in education".

I have answered the points made, but I wish to emphasise that the members who will be appointed to the committee will be of an independent turn of mind and not representational.

Mr. Greenway: Will my right hon. Friend consider appointing those who have been in the teaching profession, because they know how it operates?

Mr. Baker: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Ashdown: In normal circumstances, I should be rising to move the amendment that stands in my name and those of my hon. Friends. However, I understand that hon. Members have other pressing engagements and that there are good reasons for seeking to draw the discussions on this amendment to a close by 6.30. If the matter is pressed to a Division, I shall be happy to vote in favour of the amendment that was moved by the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett).

At this point I wish only to draw the attention of the Secretary of State for Education and Science to the points that are contained in our amendment, because he did not address them in his speech. The purpose of the amendment is to have it on record that the voice of teachers, parents, local education authorities and governors of voluntary schools shall be heard. That is particularly important in the case of two special groups. I refer first to the teachers.

The Secretary of State could say, as he has just said to the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway), that teachers might be included and that he will consider the matter. However, the concern of teachers is that they may not be included. Indeed, they suspect that, when the advisory committee is set up, the voice of teachers will not be heard, for reasons that have already been rehearsed in sufficient detail.

Mr. Christopher Hawkins: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ashdown: No, the hon. Gentleman has intervened many times during our discussions today and twice in my previous speech. In the interests of time, therefore, I shall not give way to him.

In view of the way in which teachers' rights have been diminished by the Bill, teachers are rightly suspicious that their voice will not be heard on the advisory committee. If the Secretary of State genuinely intends teachers' representatives to be included on the advisory committee, he would give very little away by saying so now. Therefore, I invite him to say that teachers will be included, not that they may be included, on the advisory committee.

The Secretary of State has to recognise that for various reasons, which we do not have to rehearse now, the trust of teachers has been shattered by the actions of this Government and the Secretary of State. They are deeply suspicious about the Bill. If the Secretary of State genuinely hopes that there will be peace in the schools, he ought to reassure teachers by saying now that the voice of teachers, through their representatives, will be heard on the advisory committee.

If he refuses to say so clearly and unequivocally, we must assume that his intention is not to include teachers' representatives on the advisory committee and that instead he intends to ensure that it is constructed in such a way as to ensure that the voice of teachers is not adequately heard. Therefore, I ask the Secretary of State to say that teachers' representatives shall be included, not just that they may be included on the advisory committee.

Secondly, I find it strange that parents are mentioned nowhere in the Bill. We have heard so much about the rights of parents and about the importance of parental power, but parents are not specifically referred to. If the Secretary of State believes that parents should have powers, why should they not also be allowed to have a voice on the advisory committee?

I ask the Secretary of State to say clearly and unequivocally that those two groups, together with the local education authorities and the representatives of the voluntary schools, will have sufficient representatives on the advisory committee to ensure that their voice will be heard. That is not too much to ask, and in the case of teachers it is a minor concession that would do much to allay their fears.

Question put, That the amendment to the Lords amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 155, Noes 220.

Division No. 103] **[8.24 pm**

AYES

Abse, Leo	Brown, Gordon *(D'f'rmline E)*
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*	Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Anderson, Donald	Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Archer, Rt Hon Peter	Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Ashdown, Paddy	Bruce, Malcolm
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack	Buchan, Norman
Ashton, Joe	Caborn, Richard
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*	Callaghan, Rt Hon J.
Bagier, Gordon A. T.	Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Barron, Kevin	Campbell-Savours, Dale
Beckett, Mrs Margaret	Canavan, Dennis
Beith, A. J.	Carter-Jones, Lewis
Bell, Stuart	Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony	Clay, Robert
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*	Cleiland, David Gordon
Bidwell, Sydney	Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Blair, Anthony	Cohen, Harry
Boothroyd, Miss Betty	Coleman, Donald
Boyes, Roland	Conlan, Bernard

Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Fife Central)*
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley, N)*
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Jenkins, Rt Hon Roy *(Hillh'd)*
John, Brynmor
Johnston, Sir Russell
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
MacKenzie, Rt Hon Gregor
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Park, George
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Robertson, George
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shields, Mrs Elizabeth
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'ds E)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stott, Roger
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wallace, James
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wrigglesworth, Ian
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John McWilliam and
Mr. Frank Haynes.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Benyon, William
Best, Keith
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bright, Graham
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buck, Sir Antony
Burt, Alistair
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Cormack, Patrick
Cranborne, Viscount
Crouch, David
Dorrell, Stephen
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fletcher, Sir Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Ground, Patrick
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lester, Jim
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lord, Michael
McCrindle, Robert
McCurley, Mrs Anna
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
Maclean, David John
McNair-Wilson, M. *(N'bury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
Madel, David
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marlow, Antony
Mates, Michael
Mather, Sir Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Miscampbell, Norman
Moate, Roger
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Patten, Christopher *(Bath)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertf'dshire N)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*

Thompson, Patrick *(N'lch N)*	Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Thornton, Malcolm	Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Thurnham, Peter	Wheeler, John
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*	Whitney, Raymond
Trippier, David	Wiggin, Jerry
van Straubenzee, Sir W.	Winterton, Nicholas
Waddington, Rt Hon David	Wolfson, Mark
Wakeham, Rt Hon John	Wood, Timothy
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*	Woodcock, Michael
Wall, Sir Patrick	Yeo, Tim
Waller, Gary	Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*	
Warren, Kenneth	Tellers for the Noes:
Watson, John	Mr. Peter Lloyd and
Watts, John	Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd.

Question accordingly negatived.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendment: No. 3 in page 2, line 4, leave out from "shall" to "a" in line 10 and insert

"give notice of the matter and of any relevant direction—

(a) to such associations of local education authorities as appear to them to be concerned and to any local education authority with whom consultation appears to them to be desirable,

(b) to such bodies representing the interests of governors of voluntary schools as appear to them to be concerned, and

(c) to such organisations representing school teachers as appear to them to be concerned,

and shall afford them".

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Bob Dunn): I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this we shall discuss Lords amendments Nos. 5 and 9.

Mr. Dunn: This is a series of amendments giving effect to a commitment given by my noble Friend Baroness Hooper on Second Reading that the position of governors of voluntary schools should be reflected on the face of the Bill. That commitment was welcomed by the Bishop of London and there was no opposition to the amendments.

The governors of voluntary aided schools employ 20 per cent. of school teachers. Moreover, they have a general responsibility for the successful running of voluntary schools. Those schools are a very important part of our education service.

The first of the amendments provides that the advisory committee shall give notice of matters referred to it to bodies representing the interests of the governors of voluntary schools and shall afford them a reasonable opportunity for submitting evidence and representations.

The second applies the principle that organisations representing the governors of voluntary schools should be consulted along with organisations representing local education authorities and teacher unions by the Secretary of State after receiving a report of the advisory committee.

The third applies the same principle to the consultation by the Secretary of State before making an order coming into force in the period up to 1 October 1987.

This series of amendments ensures a proper role for an important part of our school system. Therefore, I am happy to bring forward these amendments and I urge the House to agree to them.

Amendment agreed to.

Lords amendment: No. 4, in page 2, line 14, at end insert—

"( ) The Secretary of State shall, upon receiving a report from the Committee, arrange for it to be published."

Mr. Dunn: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this we shall discuss amendment (a).

Mr. Ashdown: I shall be brief in speaking to the amendment because it is brief, and although its scope is not great, it is important. The Lords have proposed to us an amendment requiring the report of the advisory committee to be published. We have merely tabled an amendment, the aim and purpose of which is to ensure that that is done within a set and specified time. Our amendment suggests that the report should be published within six weeks. However, if the Minister is prepared to discuss the matter and advise us whether he favours a broader or narrower approach with a different number of weeks or a different specified time, provided that it is reasonable, we shall be happy to accept it. We might be satisfied if the hon. Gentleman can go further and give an undertaking that the report will be published quickly.

The defence of the Secretary of State and the Under-Secretary of State against the amendment may well turn on clause 3 under which the advisory committee reports to the Secretary of State "on any matter" and the Secretary of State in due course conducts "consultation". The Under-Secretary of State may well argue that that consultation cannot be conducted except on the basis of a report being published. He may give an undertaking that such a report shall be published within a certain period, but that still leaves a loophole which worries us.

Clause 3(1)*(a)* states that the Secretary of State shall consult to the extent that it appears to him to be "desirable". We are concerned about what will happen unless the report is fully published within a reasonable time scale. It is perfectly possible for the Secretary of State to publish only a small part of the report and to consult in line with paragraph *(a)*, but we ask for a time limit to be set.

All hon. Members know that there are many occasions on which serious and important reports which have been produced by various bodies for the Government reach conclusions that are unacceptable or uncomfortable to the Government. The Government merely use the device of sitting on the reports, more or less in perpetuity, so that they are lost from sight. Numerous parliamentary questions then ask when the report will be published, but all produce nothing.

The Secretary of State can use that device when the advisory committee produces its report. He can simply ignore it and not bring it into the public domain. If the Secretary of State were to say to us, as no doubt he would if he were sitting in his place, "I would never do such a thing" — *[Interruption.]* I see the Under-Secretary of State shake his head. Is he saying that it is not true to say that the Secretary of State would say such a thing? I guess that he is not. The Secretary of State might assure the House that he would never do such a thing, so I draw his attention to a column in *Hansard* which fell to my eye the other day, when the hon. Member for Fulham (Mr. Raynsford) asked the then Secretary of State for the Environment when he intended

"to publish the 1983 survey of improvement grants referred to in the Green Paper 'Home Improvement'".—[*Official Report*, 1 December 1986, Vol. 106, c. 518.]

That survey was reported on in 1983, three years ago, and has not to this day been published. The Minister who is now responsible for that matter has said that a final report will be published as soon as possible. That was a report which was delivered to the present Secretary of State for Education and Science when he was Secretary of State for the Environment. If the right hon. Gentleman can delay the publication of that report for three years, we can be worried about him delaying publication of any report of the advisory committee if the committee—independent though it is not—were to say something that the Government found unwelcome.

We are asking for an assurance. I ask the Under-Secretary of State at least to say that he envisages these reports being published in full—not partially—and without delay. If the hon. Gentleman can be as specific as possible, we shall consider whether to push the amendment to a vote.

Mr. Dunn: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) for his comments. He knows full well, having deliberated with us in a different capacity than that which he now has, that we have always given an assurance that there will be no undue delay in the publication of the report. Much will clearly depend on the urgency of the report and the length of time taken for it to be printed and published. We would certainly normally expect publication to be within six weeks.

There is an air of déjà vu about this debate. The hon. Members for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) and for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) will recollect the debate in Committee on the 1980 Act, on what became section 12, and our difficulty in trying to fit a period of consultation, deliberation, exercise and evaluation within a time frame that had never been printed and supported by law. We believe that the assurances that we shall give and our commitment to them should meet the concerns of the hon. Member for Yeovil.

My hon. Friends gave a clear commitment in the debates on Second Reading and in Committee that all reports from the interim advisory committee on matters referred to it by the Secretary of State would be published. Therefore, I hope that the House will agree with the Lords amendment and I ask the hon. Member for Yeovil to withdraw his amendment.

6.45 pm

Mr. Ashdown: In the light of the Minister's assurances, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 5 agreed to.

Clause 3

Power of Secretary of State to make provision by order

Lords amendment: No. 6, in page 2, line 35, at end insert—

"( ) An order may make different provision for different cases, including different provision for different areas."

Mr. Dunn: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take amendment (b) to Lords amendment No. 6 and Lords amendments Nos. 7, 8 and 11. I draw the attention of the House to the fact that privilege is involved in Lords amendment No. 7.

Mr. Dunn: I address this group of Lords amendments in the knowledge that Lords amendment No. 6 enables provision to be made for different cases, including different areas as regards conditions of employment as well as remuneration. This would allow orders to accommodate such variations as may be needed to meet the particular position of the voluntary sector. The amendment was moved in the other place as a Government amendment following representations by interests representing voluntary schools. Different provision for voluntary schools is, in fact, only one case in which different provision may be needed. A difference in conditions of employment could be needed as between ordinary schools and special schools. It is even more likely that a difference will be needed as between teachers in schools and those teachers who do not work in schools, such as peripatetic teachers or those who teach children at home.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the Minister. I am afraid that it is my mistake. The hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) should have moved amendment (b) before the Minister spoke. I ask the hon. Member for Yeovil to move amendment (b).

Mr. Ashdown: I am grateful to you, Mr. Speaker. I am sorry to stop the Minister in mid-flow. It was a matter that I was happy to leave. I beg to move amendment (b), in line 3, after 'cases', insert

'but only where different provision is made under arrangements existing at the date of this Act.'.

This is a probing amendment. The intention is to maintain the status quo on differentials and not to give the advisory committee, which the Secretary of State has assured us is interim, the possibility of dealing with the question whether there shall be disparities of pay and conditions across the rest of Britain or in certain categories.

When one considers the temporary interim nature—that is what the Secretary of State has assured us is in his mind—one is suspicious because it appears that he has given the advisory committee powers to consider matters of much longer-term importance. As I say, this is a probing amendment because I am somewhat confused by what the Government have said at various times when this matter was discussed. It was discussed on 10 December, at which time the Minister of State, Department of Education and Science said quite clearly that the Government's intentions in the clause were to allow them

"to continue the higher rate of pay in special schools and social priority allowances for the inner cities."—[*Official Report*, 10 December 1986; Vol. 107, c. 620.]

That is perfectly clear and seems to set out the current case. I support that and this amendment tries to put it into effect. When Baroness Hooper spoke on this matter in another place, she said:

"The Government have no radical proposals for regional or other pay differentiation, though that is an issue".—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 26 January 1987; Vol. 483, c. 1229.]

However, regional variations and the possibility of such variations were mentioned by the Secretary of State on a number of occasions—certainly outside the House if not

[Mr. Ashdown]

inside it. Even the Minister of State, despite the fact that she said originally this was only to cope with London weighting and special provisions in special schools, said:

"It is important that individual head teachers can offer special rewards and that individual authorities can examine the possibility of attracting people to areas in which they can pay for shortage teachers or shortage skills that they believe are important,".—[*Official Report*, 10 December 1986; Vol. 107, c. 620.]

What exactly is the Government's intention? The Minister should come clean about that, because Government spokesmen seem to be pointing in different directions according to which audience they happen to be addressing. This matter is vital. If the advisory committee continue the present system under which special pay is allowed for special schools and under which there is a differentiation for London and London weighting, I shall not be very worried.

If the advisory committee were to address the problem whether premiums could be paid to temporary teachers to attract them to areas in which education is suffering because of shortage, we would support that—provided we could find an appropriate way of doing it. If on the other hand the advisory committee does what the Secretary of State often seems to indicate he would like to do — institute a mechanism for regional variations between one area of Britain and another—that would worry all of us and I should be profoundly opposed to it.

Such a regime could serve only further to divide Britain, which is so sorely and sadly divided under this Government. Teachers would be bound to go where they could get the highest pay and there would be further erosion because the best people would leave the north and go to the south of England. That would be divisive for the education system and the nation and would be damaging to the teaching structure. The Government must say clearly whether that is in their mind, and whether it is one of the powers that they would seek to give the advisory committee.

My central point is that if the advisory committee is temporary, interim, transitional—to use the words that the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State used today —why should the Government seek to give it powers to investigate matters of long term-consequence to the teaching profession such as regional variations? If it is genuinely temporary and interim, surely it should be allowed to maintain the status quo in this matter. Many people will look at the Minister's answers to discover whether it is the long-term and secret intention of the Government to prolong the life of the advisory committee so that it can draw up damaging regimes to set up a regional differential system for teachers' pay.

Mr. Radice: The Minister should start again.

Mr. Dunn: The hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) invites me to start again. I would dearly love to do so, but I am conscious of the pressure of time.

Just before I realised that I was speaking at the wrong time, I was describing some of the differences that might occur between teachers with different responsibilities. I said that it would be even more likely that a difference will be needed between teachers in schools and teachers who do not work in one school, such as peripatetic teachers or those who teach children at home. They are unlikely to be able to attend staff meetings or to take administrative responsibilities in a school. This amendment will allow such a distinction to be made.

The amendment subsumes the power in the previous clause 3(4)*(a)* to make different provisions about remuneration. That power will be needed in order to pay higher salaries to teachers in special schools than those in ordinary schools, for the social priority allowance for schools in difficult areas, and for the London allowance which, as hon. Members know, has been paid for many years.

I have been asked outside the House whether the Secretary of State intends to use this power. He and I have been surprised at how much fuss has been made about this issue. There has always been a difference in pay between London and other areas. Since 1945—before I was born —a London weighting has been paid. The teacher unions press each year for the weighting to be increased.

Mr. Radice: They are suspicious of the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Dunn: Suspicious of me? I am one of the most honest and straight person that I have ever met— *[Interruption.]* I have never invoked parliamentary privilege and I do not intend to do so now. Each year the teachers' unions press for the weighting to be increased. Therefore, they must believe that regional differences are justified.

The reference in this subsection is an enabling provision. The Secretary of State is not required by the legislation to provide for different provision in different areas, but the legislation allows this possibility to be kept open. The alliance amendment as ably moved by the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) is intended to limit any use of this power to the type of provisions presently in use for differential pay. The hon. Gentleman's amendment —with which I do not agree—clearly makes that point, but this would be an unreasonable constraint on the type of issue which could well be usefully considered by the interim advisory committee. In addition, in terms of conditions of employment, different provision could not be made for different cases. Therefore, it would undermine the very reason why the interests representing voluntary schools asked for the amendment to be made.

Neither the Government nor the Secretary of State intend to bring forward any immediate radical proposals for regional pay differentations. We shall consider carefully whether it is an issue that should be addressed by the advisory committee. I ask the House to reject the amendment.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: The Minister's reply will disappoint not only hon. Members but the teacher organisations, because clearly the amendment was intended to probe whether the suspicions of teacher unions and other people were justified. The Secretary of State has confirmed those suspicions, because instead of trying to create good will and trying to break down barriers he has created barriers. He well knows that the teacher organisations and the majority of our people do not favour the development of more regional allowances and an extension of the scheme for London allowances, nor do they favour differential rates for different subjects.

These are extremely contentious areas and the Government want to pretend that this is only an interim measure to bridge the gap across the present problems.

They are foolish to bring in new proposals which cause a great deal of anxiety and suspicion. I am worried by the Minister's reference to peripatetic teachers. He said that they would have to be paid at a different rate to teachers whom he suggested turned up at parents' evenings. I know a large number of peripatetic teachers who turn up at staff meetings and parents' evenings. They feel that they have the same responsibilities as other teachers to pass on information to their colleagues and to make sure that parents know about the instruction that pupils are receiving.

The Minister's remarks will give rise to considerable anxiety on the part of teachers who move from place to place if they feel that they might be treated in a different way to other teachers. We are alarmed and dissatisfied by the Minister's response. If he wants to reach a quick agreement about teachers' pay, he should give a clear and categorical assurance that, at least in the first two years, he will not use this procedure or even contemplate using it to enforce different rates of pay and different subject ratings in various parts of the country. He has increased our fears and the fears of the teachers and done nothing to allay the suspicions.

7 pm

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): One point that causes me great concern is that northern teachers might be tempted to move south if there were regional differentials in pay. Those of us who represent cities in the north are aware that we have major problems in employment. We need improved training to equip our children for the jobs that we hope to develop in the regions. To do that, we have to keep our good teachers in the north and in the provinces. We do not want them to be sucked into the south-east where there is relative prosperity compared with parts of the north. Therefore, I urge my hon. Friend to be circumspect in his proposals.

One way in which my hon. Friend could overcome the suspicion voiced by the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) from a sedentary position would be to call together employers and the trade unions, and to encourage them to hammer out an agreement that would meet the approval of the advisory committee. That might overcome the worries and anxieties that the teachers' lobby expressed today to hon. Members.

It would be a sign of good faith by my hon. Friend that he sees the Bill purely as a temporary measure, whose provisions are not to extend beyond 1990 except with the approval of the House. It will reassure teachers, particularly in the provinces, that their career prospects will at least be equal to those of teachers in London and the south-east. It will also reassure parents in the regions that their good teachers will not be attracted to other parts of the country by higher salaries.

Mr. Dunn: I welcome the contributions of the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) and of my hon. Friend the Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind). I hope I did not mislead the House earlier. I must make it clear that the Government have no intention of discriminating against peripatetic teachers or those who teach at home. Some of the duties of other teachers may not fall upon peripatetic teachers.

I direct the attention of the House to the debate in Committee, when my hon. Friend the Minister of State said:

"There is a provision for different cases. This will allow us to continue the higher rate of pay in special schools and social priority allowances for the inner cities. It is an important method of ensuring that there are teachers in schools that are in serious need of an extended number of teachers to help with their special deprivations."

Later, she said:

"The hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery) and the hon. Member for Burnley talked about regional differences. They were concerned about any proposition that there could be different regional pay. Their argument was that the proposed pay structure that should be accepted included sufficient rewards for classroom teachers and there was no need for any incentives for shortage teachers or shortage skills, and no need to get teachers to go into difficult posts by having different scales because it would create difficulties.

The Government's argument is the reverse. It is important that individual head teachers can offer special rewards and that individual authorities can examine the possibility of attracting people to areas in which they can pay for shortage teachers or shortage skills that they believe are important, and also that they can get good teachers to take up difficult posts either in inner city areas or in rural areas." — [*Official Report*, 10 December 1986; Vol. 107, c. 620.]

In another place, when the Lord Chancellor speaks in a judicial capacity he speaks from one part of the Woolsack. When he speaks in a political capacity, he takes a step to the left or the right; I cannot remember which. I should almost like to do the same. In joining debate with my hon. Friend the Member for Lancashire, West, I must remind him that the problems of recruitment because of the high price of housing in the south-east, which I represent, are in no way less severe than those in the region to which he has referred and in which I was born.

In the light of recent developments, I hope that the House will accept the Lords amendment and reject the amendment proposed by the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown).

Mr. Ashdown: The Minister has put his case with his usual urbane charm and in a very civilised manner. Of course, lurking underneath are the concerns which, as was said by the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett), have not been put to rest. I hope the Minister listened carefully to the hon. Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind), who spoke with considerable cogency and put the case with great effect. Nevertheless, for the convenience of the House, although I do not wish this to be taken to indicate our consent to regional differentials, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 7 agreed to. [Special Entry.]

Lords amendments Nos. 8 and 9 agreed to.

New Clause

ARRANGEMENTS FOR SETTLING REMUNERATION AND OTHER CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT OF TEACHERS IN FURTHER EDUCATION

Lords amendment: No. 10, after clause 3, insert the following new clause:

".—(1) Any arrangements for settling for the whole of England and Wales any matter relating to the remuneration and other conditions of employment of teachers in further education, or any description of such teachers, shall be such that every organisation which—

(a) was represented immediately before the passing of this Act on the Burnham Further Education Committee, and

[Mr. Ashdown]

(b) has members whose conditions of employment may be affected,

is afforded a reasonable opportunity of participating in the process.

(2) The 'Burnham Further Education Committee' means the committee set up in pursuance of section 1 of the Remuneration of Teachers Act 1965 to consider the remuneration payable to teachers in further education.

(3) It is the duty of the parties to any such arrangements to take any steps necessary to secure that the requirements of this section are complied with.

(4) This section applies to arrangements notwithstanding that they were made before the passing of this Act and any steps required to be taken in relation to such arrangements shall be taken before anything is done in pursuance of the arrangements after the passing of this Act."

Mr. Dunn: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Speaker: With this amendment it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendment No. 14.

Mr. Dunn: The amendment, put down by my noble Friend Baroness Cox in Committee in the Lords, stemmed from the general concern that the interests of those smaller unions on the Burnham further education committee who had a distinctive contribution to make should be protected. That concern was first expressed in Committee here by my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson). He feared that the Association of Polytechnic Teachers might be excluded from any national negotiating framework set up by representatives of the local authority employers and the further education teachers. The concern is a valid one. The National Joint Council for Further Education, which deals with the conditions of employment of further education teachers, and was set up jointly by the local authority employers and representatives of teachers in further education, does not include the APT. The APT has pressed without success to be in this body. As it has 20 per cent. of polytechnic lecturer in its membership, it has a strong case for representation.

The amendment protects not only the APT's interest but also that of the other smaller unions on Burnham FE, who have a right to be involved because of their distinctive contribution. I am thinking particularly of the National Society for Education in Art and Design, and the Association of Agricultural Education Staffs.

The amendment was accepted in another place without a Division and, I think it is fair to say, with a good measure of support from all sides. The noble Lord, Lord McIntosh of Haringey said that he was in sympathy with the intention behind the amendment, and the noble Lord, Lord Kilmarnock said that he supported the amendment in principle. I hope that the House will agree that the amendment should be accepted.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Will the Minister give us a little more information? As he will be aware, the FE negotiations over pay and conditions were going well until the middle of the autumn, when they ran into certain difficulties. As I understand it, the negotiations have restarted today. While I have been in the House I have not been able to find out whether the negotiations are going on or whether they have run into further difficulties. I hope that the negotiations are continuing and that, as a result of the negotiations today, there may well be a phase when some detailed working parties have to be set up.

When this measure receives Royal Assent, I am a little concerned about how far the negotiations might have to be interrupted in order to adjust the groups of people who are doing the negotiating. It might be rather unfortunate if the negotiating body was being changed in the middle of negotiations that were reaching a certain measure of success. I hope that the negotiations that started again today will have reached major agreement on many points. I am sure that the Government would want those negotiations to be successful and for harmony to return to our FE institutions.

It would be helpful if the Government could say whether they envisage those negotiations being completed with the existing group of negotiators or whether they feel, as a result of the amendment, that it will be necessary to restart in some of those areas in which agreement has already been reached. I hope that the Minister will tell us that the negotiations are moving along successfully. I also hope that he will tell us what is going to happen on the matter of changing the negotiators if the amendment is carried and the measure receives Royal Assent in the not-too-distant future.

Mr. Dunn: Like the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett), having been in purdah, as it were, in the House from midday, I am not aware of the developments to which he referred. However, I shall of course ensure that we become aware of what has happened today.

The hon. Gentleman is right in his interpretation. The national joint council meeting does not involve the APT because there is no requirement for it to be involved. However, as he rightly surmises, it will require the APT to be involved from the point of Royal Assent.

Question put and agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 11 to 14 agreed to.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101 (Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments &c.).

That the draft Audit (Northern Ireland) Order 1987, which was laid before this House on 10th February, be approved.

Question agreed to.

Maltby Far and Low Commons

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Portillo.]*

7.12 pm

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): I should like, through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to thank Mr. Speaker for granting me this Adjournment debate on a local issue for my constituency which also has some national implications. I do not want to rehearse the arguments I put forward in an Adjournment debate on 19 December 1984 on the ownership of Maltby Far and Low Commons. However, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Mr. William Bunting of Periplanta, Thorne, near Doncaster. Over many years he has sought to answer the question of who does own Maltby Far and Low Commons. His historical research has been invaluable to those who object to what is happening on the commons. It has been a thorn in the side of the applicant who has had the go-ahead to build on a section of Maltby Far and Low Commons.

On 19 December 1986, the Secretary of State for the Environment granted a limitation order on the commons under section 193 of the Law of Property Act, 1925. This is the first time since the Act's inception that common land has been handed over to be used as a golf course. It obviously has major implications for other common land throughout the country.

The local objectors and I believe that a golf course would be an asset to the district that I represent and live in. We believe that the only thing wrong is that the common land should not be used to complete that golf course. It took the Secretary of State for the Environment over two years to make the decision, since first receiving the inspectors' report on the public inquiry in November 1984. During that time, the local authority has sought from the Earl of Scarbrough, the applicant in the case, the evidence of his claim to ownership. It believes that his continued refusal strengthens the impression that he is unsure of his ground in relation to this matter. It certainly has made his ground unsure.

The Earl of Scarbrough's solicitor sent a letter to Rotherham borough council in October 1985 stating:

"Our client considers that the matter should rest with the Secretary of State's determination that he is satisfied as to our client's title to the commons."

I and many residents of Maltby believe that there has been a breach of natural justice in this case. Indeed, it was said at the public inquiry in 1982 that we had to take the Earl of Scarbrough to a court of law before we could see his claim to the ownership of the commons. That would involve expense perhaps in the region of £20,000, which either I or other people who have rights to the commons would have to find. I believe that that was said at the public inquiry in full knowledge of that fact.

I have received a selection of letters since the granting of the limitation order, and I should like to read out what my constituents have been saying in relation to this matter. I received a letter from Mr. John Hadgett of Muglet lane in Maltby, who wrote:

"However, what the Secretary appears to have forgotten is that Lord Scarbrough has far from satisfied myself, and indeed, many more people who object to the golf course that he has claim to the land. And basically that is all we would like him to do."

That is all we have ever asked the Earl of Scarbrough to do. We just want him to show us his claim of title to the land that the Secretary of State for the Environment has supposedly seen.

I received a letter from Mr. Tom Routledge of Dunns Dale in Maltby, who states:

"I do not object to golfers or golf courses, but to the fact that the commons are being used. In a free democracy the onus should be on the Earl to furnish proof of ownership."

Mr. K. McGrath of Greenland avenue in Maltby, who I should add is related to me through marriage, has been very specific about the decision. He said:

"I would like to draw your attention to paragraph 6 where it states 'You (Messrs. Allen and Overy) wrote to the department on the 7th July 1981 giving details of your client's title to the soil, supported by copy documents of title'. The first two lines of paragraph 11 seem to contradict the aforementioned quote. Paragraph 11 goes on to say that no better claims had been received from anyone else. This is an extraordinary statement. Am I to assume from this that the Department of the Environment has seen evidence, which is not satisfactory, i.e. not conclusive proof of ownership, but that nothing better has been offered by anyone else?"

That question should be fully answered at the Dispatch Box tonight. Is it the case that, because there has been no definite proof of evidence from anyone else about ownership of the commons, the Department of the Environment has accepted from the Earl of Scarbrough something that falls short of definite evidence about the ownership of the commons?

The decision on the limitation order has not pleased many members of the local community who use the commons for their own recreation. The actions of the Secretary of State and the Earl of Scarbrough have made people suspicious of their motives. In a letter that I received from a Mr. K. Routledge of Hawthorn avenue, Maltby, he used what is now quite a popular saying in political circles. He said:

"Scarbrough"—

meaning the noble Lord—

"his legal advisers and his beloved Tory party have been less than economical with the truth."

Of course, it would be quite wrong to use this language just because the Earl of Scarbrough is president of the South Yorkshire Conservative Association, but his actions on Maltby commons need some explanation. The information that I received from the Rotherham metropolitan borough council in relation to the proposed golf course was that it knew about the proposals on 15 August 1975. It received the planning application for the building of the golf course on part of these commons in April 1976. What seems extraordinary to me, particularly since the land was registered as common under the Commons Registration Act 1965, is that the Earl did not apply for his limitation order until 25 June 1979, and he would obviously have to have that before the golf course could go ahead.

Of course, in May, 1979 there was a general election and the Conservative party took office, so presumably the noble Lord then had somebody in the Department of the Environment who might be politically sympathetic.

Since the inspector's report was submitted to the Department of the Environment, there have been three Secretaries of State who could have given the go-ahead to the golf course. The right hon. Members for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Jenkin) and for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker) chose not to give permission. It is most unfortunate that the present Secretary of State for the Environment has seen fit to give that permission.

[Mr. Kevin Barron]

I would like that decision to be rescinded and a full investigation made into this matter because of what could be termed the family connection. Through marriage, the Secretary of State for the Environment is related to the family of the Earl of Scarbrough. To be more precise, the right hon. Gentleman's elder brother, the fourth Viscount Ridley, married the third daughter of the 11th Earl of Scarbrough, who is the sister of the present Earl of Scarbrough, the 12th Earl, who is the applicant in this case.

I believe that this matter ought to be investigated further. I refer the Minister and the House to the Royal Commission on standards in public life and the memorandum by the Secretary to the Cabinet in 1975 in relation to the question of interests of Ministers. The memorandum says:

"Ministers must so order their affairs that no conflict arises, or appears to arise, between their private interests and their public duties."

The document goes on to give further detailed enlightenment on the question of family interests as well, in relation to these matters.

I believe that the public interest would have been better served, and would be better served now, if the decisions on Maltby commons had been taken by another Minister and not by the Secretary of State for the Environment, who has this family connection—I put it no higher than that—with the Earl of Scarbrough.

I repeat that I would like that order giving permission for the golf course to be built to be rescinded as soon as possible, so that a full investigation can be made into this matter.

7.25 pm

The Minister for Environment, Countryside, and Planning (Mr. William Waldegrave): I shall deal with two matters rather quickly. First, I hope that the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) will not criticise me or my Department, on the ground that we have taken over this matter. On several occasions during the course of this matter, he has been anxious that we should take time, and we have bent over backwards, particularly since the last debate in which he raised the issue, to extend the time for objection as he asked.

The history in this case is long and tangled. I complimented the hon. Member on the previous occasion on which he raised this on the immense amount of research he had done into it and the fascinating account he then gave of its history, about which hon. Members can read in *Hansard*. It is right to spend a lot of time, even at the inconvenience of applicants in this case, to try to make sure that no injustice is done.

In that sense, the hon. Member was a little naughty to say that the previous two Secretaries of State had not taken the decision, as if they had refused to take the decision. He gave some slight indication that there was now one wicked Secretary of State who had come to the wrong conclusion, while two benevolent previous ones had not done so, but it was, in fact, because at that time the mater was still being investigated.

I can reassure the hon. Gentleman at once on one other matter. I am sure that he in no way wished to imply—because in view of recent rulings he would not have allowed himself to do so — that there was any impropriety on the part of the Secretary of State for the Environment. In any event, I can assure him that none of the decisions that have been taken in this matter has been taken by the present Secretary of State. I have myself dealt with the whole matter, first of all as a junior Minister and then, out of courtesy to the hon. Member, when I was lucky enough to be promoted to Minister of State, I thought I should continue. The decision letters are indeed issued under the authority of the Secretary of State, but all the decisions have been taken by me. I have looked back through the files and at no point have the papers gone to the Secretary of State. This is a matter on which the power has been delegated to me. So I hope that the hon. Member will not pursue the matter. If he does, I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will want to defend himself most vigorously, because there really has been no impropriety.

The decisions that Ministers have to take on questions such as this are hedged about with legal safeguards, and that is part of the problem and the difficulty. Like the hon. Member, in planning matters I quite often find my own constituents are extremely frustrated by the way in which I, as the planning Minister, am unable to enter into campaigns, for example, on local planning issues. I have to say that this is a matter in which I have to stand back, as the appellate authority, and this often irritates my constituents.

We have something of the same situation here over the question, which I can well understand being frustrating to people—why the Department of the Environment will not release the papers on which it made the judgment. That was the only judgment that we could legally make, that there was a prima facie claim, which might reasonably be substantiated in law, from my noble Friend Lord Scarbrough, and we had to acknowledge the fact that no one else had put in any other claim. On the legal advice we had, that laid a duty on us to allow the procedure to begin.

The further legal advice that we have is that we cannot insist on these documents, which are not ours to disclose, being disclosed. It is not for me to say whether they should be disclosed. I have to work within the legal constraints that are on me and I do not have the right to disclose them. But I can understand that it is a difficult point, and I do not know whether I have made the explanation clearly tonight. It is a difficult argument to put across in a common-sense way.

I have another point to make tonight to the hon. Member, which may in some sense encourage him, although it makes it difficult for me to say very much. We are still in the period within which the decision could be legally challenged. So in some sense, although not the strictly sub judice sense, I have to be careful in what I say tonight.

There is nothing on this subject that I can teach the hon. Member because he is the expert on it all, but perhaps I could refer once again to the chain of events that brought me to make the decision that I made, with legal advice, last year.

In the previous debate I put on record a fairly detailed account of the chain of events as seen by my Department from the time that Lord Scarbrough submitted the application under section 193 of the Law of Property Act 1925 to enable part of Maltby commons to be used, together with other land, for the purpose of a golf course. At that time a non-statutory local public inquiry into the

application had been held and the inspector's report had been published. We were waiting for the responses from both the applicant and the objectors to the reference-back letter which had been sent by my Department on 6 November 1984. This has stated that the Secretary of State was disposed to accept the inspector's recommendation that the order be made, subject to modifications.

I undertook in that earlier debate to give consideration to all representations made following that letter both on the detail of the proposed modifications recommended by the inspector in his report and on the issue of the ownership of the commons. I can assure the House that all those representations were very carefully considered, and that is why we took further time. No one can accuse us of being hasty — the hon. Gentleman did not so accuse us—in reaching our decision, which was issued two years later, on the same date that the limitation order was made. There is still time for a legal challenge of that decision and I must be scrupulously careful to avoid further comment on the case.

However, it may be helpful if I refer to some of the events which occurred following the previous debate. First, we extended the closing date that we had given for receipt of responses to the "reference back" letter. Originally, it was the 27 February 1984, but we allowed no fewer than three extensions of the time, the last, in response to a letter written on 15 January 1985 by the hon. Member for Rother Valley, to 12 February 1985. We received representations. Among others, there was a request from the Rotherham metropolitan district council that the Department should let the council have copies of various documents, all relating to land title, and the hon. Gentleman has referred to this.

A letter was sent to the local authority on 13 February 1985 explaining that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was not prepared, with the legal advice that he had, to produce those documents. There followed a further request by the council in July 1985 for disclosure, which was again given careful consideration. The reply, sent on 14 October 1985, stated that the Secretary of State was satisfied that he was entitled to find, on the basis of the legal advice that he had received—the inspector's report and the opinion which had been given by Francis Ferris QC to Rotherham council—that the Earl of Scarbrough had sufficient standing to make the application. That letter also explained why we were not prepared to disclose the requested documents.

The Department also had correspondence during 1985 with the solicitors acting for Lord Scarbrough. We were advised that the modifications to the proposed order as recommended by the inspector, the effect of which would have been to reduce the area of commons over which the limitations would apply, were acceptable to Lord Scarbrough. After careful consideration of all the representations that had been made, the order was eventually made in a decision letter issued on 19 December 1986. Paragraphs 5 to 12 of that letter dealt at some length with the issues that had been raised concerning the standing of Lord Scarbrough to make the application and on the question of disclosure of ownership documents. Various other legal matters were raised in the inquiry, including whether limitations and conditions under section 193 can be imposed for the benefit of a new use of common land arising after the coming into force of the Law Property Act 1925. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's views on these other legal issues were set out in a paragraph 13 of the decision letter.

Section 193 of the 1925 Act does not set out any criteria for the matters that the Secretary of State should take into consideration before deciding to impose any limitation on, and conditions as to, the exercise of the public's right of access for air and exercise. Nor has this issue been tested in the courts. Clearly, he needs to satisfy himself that any limitations applied for are necessary or desirable for preventing an estate, right or interest of a profitable or beneficial nature, belonging to the applicant, from being injuriously affected. Paragraph 17 of the decision letter sets out his opinions on this aspect.

I understand that, as directed by the Department, Lord Scarbrough has advertised in the local press the fact that the order has been made, but I emphasise that the limitations set out in the order do not come into force until the commencement date of the works of construction for the golf course upon the common land.

Mr. Barron: The Minister has set out a good scenario of where we are. In the past 10 years, no work has been done on the commons—the land at issue—and a very little on the rest of the golf course, which is on the land owned by the Earl of Scarbrough. The Minister has rightly said that this could still be a matter for judicial review, but that means expense either to individuals or the local authority, which is therefore the public purse. I invite the Minister to agree that the offer made during my previous Adjournment debate by my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) that an independent body such as the Open Spaces Society, which has been dealing with such problems for nearly a century, should see the document, and the evidence that the Secretary of State for the Environment saw, and which gave him grounds to give permission for the limitation order to go ahead.

Mr. Waldegrave: It is not within my power to insist on the documents being released—that is the legal advice that we have. It is up to Lord Scarbrough or his agents to show them to the Open Spaces Society or anybody else. I am not sure that it is for me to comment on that. I have no information as to when, if at all, the works are to start and other planning matters may have to be dealt with but are outside the scope of the debate.

I fear that, particularly in view of the possibility of a legal challenge, it would be unwise of me to comment further. I can understand the hon. Gentleman's disappointment, and I congratulate him because this is a classic example of how a local Member of Parliament can pursue the interest of his constituents with considerable scholarship and tenacity. In that personal sense, I am sorry that the outcome of the debate has been so unsatisfactory for him.

Green Belt (Hertfordshire)

7.35 pm

Mr. Peter Lilley (St. Albans): I am grateful for this opportunity to raise the subject of the green belt in Hertfordshire. I am particularly pleased that my hon. Friend the Minister is responding to the debate, as I know, from first-hand experience, that his commitment to the green belt and preserving our green and pleasant land is unsurpassed. In particular, I welcome the opportunity to bring to his attention the concern of my constituents about the need to preserve our green belt and to give him an opportunity to allay a few of the fears raised by misreporting in the media of recent statements on the rural economy.

When I made my maiden speech, I said that the one thing that united the inhabitants of the various settlements in my constituency was a desire to remain separated from each other and from London by the green belt. St. Albans is the first distinct and distinctive city out of London. It is also the most beautiful. The centre of St. Albans is built on a hill and from there one can see—to the north, the west, the east and the south—green land and trees. Indeed, the green belt penetrates to the centre of the city, where the old Verulamium site was, and up to the abbey.

We maintain our character because of the green belt regulations. In 1958, the first proper green belt was established in Hertfordshire and covered a swathe of land to the south of Hemel Hempstead, St. Albans and Hertford. In 1976, that green belt was extended to encompass the whole of St. Albans, Harpenden, Redbourn and Sandridge. Since then, virtually all the land that has not been built upon and is not urbanised has been green belt land. In Hertfordshire as a whole, about 234 square miles, which is about 37 per cent. of the county, is accounted for by green belt land.

The green belt regulations, despite some fears and doubts, have been vigorously upheld in my area. We have lost land to the M25, but the last major loss of land for housing in my constituency was in Jersey farm, and that was not technically classified as green belt land before it was released for building. I understand from Mr. Briscoe, of Hertfordshire county council, to whom I am indebted, that no major appeals on green belt land have been won by developers since then, and that was over a decade ago.

In my district, out of literally scores of appeals, through which Mr. Kenworthy, deputy director of planning was kind enough to search, involving applications to develop the green belt land in St. Albans, only one significant decision went in favour of the developers. That was not in my constituency, although it was in the district of St. Albans. The scores of other appeals were all turned down, and the green belt has been preserved.

I was particularly pleased that the first decision made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, of which I was aware, was to reject an inspector's recommendation for development of Napsbury lane site in the green belt in the south of my constituency. Had that been developed, we would have joined London Colney and effectively become a part of a concrete strip from St. Albans to Hyde park.

However, despite the Government's excellent record in maintaining the green belt, the pressures are intensifying. In recent years the electrification of the railway line has reduced travelling time to about 18 minutes from St. Albans to St. Pancras. We have had an extra lane on the M1, and we had the junction of the M25 and the M1. All these changes make St. Albans a very attractive place to live. When I hear people talking about the Government's failure to invest in the infrastructure, I can only believe that they ignore the evidence of their eyes.

As a result, St. Albans is something of a boom town, having excellent location and great beauty. The most immediate threat to it is what the press call the application to develop the "golden triangle". My hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones) has rightly insisted that we call this the "green triangle". The site is in his constituency, although it is in the district of St. Albans. My hon. Friend has successfully led the battle at every stage against that threat, particularly in persuading the Department of Transport to reword the very misleading advertisement put out in its name by its agents which suggested that this site was ripe for development and that there might be Government approval for it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Watford succeeded in making it absolutely clear that there was no Government presumption in favour of development of this site. My hon. Friend's position, which I fully endorse, is that this Government believe in the sanctity of the green belt. That springs from our philosophy as a Conservative party committed to conserving all that is best. It is enshrined in the circulars which have been issued by successive Secretaries of State and which have statutory backing.

The original circular, which is reaffirmed by subsequent circulars, made clear the purposes of green belts. They are threefold:

"(a) to check the further growth of a large built-up area;"

That is most important from my point of view and that of my constituents.

"(b) to prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another;"

and

"(c) to preserve the special character of a town."

That also applies particularly to St. Albans.

Those original circulars have been reinforced by the Secretary of State's specific reference to the M25 when he wrote to SERPLAN about it before it was complete. He said:

> "The general presumption against development in the green belt is not affected by the M25, and there should continue to be the strongest restraint on development there. The improved access which the motorway provides will enhance the recreational value of the Green Belt."

He went on to say:

> "The emphasis should be on better use of existing urban land, redevelopment and the return to use of neglected sites, rather than the allocation of new land for development."

So we are protected from the exceptional pressures which the M25 will bring to bear. My hon. Friend the Minister himself spelled out the incompatibility with green belt policy of many projects for building large new retail developments in the green belt. I welcome his comments. He told the Confederation of British Industry conference:

> "it is difficult to see why major developers and institutional investors should be advancing giant speculative projects for shopping and leisure complexes outside towns that fly full in the face of long established green belt policy—a policy to which this Government is fully committed."

The Minister also said:

> "I would say that the promoters of some of the wilder schemes have no reason to think they will succeed in breaching green belt policy . . . It could well be considered irresponsible to attempt to launch these proposals that run

completely counter to established policy. Those who pursue them to the point of appeal may find that they have the costs of any inquiry awarded against them."

We are confident that the golden triangle application which has just gone to appeal this week will in due course be rejected. We are saddened that the appeal will not be heard until February 1988, but I appreciate that my hon. Friend, in responding to this debate, will not be able to pre-empt any decision on that case and will be able only to comment generally because of the possible legal involvement of himself and the Secretary of State.

There is concern locally that even if my right hon. Friend does, as we are confident that he will at the end of the day, reject any application to develop on this site, we shall face repeated applications from developers putting in slightly altered plans. Local councils will incur heavy burdens of costs in refuting them, and the uncertainty will persist. I welcome my hon. Friend's latest circular entitled "Award of Costs Incurred in Planning Proceedings". The sanction of awarding costs against developers who make repeated appeals will act as a potent deterrent to that practice.

Despite the Government's impeccable track record, forces have been aroused by the media reports — or misreports—of the Government's statement on the rural economy. I understand that this simply upgrades the importance of environmental considerations to the very extent that it downgrades agricultural considerations. But I would be grateful, as would my constituents, if the Minister would reaffirm the Government's position in those related matters for the benefit of all of us. I know that other hon. Members from Hertfordshire are here today and would like to reaffirm our commitment to the green belt, which is an intrinsic part of the environment in our county.

7.47 pm

Mr. Robert B. Jones (Hertfordshire, West): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for St. Albans (Mr. Lilley) for having initiated this debate. If I come, like a green belt, between my hon. Friend and the Minister, it is because my hon. Friend has been such an articulate and powerful spokesman for the green belt in the St. Albans area, and the Minister has been quite the most sensitive and environmentally minded Minister we have had in the Department of the Environment since it was created. That is a happy background against which to consider this most important topic of the green belt, particularly in Hertfordshire.

My constituency meets the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for St. Albans more or less at the junction of the M1 and M25 motorways. My area therefore suffers very much from the same pressures as his. The constant pressure from loony Left-wing boroughs in London is driving out their residents to come and seek peace and prosperity in the fields of west Hertfordshire. That is very desirable for those residents but it adds to pressure on housing and business land in our areas.

One of the difficulties is that the gaps that exist between the various communities are very narrow. The gap between Hemel Hempstead and Abbots Langley on the south-east side, in the constituencies of my hon. Friends the Members of Hertfordshire, South-West (Mr. Page) and for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones) is only about half a mile wide. The gap between Hemel Hempstead and the Berkhamsted-Potten End community on the western side of Hemel Hempstead is less than a mile wide. The gap between Hemel Hempstead and Redbourn, in the constituency of St. Albans, is even narrower.

If one accepts the principle, as seems to be the case in successive structure plans in Hertfordshire and elsewhere, that there should be growth around the edges of the free-standing towns in the green belt, one does not need much imagination to realise precisely what will happen in the end if we do not rigidly maintain our green belt boundaries. I am also concerned that, despite the excellent intentions of my hon. Friend in looking again at agricultural policy in the environmental context, this may lead to some weakening of the planning background in areas not covered by the green belt but still within the pressured areas of Hertfordshire.

There are areas within my constituency of Hertfordshire, West and within the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for St. Albans which do not fall within the Green Belt. Some areas are of outstanding natural beauty but other areas do not fall into either of those categories. It is to those areas that the pressure will be most directed. Therefore, my hon. Friend must be clear about the importance of maintaining rural local authority policies on the environment wholly separate from those on the green belt.

Does my hon. Friend consider the designation of an area of outstanding natural beauty to be as strong a designation as the green belt? In some of our agricultural areas we shall have to fall back on that if we are to ensure that development does not take place. In that context I draw my hon. Friend's attention to the present terms of reference of the Countryside Commission. They mean that the commission must look at the area of outstanding natural beauty, in our area the Chilterns, on a strictly hill contour basis, rather than also incorporating the vistas of those hills which come from the open land around them. The whole concept of areas of outstanding natural beauty should be extended so that the agricultural land surrounding them is considered in the same planning vein.

I must emphasise the point that my hon. Friend made about costs. The Environment Select Committee of which I was a member reported on the green belt and land for housing at the beginning of this Parliament. It made recommendations about costs and all members of the Select Committee were grateful to the Department for taking them on board so promptly. We have yet to see evidence of how that works in practice. In my area we have had a series of planning applications by developers for land adjacent to Grove road, Station road and Bulbourne road in Tring. In common with the experiences of my hon. Friend, all those applications were rejected on appeal by the Secretary of State. That underlines the fact that the Government have been particularly careful about preserving the green belt.

However, it has now reached the stage where local authorities find the burden of presenting their case and individual objectors find the burden of repeating their arguments and remarshalling their forces every time so considerable that punitive costs should be awarded when there have been several try-ons for the same site. Without referring to the particular sites, because that would be wrong, I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will reassert his determination to use the costs machinery to deter developers from constantly submitting planning

[Mr. Robert B. Jones]

applications for areas which clearly are integral parts of the green belt and important for the preservation of the environment.

The issue of the green belt and future development, alone among the non-social issues on the political agenda, is close to the hearts of my constituents. Those who feel strongest about it are often those living in the centres of the towns or those who have come from the inner cities. They are not necessarily those who live on the edge of the countryside. The green belt acts as an important area for leisure and recreation and as a green lung. Therefore, I welcome the Minister's constant reassertion of the value attached to the political and planning concept of the green belt. That has been one of the great successes of our planning system since the 1947 legislations.

Mr. Christopher Hawkins (High Peak): I fully understand my hon. Friend's anxiety to preserve the environment, which I share because there is a national park in the High Peak; clearly, it is a major interest of mine. In the north, unemployment is much higher than in the south and when constituents find even a well-paid job in the south, they find it extremely difficult to meet the housing costs and find that there is no rented accommodation. Does he agree that we must do what the Government are planning and both pick some areas which are not particularly environmentally sensitive and allow housing to be built there and do something about the Rent Acts? Will my hon. Friend comment on that balance that we need to strike?

Mr. Jones: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, but we should not widen this into a general debate about housing policy. On his narrow point about building houses on bits of the green belt to deal with the problem—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. If the hon. Gentleman pursues that point, I hope that he will pursue the question of building houses on the green belt in Hertfordshire, which is the subject of the debate.

Mr. Jones: Indeed, to be specific, no matter how many houses are built in St. Albans and West Hertfordshire, they will all sell at high prices, so that is no solution to the problem. The real solution lies in many of the points that my hon. Friend touched on, especially the extra objective that was added to green belt policy by the Government, again in response to the environment Select Committee's report, which was to reinforce the redevelopment of the inner cities by using strategic green-belt policy.

This is a most important subject and we are fortunate to have this debate tonight. When my hon. Friend the Minister replies, I hope that he can once again reassure us of his determination to preserve the green belt.

7.55 pm

Mr. John Powley (Norwich, South): I am honoured to follow my hon. Friends the Members for St. Albans (Mr. Lilley) and for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones) in this debate on the green belt in Hertfordshire.

The House will know that I have experience as a county councillor and that Hertfordshire played an important part in determining the structure plans which were the responsibility of county councils. At that time I lived in Cambridgeshire and watched with considerable interest how Hertfordshire dealt with its structure plan provision and organised its housing and industry planning, particularly its green belt. I had the pleasure to visit that county to see the provision it was making in its structure plan for the green belt so that we in Cambridgeshire could learn from its experience when we made structure plan provisions. That experience has subsequently been of benefit to my home county of Norfolk.

It has been interesting to see how over the years Hertfordshire has dealt with the sensitive problem of retaining the environment, which everyone wants to retain, and met housing pressures. It has also built roadways through Hertfordshire to improve its road communications. I have seen pressures build up in Norfolk which Hertfordshire experienced 10 years ago and I hope that from watching the Hertfordshire experience, I have been able to contribute to preserving the green belt in Norfolk.

Whether we talk about Hertfordshire, Cambridgeshire or Norfolk, we are all dedicated to retaining the green belt around many of our fine cities. Norwich has a reputation as a fine city. Indeed, it says so on all the signs leading into the city. One cannot retain a fine city—such as St. Albans in Hertfordshire—if the green belt is destroyed by over-development, by over-industrialised development and encroachment on good agricultural land. It is right that the Government should be vitally concerned and they have appointed a Minister with responsibility for the environment. I remind the House that my right hon. Friend the Minister is piloting through the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads Bill to improve the environment as part of the green belt which we have experience of in Hertfordshire.

I could not let the occasion pass without emphasising my considerable concern——

Mr. Christopher Hawkins: Before you reach your peroration—I do not want to delay you needlessly——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): Order. It is not my peroration, but the hon. Gentleman is delaying me.

Mr. Hawkins: I did not intend to wake up Labour Members, but I wondered whether my hon. Friend had any thoughts on the problem of farming, which is important in Hertfordshire, as it is in my constituency, particularly when we have surplus production in Europe. What should we do with the land that farmers will no longer be using to produce butter and beef mountains and wine lakes? Does that fit in with my hon. Friend's plans?

Mr. Powley: I understand the point that my hon. Friend makes, with some validity, but I do not want to trespass on the constituencies of my hon. Friends from Norfolk, which in the main are farming constituencies. My constituency of Norwich is not a farming constituency, and thus I would be trespassing on other people's territory were I to follow that line of thought.

I conclude by supporting the remarks that my two hon. Friends from Hertfordshire have made, and I look forward to the response from the Minister.

8.2 pm

The Minister for Environment, Countryside and Planning (Mr. William Waldegrave): This is the second debate in two days on this important subject. However, this debate has a considerable advantage over the one that I answered yesterday because on this occasion I have a full

two hours for the reply, which will allow me to cover the matter in the necessary detail. My hon. Friends have given me this opportunity because they want me to go into the matter in some depth.

We have had some powerful contributions to the debate. I have never seen anyone sacrifice the rules of geography to the rules of order more skilfully than my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Powley), who appeared to locate the Norfolk Broads—temporarily, for the purposes of the debate — in Hertfordshire. My hon. Friend kept in order and kept his eye closely on you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. His point was well taken that, although there is no green belt immediately round the Norfolk Broads and no geographical relationship with the Norfolk Broads — which is so ably represented, in part, by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Ryder), who is on the Front Bench—the issues there are very much the same. There is the Government's commitment to the conservation of our incomparable heritage in the countryside and in its natural beauty.

The gently dissident voice of my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Hawkins) rightly reminded us of a good phrase used by my right hon. Friend now the Secretary of State for Education in the context of green belt. He said, "Green belt not green museums." We must not turn the villages and small towns, even of our green belts, into colonial Williamsburgs, to be looked at by the tourists pouring out of charabancs. That is not in our best interests. We want living communities. My hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones) referred to the important circular that we put out last year and the advice that we repeated in the recent circular that, for example, redundant farm buildings should be sympathetically redesigned for the kind of local employment needs which there may often be, even in green belt. It is better to have those buildings properly re-used than have them lying derelict as eyesores and dumping grounds.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Does my hon. Friend agree that redundant farm buildings present the same opportunity for small businesses today that the old Nissen huts presented small businesses that started up after the war? Not only is that helpful on the fringe, it is the seed-bed of much of our future economic growth.

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend makes a fair point. In my urban constituency an important role is played by small businesses under the viaducts and railway arches, such as one sees near Waterloo station, where often small firms have started off and gone on to greater things.

My hon. Friend the Member for St. Albans (Mr. Lilley) paid a fine and moving tribute to that beautiful city. I have just re-read — as it is necessary to do occasionally to reinforce one's views about lawyers — "Bleak House", which takes place in and around St. Albans and ends in a dramatic chase on foot from London to St. Albans and back. People were tougher in those days. That book reminds us, as my hon. Friend did, of the contiguity of St. Albans to the great urban centre, and therefore the importance of ensuring that fine city is protected by a proper green belt. It could so easily have become swamped in urban sprawl, in a way that is essential it should not.

My hon. Friend paid tribute to the stalwart defence of that green belt that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his predecessors have undertaken. My hon. Friend referred to the Napsbury lane site application, which we turned down. He then referred to one of the issues which is coming up, and he fairly absolved me from any duty to comment on it tonight. However, whether it is a green triangle or a golden triangle, my hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones) has made certain that no Secretary of State will be other than well aware of the importance of any proposed development in that area through the green belt.

At the instance of the local authority, that inquiry has been referred, but that inquiry will and must be extremely thorough. My hon. Friends the Ministers for St. Albans and for Hertfordshire, West referred to the M25 being built and the fact that it was said at the time that the M25 was not to be used as a Trojan horse for development all around London. That will be one of the material considerations of the inquiry. My hon. Friend the Member for Watford, and those whom he represents, will be giving evidence to that inquiry in due course.

I welcome the debate tonight because it gives me another opportunity — which is necessary when things are being misinterpreted—to hammer at the truth until it is understood. I can explain once again what we are doing with the change to the agricultural dimension of rural planning and, perhaps even more important, what we are not doing. What we are not saying—here I have to disappoint housebuilders and some of the landowners—is that the countryside is up for grabs; that we are not interested in green land, because the only protection for green land is its use as agricultural land.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones) was a distinguished councillor and adviser to the Association of District Councils at one time. He knows as well as I do that the planning system is the basic protection. Our circular said that in today's world, where we are living with surpluses in many commodities and where the taxpayer and consumer are having to pay for those surpluses, it is irrational if we say that we do not need development, to steer that development away from the best agricultural land on to the worst agricultural land —overriding the ordinary considerations of development versus environment, which in agricultural areas will have agriculture as an important local industry and one of the material considerations in any decision on development versus non-development.

In many cases, particularly in cases where there has been efficient and high-productivity farming, the remaining unimproved land is often of great environmental and ecological interest. If there is a nice flat field which has been in cereals or rye grass for 20 years—and will, sadly, have lost any ecological interest—we should not be steering the development away from that on to the undrained water meadow where the Agricultural Development and Advisory Service man may, in the old days, have said, "What you need here is a drainage grant to make this grow more cereal surpluses".

That is all that the circular says and no more. Now we must look at development versus environment head on. The environmental notations in the local plans are as strong as ever they were. It is important to maintain the countryside. If there is, as there sometimes will be, environmentally satisfactory land use other than farming, we must not steer away from it in order to protect an agricultural output that we do not need.

The previous debate that I answered was about a golf course, and I was interested recently to see work by the

[Mr. Waldegrave]

London Wildlife Trust showing that many golf courses round London also manage very well as wildlife centres. It is possible to imagine that, even in the green belt, land can be used for recreation or other purposes which may make farming impossible but be environmentally satisfactory. We have what could be an attractive opportunity to bring a little more income into the countryside and make more room for carefully managed recreation if it fits environmentally. We should not miss that opportunity simply because of an outdated overriding imperative about agricultural production. That is what we were saying—no more and no less.

Mr. Christopher Hawkins: I greatly welcome much of what my hon. Friend says. Although I may appear to be pressing for building to some extent, I strongly agree with protecting the environment. However, in the past I have had cases of the barn, as the Minister mentioned, that could be converted into a nice home, and so on, for which the planning application has been turned down. Will the appeals procedure be changed to reflect the new approach? I have had cases of triangular pieces of farming land, too small for dairy farming and too near a town for sheep because of the dog problem, which have gone through the whole planning gamut but have got nowhere. Unless we change the appeals system, what my hon. Friend the Minister is saying will not happen.

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend raises the problem of another of the important environmental notations—the special protection given in national parks, in one of which his constituency lies. I know that on occasion he has had reason to criticise the High Peak national park. The issues there, when one is trying to manage land surrounded by enormous pressures of population, are a little different even from green belt land. I am not saying that every decision has been right in the past. We must be sensitive to keeping the communities there alive, too, but that is a slightly more specialist subject than the ordinary management of green belt. However, I take my hon. Friend's point, and it is vital that there should be real jobs and real communities in the national parks. If we stray too far into the national park debate I may be rebuked by you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so I shall not continue down that line.

I see that my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry is anxious to pursue his own debate so I shall make two more swift points. If I continue at length he may become disgruntled.

My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Powley) made an important point about structure planning that has lain behind some of the anxieties that have been expressed in recent weeks about our commitment to green belt and wider countryside protection. Our discussion paper says that in future we shall go for single tier plans run by the district councils, by the development control authorities. Some people have asked what will happen to, for example, the protection of green belt. Until now general policies have been set out in structure plans. Let me make it clear once again, as I made it clear to the Council for the Protection of Rural England last week, that we have no intention of surrendering the proper strategic planning on top of the unitary plans. That will still be done by counties, or perhaps by consortia of counties, and will be built into the district plans which the districts will hold.

However, we cannot put up with the way in which structure plans have now become immensely complicated. One famous case contained 252 so-called policies, which is nonsense. Planning of that detail should be done by the district. However, there is a proper place for strategic guidance and strategic planning which will still come from county planners or a consortia of counties, as happens in the SERPLAN area of East Anglia, but they must then be built in and have their statutory course from the district unitary plans. I hope that we can set that red herring at rest—if that is what one does to a red herring.

The conservation of the green belt rests, as both my hon. Friend the Member for St. Albans and for Hertfordshire, West said on getting the other side of the equation right—that is, the re-use of the brown land, land which has been used before and can be used again. That is vital. It is encouraging that since I have been in the Department of the Environment much more housing is being built on re-used land than we ever believed would be the case in the past.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) is not here—indeed, no member of the Labour party is here, nor of the Liberal party—but he made a speech which disturbs me greatly. Perhaps I should not say this because I know that it will make him cross. It would have been a rather courageous speech in the sense that it turned policy upside down. It was made to the National House Building Council, so it may have been a popular speech at the time. The hon. Gentleman said that we were over-exaggerating the possibilities of building on brown land and it was probably right to extend building into green areas and even into green belt.

I was deeply disturbed by that. That seemed to me to show the beginnings of a commitment by the Labour party to move away from proper countryside protection and, above all, to move away from the pressure to re-use land which we have been succeeding in getting. If we let the housebuilders think that those pressures will come on, they will go back to the old business of trying to apply for the earlier sites again and again, whatever we do about costs —although we can do something about that. I greatly regret that speech.

Mr. Lilley: May I congratulate my hon. Friend as I had intended to do earlier, on his decision over Tillingham hall. It brought great relief not just in Essex but in Hertfordshire as well that the Government clearly will not allow massive or major new developments in green belt land, but are ensuring that it will occur in the already urbanised land.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have been tolerant, but the debate is about Hertfordshire and we must not develop it into a general debate about the green belt. Many hon. Members, had they been aware that such a debate was contemplated, may have wished to take part. The House is debating the green belt in Hertfordshire.

Mr. Waldegrave: That was an extremely wise decision, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Many more Conservative Members would have wanted to take part if the debate had been wider. I do not know whether any Labour Members would have wanted to do so. Tillingham hall is not in Hertfordshire, but it is fair to say that the clarity of the

decision, which rests four square on green belt criteria, should be of consolation and encouragement to those defending the green belt in Hertfordshire. They would be defending it in the Norfolk Broads if there was any there.

I am grateful to my hon. Friends for giving us the opportunity once again to reaffirm our commitment. It is particularly satisfactory to have a debate introduced by what I think, without flattering him, I can call one of our principal free market philosophers. He wrote with Sam Brittan a book which has been a text book for many of us. If he is willing to endorse the necessary constraints to a market, as there must be necessary constraints to markets, in certain social and planning activities, it gives us all great hope that the commitment to green belt ranges throughout the Conservative party. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving us the opportunity to endorse it.

Regional Assistance (West Yorkshire)

8.19 pm

Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock (Batley and Spen): I welcome this opportunity, which I had not expected, to call attention to the effects of regional policy on investment in West Yorkshire, especially my constituency.

The textile industry has been through hard times in the past few years, but companies now involved have a bright future. There is lots of investment in the traditional industries, and we have new ones. Last week, I had an opportunity to visit the British yarn show in Leicester where many of my companies were exhibiting. I have no doubt that we shall be able to sweep the board in the face of Italian manufacturers when the yarns get through to designers.

We have a tremendous amount of investment in my constituency now. Traditional industries are re-equipping with high technology machinery to stand with the old, and we have new factories. In the past year, we have had a machine tool company and a company which makes curtains for a big store establish factories. A third factory is nearing completion. We have also had investment of some £18 million in a pets food factory, 50 per cent. of the production of which goes to export. We are hoping to hear soon of further investment which will create a new factory and new jobs in an area which desperately needs them.

About £60 milliom is being invested in my small part of West Yorkshire. We have investment of £40 million in a new hospital, which is creating jobs for builders and in cement, steel and bricks. It will provide further jobs when it is fitted out.

I welcome assisted area status. It was not available to Batley and Spen when I was elected. I welcome the Government's changes to travel-to-work areas which enabled help to be given to many of my companies.

8.21 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry (Mr. Giles Shaw): I should like to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen (Mrs. Peacock) and congratulate her on getting this short additional Adjournment debate to draw attention to the importance of regional policy in her constituency.

I confirm that, since 1979, it has been Government policy to concentrate assistance provided under the Industry Acts on helping areas of greatest need. The map was redrawn in 1984 to exclude large parts of the country and concentrate assistance on areas in the north, the west midlands or the south-west where we knew there were substantial problems and genuine need because of industrial decline or other reasons.

The fact that my hon. Friend has been able to record an increase in investment in her constituency is eloquent testimony to the effectiveness of that policy. She will know that it is based on travel-to-work areas, which are the most sensitive instrument for measuring unemployment, among other things. Like me, she will benefit in part of her constituency from being part of the Bradford travel-to-work area. That has allowed her to obtain assisted area status for a portion of her constituency in which there has been substantial development.

In the constituency which my hon. Friend so admirably represents, she has several traditional textile industries. She will share with me a feeling of great satisfaction that,

[Mr. Giles Shaw]

after the long lean years of the recent past, there are now substantial improvements in textile orders. The British textile and clothing industry now ranks fourth in the national league table of manufacturing industries and last year it produced record exports for the fifth successive year.

The textile industry has been able to diversify out of traditional clothing to many industrial uses which provide an entirely new field for endeavour. I trust that the companies in the constituency which my hon. Friend so outstandingly represents will also benefit from those developments.

I am aware that there are applications before me for further assistance for a certain company which wants to locate in my hon. Friend's constituency. I assure her that they will receive early consideration. I hope to be able to make an announcement shortly.

It has been a privilege to take part in this brief debate about the importance of regional policy in West Yorkshire, especially Batley and Spen. I look forward to many years of the representation that my hon. Friend has provided for a constituency which, until she took over, was most feebly represented in the House. We now know that she has been able to deal with the issues that have confronted her constituency in a wholly admirable manner, and I wish her well.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-four minutes past Eight o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 27 February 1987

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Licensing Reform and Alcohol Abuse

9.34 am

Mr. Robert Banks (Harrogate): I beg to move,

That this House calls for the early introduction of legislation to reform the present licensing laws in England and Wales; expresses its concern over the problems presented by those who consume alcohol to excess; and calls for further measures of action, education and research.

The motion I have chosen for debate today may appear to many as two subjects in one. The reason why I have done that is to demonstrate that the long overdue reform of our licensing laws must be undertaken in pursuit of a reduction in the problems connected with those who consume alcohol to excess. It is important to consider all this in the round.

It must be the primary aim of Government—indeed, I believe it is—to make changes in the context of the good they will achieve for consumers in the broadest sense. My hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), who I am delighted to see in the Chamber today, and those who took part in the debate on the Licensing (Amendment) Bill voiced their concern about such matters, and they bear repeating.

With regard to the problems perceived in society today arising from the consumption of alcohol, I can offer no personal qualifications for advising the House, for I am neither a drunkard nor an abstainer. Others present may have more relevant credentials. I admit to being a social drinker and, on occasions, I have felt the consequences of drinking more than I ought. So I may well be classified as an average type of drinker.

My first point concerning the problems of alcohol excess relates to the effects on health; the second to behaviour and crime. Alcohol can and does have a beneficial effect. For older people especially, the occasional or regular drink acts as a tonic. For others it is a welcome stimulant when energy is flagging. It is not possible to be specific about the cases of illness in which alcohol consumption may have played a part. One can, however, consider the statistics for chronic liver disease and cirrhosis caused by alcohol. In 1984, in England and Wales the number of deaths recorded as a result of those two diseases was 937, a rise from 745 in 1980. The number of deaths where alcohol could be identified as a factor showed a slight decline from 2,560 in 1980 to 2,500 in 1984, but in comparison the figure rose to 2,777 in 1985. Since 1976, no particular change in Scotland appears to be discernible.

Nevertheless, there are real problems in reaching conclusions on the effects of sustained, moderate or heavy drinking on physical or mental health. What is clear is that those drinkers who are alcoholics suffer considerable damage to their health, appreciably shorten their life expectancy and it invariably leads to family break-ups and despair. No one knows what leads to alcohol addiction, and research has yet to discover what triggers the dependency syndrome. I prefer to apply common sense, which dictates that excess alcoholic consumption cannot be good for one's health. It is better for our bodies to eat when we drink and to drink only sparingly on an empty stomach.

It is the effects of alcohol on behaviour and crime that is of continuing real concern. Those matters have been raised in the House on many occasions. Alcohol consumption may overcome inhibitions. Loutish and violent behaviour, among young people especially, on the streets, football terraces, trains and ferries is more often than not directly attributable to too much drink.

The steps already taken to restrict and prohibit the sale of alcohol—for example, on trains carrying club fans—are welcome, but first-job wages are today much higher compared with 20 years ago. Young people have much more money available. The Heysel stadium disaster in Brussels in May 1985 resulted in a death toll of 39. There are grave lessons to learn from that appalling event. But crime and the causes of crime must be tackled. Mr. Roger Birch, the chief constable of Sussex, initiated the setting up of a licensing unit in Bognor Regis in 1985, and in Brighton last year. The unit's task is to improve the quality of management and control of licensed premises. Constructive support is given by breweries, trade associations and individual licensees.

During 1986, 3,244 scheduled visits were made by uniformed officers, and a marked improvement in behaviour both inside and outside certain premises is evident. Of the 6,000-plus persons apprehended by police in Brighton for criminal offences, 60 per cent. had been drinking liquor in the four hours preceding their arrest, but more significant is the fact that almost one half of the alcohol-related arrests were of people in the age group of 18 to 25. Almost one third of all criminals were arrested between midnight and 4 am, and 78 per cent. had been drinking. Details of each person arrested are documented to record all the relevant details. It is an example which, with funding, should be adopted as a research project in other parts of the United Kingdom. That initiative is to be greatly applauded.

The incidence of excess alcohol consumption among drivers convicted of driving offences is of particular concern. The number of drunken drivers found guilty of driving offences in England and Wales has risen from 58,000 in 1976 to 101,000 in 1984, a rise of some 74 per cent. In Scotland, the rise has been 19 per cent. That comparison points to the need to bring the licensing laws in England and Wales, in my view, into closer line with those in Scotland.

The Government campaign should be widened to make it mandatory for cars, for instance, to have information on consumption limits and how safe it is to drive with certain levels of consumption. In America, I understand that breathalysers are built into some makes of car. One breathes into that part of machinery of the car, and it will not function if one's breath shows that one is over the limit. Another way in which the Government can play a part is to ensure that breathalysers are freely and cheaply available. I see no reason why people should not have their own breathalysers. They would be able to determine whether they were in a fit state to drive.

[Mr. Robert Banks]

Society is changing. More people have cars, which in itself is reflected in the statistics that I quoted. People travel further afield. Living standards have gone up, and rising living standards are reflected in the overall consumption of alcohol. There is a natural pressure to be hospitable, and drinking is the social way of entertaining and of expressing friendship and generosity.

I believe that those who are guilty of drunken driving offences should automatically see the full horror of the consequences for life and health, both for them and others, in videos that should be presented to them as part of the penalty that they have to meet. Those are well-known problems and our experience is similar to that in other countries the world over.

Arguments necessarily centre on how to limit and overcome those problems. The policies that we must adopt should involve logic, an active role to make people understand the dangers of excess alcohol consumption to themselves and others, and the promotion of help to those caught in the sickness of alcoholism. Essential to the proper implementation of an overall policy is the setting up of an interdepartmental working group to bring what is relevant together. That would involve the Department of Health and Social Security, the Department of Education and Science, the Department of Transport, the Home Office, the Department of Trade and Industry, and, I dare say, other Departments. Undoubtedly co-ordination and the actioning of an all-embracing policy to inform, protect and care is the best way forward.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I have listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman's remarks. Does he not agree that the judiciary needs to take on board the gravity of serious drunken driving offences? Some of the convictions imposed upon drunken drivers recently in Scotland have been staggeringly light.

Mr. Banks: That is a very good point, which we should all take to heart. Many sentences are way below the severity that the crime deserves. I can think of one or two cases in which deaths have been caused by drunken drivers and the sentence on the driver has not been severe enough.

I applaud the screening for breast cancer among women, which was announced only a few days ago, and the allocation of £50 million to help to spur on that campaign, but alcohol and health are equally important. I should like to see more funding being made available to deal with those problems.

The Alcohol Education and Research Council was the consequence of the enactment of the Licensing (Alcohol Education and Research) Bill. The council now has a fund of over £5 million through additional and generous donations and judicious financial management. Its work is to give grants to action, research and educational projects, and to date over 120 projects have been supported and over £1,541,000 committed. The council actively seeks applications for funding and is meticulous in ensuring that worthwhile projects are helped where possible. I mention that, because I wish to bring the work of the council to the attention of the House. I hope that those who seek funds for particular projects will not hesitate to put in their application to that body.

Grants from Government concerned with alcohol abuse totalled £1,282,000, but nearly £500,000 went to the Health Education Council and another £500,000 to Alcohol Concern. Those are pitifully small sums in relation to the problems and the cost of them. The organisations do their best with the sums available. The British Medical Association's board of science report called for better aid and better targeted campaigns in schools. I support that. The use of videos for education and information must be wider. A great deal of work is still to be done. I am convinced that this is something which, with larger funding, must be tackled with greater force.

The problems of alcoholics and their accommodation are forbidding, and the battle for funds is nothing to be proud of. Hospices should be a model on which to base the treatment and care of those suffering from alcoholism. Drunkenness convictions in Scotland dropped by 13·6 per cent. in the period from 1978 to 1983. In England and Wales, they rose by 9·1 per cent. In 1980 to 1983, however, the number of convictions dropped in Scotland by 41 per cent. The number also dropped in England and Wales, but by only 12 per cent. I mention those figures because they show the need in England and Wales to reform the licensing laws and to take advice and learn a lesson from what has occurred in Scotland.

I shall refer next to the need to reform the licensing laws in England and Wales. I am convinced that there are benefits in creating a more relaxed atmosphere for the consumption of drinks in, for instance, pubs. the report on the surveys in Scotland following the 1976 Act which changed the licensing laws stated:

"the rate at which alcohol was consumed during periods of drinking fell noticeably, particularly for male drinkers. People were drinking more slowly on licensed premises in 1984 than they had been in 1976. And there was a fall in the number of people who started a drink in the last 10 minutes before the bar closed."

Under our present laws, there is a tendency for people to take a last hurried drink before closing time, on a now-or-never basis — sometimes without really wanting another drink. I am sure that we can learn much from the changes in the laws in Scotland and that we must reform our laws. In a report in 1984, I advocated that the maximum permitted hours that licensing magistrates could grant should be 13—that is, from possibly 11 in the morning to midnight, or 10.30 am to 11.30 at night.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin), in his excellent report entitled, "Time Gentlemen Please", advocated a period from 10 to midnight, following the suggestion in the 1972 Erroll report, and by the Licensed Victuallers Association, the British Tourist Authority and the Adam Smith Institute.

I applaud the advent of low alcohol and non-alcohol beers. They will be a spearhead in the campaign for more sensible drinking. A lot more will have to be done and will be done to make such beers more readily known and more available.

Tourists tend to eat and drink outside expected times, sometimes due to time changes in their journeys or because it suits them better. Likewise, there is a tendency for people to stay up and out later, and the 11 o'clock closing time does not suit them. Not every pub would necessarily want to stay open from 11 in the morning until midnight, nor would they have the customers to make it worthwhile.

If the serious drinker wants to drink in the afternoon, he can quite easily purchase liquour in an off-licence or supermarket. More people need to be provided with what they want. Between 25,000 and 50,000 jobs are estimted to result from this sort of reform, but the important fact to

remember is that, on the evidence of the Scottish example, it would be good for consumers' health and sobriety generally.

It is a somewhat ridiculous anomaly that hotel residents can eat and drink in the hotel restaurant at any hour, yet local people or non-residents who go to the restaurant cannot get a drink with their meals after 3 o'clock in the afternoon. I have been pleased to sponsor the Licensing (Restaurant Meals) Bill which Lord Montgomery has piloted through all its stages in the other place with great skill. Amendments were made in Committee. Those who objected to its Second Reading have not explained their reasons to me. I hope that the debate will be appreciated for the opportunity that it provides of discussing the wider issues of reform and the measure proposed in the Bill.

The Bill merely proposes that restaurants should be able to be granted licences to serve alcohol with meals between 3 pm and 5.30 pm, and between 3 pm and 7 pm on Sundays—that is, restaurants or other places that are structurally adapted and self-contained, including those within or attached to premises such as hotels, public houses or private members' clubs. During the Second Reading debate in another place, Lord Caithness said:

"We are not talking about all premises which may serve drinks with meals, such as the bars of public houses, but only those which are designed to cater specifically for customers sitting down to a meal to which the consumption of alcohol is ancillary." — [Official Report, House of Lords, 17 December 1986; Vol. 483, c.259.]

That Bill, if passed, will not lead to bouts of afternoon drunkenness. Indeed, one can think of no more expensive way of getting a drink than purchasing a meal for it. It is a most reasonable reform and illustrates one way in which we can begin to start to make reforms. It is dictated by the perfectly normal and understandable desire of the industry to meet the wishes of its customers. It will merely mean that people can have a proper meal with a drink in the afternoon if they want one. It will be a job-creating reform and will help Britain to compete internationally for tourists and conference visitors. After all, most civilised countries do not have our present restrictions.

It has been said that the Bill will be piecemeal legislation. The wider issue of licensing reform has been attempted by hon. Members without success. It is now 15 years since the Erroll report was published and recommended that the licensing system should be more flexible to cater for changes in leisure habits and consumer demand, particularly among tourists.

It can be argued that the Act that amended the laws in Scotland was piecemeal—after all, it affected only a part of the United Kingdom—but it went through and it has provided a most valuable case study of the effects of the changes. I do not believe that it can be justly argued that this small, harmless measure should be blocked because of doctrinaire principles against wider reform. In my view, it is a logical step in the right direction. I hope that the House will allow it to make progress.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood was unsuccessful with his Licensing (Amendment) Bill. Many people considered that his Bill and the Licensing (Restaurant Meals) Bill would not work together. Now that his Bill, unhappily, has made no progress, we should allow the Licensing (Restaurant Meals) Bill to go forward and to assist those who wish to have a drink with their meals at a perfectly civilised time in the afternoon. We must contend with many problems, but I believe that the more that we can debate the matter and the more that we can arrive at ideas to deal with the problems, the better we shall make the population.

9.57 am

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I compliment the hon. Member for Harrogate (Mr. Banks) on the way in which he presented his case. However, I shall offer a couple of criticisms in the course of my brief speech. One is that I am much less sanguine than the hon. Gentleman is about the liberalisation of the law in Scotland. I certainly welcome the chance to take part again in a debate on alcohol abuse. I raised the issue of alcohol abuse in an Adjournment debate way back in May of last year, when I said that the nation needed a public health policy on alcohol abuse. I also talked about the staggering growth in alcohol abuse throughout the nation. I suggested that the Government's policies left us in some doubt about whether they genuinely sought to deal effectively with what I believed to be a major social disease.

I have heard hon. Members warn about the drug of choice in America — cocaine — becoming the drug of choice in this country. For many people in Great Britain the drug of choice is alcohol. The excessive consumption of alcohol is a major British social problem that we must address. I respect the sincerity of the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) in his attempt to liberalise the laws south of the border, but I say, have a care, because not all is goodness and sweetness north of the border, as I am sure the hon. Member will agree.

In his excellent speech, the hon. Member for Harrogate referred to the Scottish laws, but I remind him that, at about the same time as those laws were introduced in Scotland, public drunkenness was very largely decriminalised and that at approximately the same time the consumption of alcohol was banned from football grounds. Again, we were ahead of the English in that respect. Similarly, people were not allowed to take alcohol into football grounds.

Banning the consumption of alcohol at football grounds is a liberalisation of the law and it has worked remarkably well. I think that I can say, as a Yorkshireman long domiciled in Scotland and married to a Scot, that Scotland has a much better recent record on crowd behaviour at football grounds than, lamentably, the record at English football grounds.

Banning alcohol from football grounds has had an important effect on alcohol-related crime figures in Scotland. I would argue that it has had as much of an effect as the liberalisation of the laws of the land. I believe, too, that the general recession is partly responsible for the slowing down in the increase of alcohol abuse in Scotland.

Sir Bernard Braine (Castle Point): I am following with great care the hon. Gentleman's very interesting speech. Will he confirm that the slowing down process to which he has just referred began before the Clayson reforms were implemented?

Dr. Godman: Alcohol consumption relates directly to the price of the product. I remember that during the last Budget debate I was criticised on Capital radio for having the nerve to suggest that the Chancellor had missed a good opportunity to deal with the problem, or partially to deal with it, by failing to raise the price of a pint, or of a half

[Dr. Godman]

and half, as we call it in Scotland. I look to this year's Budget for a sensible and realistic price for this drug—the drug of choice for many people.

Chris Park, the excellent director of the Inverclyde Council on Alcohol in the constituency that I represent, said:

"On the subject of alcohol problems versus drug problems, alcohol is by far the most abused drug in Scotland . . . in the last year, around 700 people died as a direct result of their alcohol abuse, whereas around 160 died from heroin abuse."

To return to the liberalisation of the law, Douglas Allsop, the director of the Scottish Council on Alcohol, claims that, in Scotland,

"Research has shown that any increase in availability of alcohol will lead to increased consumption and an inevitable increase in the already unacceptably high prevalence of alcohol related problems in Scotland . . . We are particularly concerned by the increase in off-licensed premises after the recent Government report"—

entitiled "Adolescent Drinking"—

"finding that 61 per cent. of Scotland's 13 year olds drink alcohol".

Mr. Allsop went on to say that most of those youngsters obtain that alcohol

"virtually without challenge from off-licences and supermarket outlets."

That is why I say one must take care when pointing to Scotland.

Not so long ago in Scotland my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Shettleston (Mr. Marshall) succeeded with his laudable private Member's Bill regarding the sale of solvents to youngsters by Scottish shopkeepers. We need to be equally tough on the sale of alcohol to our youngsters.

Much more needs to be done to tackle this evil. Industry has an important role to play. A number of Scottish companies, including some in the brewing industry—God knows, they have a responsibility here—have negotiated alcohol treatment programmes with the relevant trade unions and local alcohol units in hospitals to deal with the problem.

I do not believe that a man or woman should be sacked because he or she is suffering from this form of addiction, but it is absolutely essential that such a person should seek treatment. Companies, employers and trade unions must acknowledge that they have an important role to play. I welcome the developments in the alcohol treatment of employees, but it is piecemeal and the Government have a more direct role to play in encouraging this kind of development.

Some industries need this more than others. All newspapers, in my view—I do not say this because of last night's result in Greenwich—should have an alcohol treatment programme for their employees, particularly for their political journalists.

The hon. Member for Harrogate said that much more needs to be done by way of health education programmes in our schools and colleges. I welcome what he said. In a constituency such as mine, which has been ravaged by unemployment, particularly youth unemployment, it is absolutely essential that youngsters who have been forced into joblessness should not take up heavy drinking. Too many of them are doing so, and they require help.

Apart from our own Scottish Parliament, I should also like to see an increase in the number of designated places in Scotland. A designated place is a hostel for those who are habitually arrested for one element of alcohol abuse—public drunkenness. A great deal of the time of the community policeman—the laddie on the beat—is taken up by picking up public drunkards and running them in. We have one designated place in Aberdeen. The chief constable of Grampian region speaks very highly of it, because it releases his police officers from a great deal of unnecessary work and it allows professionals to give professional assistance to people who are suffering from public drunkenness. The Government should provide far more financial assistance for setting up designated places. Some might say that we need one here, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

As for dealing with people who are suffering from this form of addiction, there is a project under way in the alcohol unit of the Duke street hospital in Glasgow. The hon. Member for Eastwood will know the hospital. Its catchment area includes Easterhouse and Drumchapel, Glasgow. Some encouraging developments are taking place in the treatment of those who are addicted to alcohol. That work is being conducted under the direction of Dr. P. Jauhar and Dr. Margaret Walker, with some help from Dr. Raymond Antebi. Nurses in the psychiatric unit are involved in the treatment of the addict—because that is the kind of patient we are talking about—and also social workers, occupational therapists and the district health visitor. The patients in that hospital are drawn from wide socio-economic strata in east Glasgow. Bringing together this team of doctors such as Dr. Jauhar and Dr. Walker and social workers—one of whom happens to be my wife—means that the addict is given help not only when he or she is in the hospital but when he or she returns to his or her family in the community. That development should be extended to other hospitals, not just in Scotland but in the United Kingdom.

I say to those from south of the border, have a care when talking about the liberalisation of the Scottish laws, although there are positive elements to them. But people in Scotland must deal with a major social evil, especially among youngsters—that of alcohol abuse.

10.10 am

Sir Bernard Braine (Castle Point): I am glad to follow the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman), who spoke with such knowledge and understanding of the alcohol scene. I liked his warning, "Have a care." I hope that that will be the message that the House sends out. I should also like to join the hon. Gentleman in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate (Mr. Banks) on his success in the ballot, on his wisdom in selecting the subject of licensing reform and alcohol misuse—the two should always be linked—and on the informed and moderate way in which he opened our debate. I am sure that all hon. Members would agree that he has performed a great service to the House in raising the matter in that way.

It is important that we should identify clearly the purpose of licensing law. Historically, it is the principal means employed by and within our society to control the harm that can arise from the misuse of a potentially dangerous drug, one about which the medical profession has been warning us repeatedly during recent years. When taken in excess alcohol can impair health, shorten life and cause immense human misery.

That there is a need to control the misuse of alcohol cannot be disputed by anyone. That licensing law is an

effective control is apparently rejected by some, but the evidence is against them. A study of the effect of the restrictions introduced during the first world war which formed the basis of our present licensing laws shows clearly that the restrictions had exactly the effect intended. Drunkenness convictions fell by 79 per cent. between 1915 and 1918 and over the same period deaths from liver disease fell by more than 60 per cent. During the period following the first world war, Britain gained its reputation as one of the most sober nations in the world. The level of alcohol-related harm fell probably to its lowest point in our history. Of course, there were other factors, such as the economic recession in the early 1930s, but it cannot be seriously doubted that licensing restrictions played an important part.

Controlling the availability of alcohol does work. The licensing law is a protection against alcohol misuse. Certainly, as the law has been steadily whittled away in more recent years, there has been a huge increase in alcohol consumption and in alcohol-related harm. It should be unnecessary to repeat the account which I gave in the debate on the Licensing (Amendment) Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) when we spoke of the growing misuse of alcohol as a major threat to public health.

If, however, we go on moving piece by piece, nibbling at the protection that the licensing law affords, what degree of harm are we going to accept? Do we have to reach the levels in France and the Soviet Union before action is taken? Nibble, nibble, nibble — that is the advocacy we constantly hear from some of my hon. Friends. How far do we have to go before the harm becomes even greater than it is? What is the minimum control that such people will accept? The relationship between availability and consumption is clear. The relationship between the price of alcohol and consumption is even clearer. The hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow did not say that, in terms of disposable income, alcohol is actually cheaper than it was 10 or 15 years ago. Can one be surprised that it is now within the reach of teenagers and that the level of harm is rising?

The public health case for not allowing alcohol to become an even cheaper item in the shopping basket is overwhelming. However, the idea that raising the price is feasible as the sole strategy is surely unrealistic. But then it is unrealistic to expect any single measure to be feasible as a protective strategy. There are the questions of how much alcohol costs, how many licensed outlets should we permit and what should be their nature, what should be the hours of sale, or the legal drinking age, the advertising and promotion of alcohol by means such as sports sponsorship and legal control over alcohol-related behaviour such as drinking and driving. The aims of our sporting stars are to achieve excellence in achievement. Does alcohol add to this or does it take away. The idea of the drinks industry being involved in sponsoring high achievement in sport is horrendous nonsense.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate spoke vividly of the connection between alcohol misuse and crime, especially violent crime. He was right to do so. The police have established clearly the connection between the two. As consumption goes up, crime increases, especially among youngsters. The House will recall the appalling vicarage rape case. Crime has taken a pretty foul trend in recent years. Was there anything more appalling when a burglary by three men led to the vilest assault of a young girl that one can remember? The two vicious rapists had drunk five to six bottles of vodka. Between that kind of crime and drink——

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham) *rose——*

Sir Bernard Braine: Let me finish the sentence. The indictment is a pretty powerful one. Between a vicious crime of that kind and the excessive consumption of alcohol there is a direct link, and every senior police officer knows that to be so.

Mr. Couchman: I am following my right hon. Friend's arguments, which I have heard before and in which he is extremely sincere. The motion moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate (Mr. Banks) calls for a reform of licensing laws. His call is for a sensible relaxation of certain of the laws relating to licensed premises. Is my right hon. Friend suggesting that the people who were convicted in this foul and horrible case had bought their excessive drink — the five to six bottles of vodka — from responsible licensed outlets, such as public houses and restaurants, or is he suggesting that they obtained them at supermarkets?

Sir Bernard Braine: In due course I shall get on to the question where most illegal drinking is taking place. Since my hon. Friend tempts me I shall deal with that. For the moment, let me say that all those elements need to be considered in relation to one another and in the light of the known relationship between the prevalence of alcohol misuse and the general level of alcohol consumption in society. That is the point of departure for the rest of my argument. If my hon. Friend will hold himself in patience I shall get to the point he has raised.

Let us agree that when consumption increases, harm increases; when consumption falls, so does the level of harm. The essential failing of the present situation is that the Government lack an overall view of what they wish to achieve in relation to the problem. Indeed, they are divided on the subject. Government Departments with an interest in the manufacture, distribution and sale of alcohol or in controlling the effects of alcohol misuse appear to act independently of one another. The policies of one Department often undermine the polices of another. We are told that the Home Office and Department of Employment Ministers favour a gentle relaxation of the licensing laws. That could be a measure which could hardly fail to undermine the efforts of the Department of Transport to tackle the problem of drinking and driving. It has been suggested to us that we should encourage drinking in the middle of the afternoon, at least with food in restaurants and so on. That would bring more people who consume alcohol on to the road at peak travelling times, particularly when children are coming home from school. I made that point in a previous debate and I shall not repeat it here.

Mr. Allan Stewart (Eastwood): Can my right hon. Friend explain to the House why the Scottish police favour the liberalisation of licensing hours in Scotland?

Sir Bernard Braine: Did my hon. Friend say "favoured" or "favour"?

Mr. Allan Stewart: Favour.

Sir Bernard Braine: I am glad that my hon. Friend is not harking back to the situation before because my impression when I was chairman of the National Council

[Sir Bernard Braine]

on Alcoholism was that police officers in Scotland did not favour the reforms and were not happy at the time of the reforms. Yet that is an irrelevance. What really matters is whether liberalisation is accompanied by a whole host of other measures. If my hon. Friend will keep himself in patience, he will hear what I have to say on that score. I shall put my beliefs on the line. I have always believed that drinking in a controlled atmosphere of a properly run public house is something to be defended. Indeed, it is more likely that people will behave themselves there, where a licensee may lose his licence if they do not. My hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood must look at the problem in the round. That is what I am proposing to do.

The Department of Transport cannot be happy about anything that leads to increased drinking in the afternoon and it is crucial that steps are taken to remedy that lack of co-ordination between Government Departments. It has been crucial for a long time. The Central Policy Review Staff, a Government body, stated in 1979—incidentally, the Government never published its report, but it was leaked to a Swedish newspaper:

"Neither the existing machinery within Government nor the bodies outside it provide the means for the coherent formulation of policy."

That statement is as true today as it was then.

I have a suggestion to make. The interdepartmental committee set up in 1984 to co-ordinate the Government's response to illicit drug abuse, which has worked well under the splendid leadership of my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Office, provides a model that could be followed. I cannot see why the terms of reference of that committee cannot simply be extended to include alcohol. Another requirement is the creation of an appropriate forum for the discussion and formulation of control policies between Government, the agencies concerned with public health and the drink industry. Clearly, the Government must reconcile many diverse and often competing claims and interests. Of course, special weight has to be given to such a recommendation. The Royal College of Psychiatrists, which has long been urging action along those lines, recognised that the impact of health-directed policy on the livelihood of large sections of the population must be borne in mind and strategies devised to protect their interests against unavoidable negative consequences. I accept that fully. However, at present, no such forum exists and the process of working out the detailed, practical implications of control policies can hardly be said to have begun.

It might be thought then that I would have welcomed the establishment of the National Forum which was to be a meeting ground for the Department of Health and Social Securiy, Alcohol Concern, the Heath Education Council and the drinks industry. That body is now dormant following the departure of its chairman, Sir John Crofton, the eminent Edinburgh doctor, and the establishment of the new Health Education Authority. The trouble was that Sir John rumbled—I shall use that word—the set-up. He told us that he became increasingly convinced that the industry was intending only a cosmetic operation. Alas, I have to say that I did not welcome the setting up of the National Forum. It does not follow that, because the drinks industry has legitimate interests, it is right to permit or encourage it effectively to control what is clearly intended to be the principal national forum for the discussion of prevention policy. That was a wholly wrong approach.

What do we know of the industry's views and its attitude towards prevention policies? We know that it regards increased taxation on alcoholic drink, restrictive licensing laws, controls on advertising and measures against drunken driving as threats that must be neutralised. The confidential drink-driving document referred to in the article by Mr. Andrew Veitch in *The Guardian* on 19 February makes that abundantly clear. That document also makes it clear that the drink industry is not going to repeat the mistake of the tobacco industry when it was faced with not dissimilar threats, but will respond in a much more subtle and sophisticated way.

What then could we expect from a national forum, of which, as I understand it, the drink industry has to be the principal paymaster? The industry will naturally be prepared, indeed eager, to support any number of ideas and projects for educating the public to drink sensibly because such projects suggest that something is being done, while posing very little threat to its profits. It is highly unlikely that the drink industry will be prepared to discuss the level of alcohol consumption beyond which society cannot tolerate any further expansion. It is even less likely that it will favour the return to those former levels of consumption which produced the lowest incidence of alcohol-related health and social harm in our country.

There must be a national forum of some sort but it must be a properly constituted body without undue influence from vested interests. If a forum were to be created which had a genuine interest in and willingness to formulate preventive strategies, licensing law would have to be a prime area of discussion. With that, I am in complete agreement.

As I said in a previous debate, I do not see how any serious analysis of this topic could conclude that the solution to alcohol misuse is to make alcohol more easily available at all times of the day and night. In the past that belief was held sincerely by many people and no doubt many still believe it. It sounds to me as if some hon. Members still believe that. It is comparable to the belief which prevailed in earlier times that an appropriate form of housing for a family with children was a high-rise block. Experience has disproved both those beliefs and, in relation to alcohol misuse, there are serious questions to be asked not merely about pub opening hours but about the proliferation of outlets that we have seen in supermarkets, clubs and elsewhere.

The present and any future Government should aim to reduce the number of outlets and place additional controls upon them. With regard to supermarkets, for example, in order to reduce impulse buying it should be obligatory for there to be a separate entry and exit to the area from which alcohol is sold. Sales should be across the counter and not by customer self-service. Such measures could be introduced in conjunction with others concerned with price, advertising and promotion and preventive health education. We need a coherent and co-ordinated response and so far we have not got it. The Government know perfectly well what must be done. They were told in 1985 when the DHSS received a report on under-age drinking prepared by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, but which was not released until just a week before Christmas. Consider what the report says:

"for adolescents the major drug of misuse is alcohol, and . . . they suffer far more problems from its use than from all other drugs combined."

I have a few statistics of which the House should be made aware. These are the outcome of a survey that was initiated by the Government, who sat on the results for a year. It appears that 19 per cent. of boys and 14 per cent. of girls aged 13 years obtain their drink in pubs or bars, not in supermarkets. Among 15-year-olds, the percentages rise to 44 per cent. and 42 per cent. By the age of 17, 68 per cent. of boys and 57 per cent. of girls obtain their drink from pubs or bars, not supermarkets. Among 13-year-olds, 26 per cent. of all boys and 17 per cent. of girls drink alcohol on four or more days in the week, and 30 per cent of boys and 38 per cent. of girls drank at least once a week. Among 15-year-olds, the figures are 34 per cent. and 25 per cent. and 22 per cent. and 27 per cent. respectively. Nearly one in every five of 15-year-old boys drinks more than 25 units of alcohol per week.

I shall translate that into medical fact. The Royal College of Psychiatrists has stated that the upper health limit for adult men is no more than 21 units a week. The OPCS report continues:

"Heavy drinking, including, no doubt, what is known in adults as 'problem drinking' among a minority of adolescents (even among secondary school children) is a regular commitment that forms part of their lives. It is not an occasional adventure.

A minority of adolescents have a regular habit of drinking. Some of them are still at school."

Under 21-year-olds now account for one in four of all drunkenness convictions compared with one in 12 30 years ago. One in 14 cases of drunkenness involves under-age drinking compared with one in 100 cases 30 years ago. Let the House heed what I am about to say, even if it chooses to ignore the rest of my remarks. For the first time this century 16-year-olds are more at risk from drunkenness than the middle-aged. The rate of drunkenness per 100,000 population among 16-year-olds exceeds that of the 30-60 age group. It is no wonder that Sir John Crofton drew back from the trap which was being set for him.

Parliament cannot ignore the figures that I have recited. I have warned the Government repeatedly that if they continue to ignore the problem, there will be a heavy toll of misery and they will be responsible largely for it. I do not believe that they will ignore it. I think that they are now taking the warnings extremely seriously.

Licensing is about achieving a balance between the right of the individual to consume alcohol, which taken in moderation is a pleasant adjunct to living—most of us enjoy an occasional drink with our family and with our friends—and the right of society at large to be protected against alcohol misuse. Our licensing laws have grown increasingly out of balance by making alcohol too easily available and we are already paying an unacceptable price in both human and economic terms for the imbalance. The prime responsibility of Government is to ensure that the cost does not increase still further but instead is reduced.

10.34 am

Mr. Roger Sims (Chislehurst): We all admire and much respect the vigorous way in which my right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine) advances his case. We admire, too, the way in which he has championed the cause against alcoholism for many years, and in so doing has sought to persuade the Government to pursue a more positive campaign against it. I would go a long way with him in what he said about the desirability of an overall package of measures that link the reform of licensing laws with other measures directed to education and research.

I congratulate, too, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate (Mr. Banks) on selecting this subject for debate and on the wording of the motion. My hon. Friend was unduly modest with his references to the Alcohol Research and Education Council, which was set up directly as a result of a private Member's Bill that he piloted through Parliament. My hon. Friend has been a distinguished member of the council.

I believe that licensing reform is overdue. The fact that there is a virtually unlimited supply of liquor should be linked to increased research and education. I was extremely sympathetic to the Bill brought forward recently by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), but it seemed that it could be open to criticism from some, such as my right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point, who fear that increased opening hours are bound to lead to increased consumption. A reasonable inititial step would be to allow more flexible hours, without necessarily increasing the number of hours that public houses can remain open. We could introduce more flexible opening hours tomorrow without waiting for the larger package of measures to which reference has been made.

I welcome the reference in the motion to those who consume alcohol to excess. The problem is that some use alcohol to excess, not alcohol per se. At this stage I should declare an interest because, as the House may be aware, I am parliamentary adviser to the Scotch Whisky Association. I became so involved through my interest in the problems of alcoholism. I was invited to sit on a committee that the association runs, which takes a particular interest in the problems. It was by that route that I came to be the association's adviser.

The House will be aware also that I am chairman of the parliamentary ASH group. I am accused occasionally of being inconsistent in holding these two positions—parliamentary adviser to the Scotch Whisky Association and chairman of the ASH group—but there is a clear distinction to be drawn, even though it may not be shared by my hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones), who happily has to remain silent in our debate. There is a clear distinction to be drawn between tobacco products, which are harmful per se and have been proved beyond doubt to be so, and alcohol, which is not. Alcohol can be good for us if it is taken in moderation; indeed, there are occasions when it is prescribed by medical practitioners.

The important feature is that alcohol should be used properly. Clearly it should not be misused or abused. That is a view that is held strongly by the trade associations, including the Scotch Whisky Association, the Brewers Society and the Wine and Spirit Association. They are as concerned as we are about the problem of alcoholism, which is a scourge of our society. As responsible members of the community, the representatives of the trade associations do not want to see it. Alcoholism does no good to them or their products. Indeed, it is damaging to be associated with all the consequences of alcoholism.

One of the undoubted difficulties is that alcohol is associated with many extremely unfortunate consequences. For example, 25 per cent. of all road accidents involve a drink element. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point has said, alcohol is associated

[Mr. Roger Sims]

with crime and domestic problems. Surely the fault lies with the individual who abuses alcohol and not with alcohol itself. If the contrary argument is advanced, we might as well hold the internal combustion engine responsible for the many accidents that take place, drink-related or not. The problem lies with people and how and why they abuse alcohol. About 2 per cent. of alcohol users abuse it. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point said, the vast majority of people use it sensibly. We all enjoy a drink now and again in pleasant surroundings, but not when we are about to drive off in a car.

It is difficult to estimate how many people abuse alcohol, because we must consider everybody: from the business man who does a reasonable job but who, if one wants to get something out of him, one should see before 12 noon — we cannot say that he is incompetent or unable to do his job in the afternoon, it is just that he is a little the worse for wear — right down to the down-and-out with his bottle of meths.

One thing that we do not know is why people become alcoholic and whether it is possible to get them off alcohol.

Dr. Godman: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one of the factors is the slick and smooth advertising of alcoholic products? Does he know of any television advertisement for beer, wine or spirits which urges moderation?

Mr. Sims: I do not think that there are television advertisements for spirits. Spirit manufacturers have deliberately not used television advertising. Nevertheless, I do not dispute the broad thrust of the hon. Gentleman's assertion.

We do not know why some people turn to alcohol. Perhaps they are under stress, but why do some people turn to alcohol when others turn to drugs, others to cigarettes and still others simply bite their nails? There is much that we do not know about why people become alcoholic. There is conflicting advice about the best way in which to treat alcoholism and even whether it is curable. Some experts say that it is, whereas others say that, once an alcoholic, always an alcoholic, and that, although it is possible to get somebody off the drink, if he has another drop he will be back in trouble again. There is a great deal of research still to be done.

Research into availability has been mentioned. It seems that making alcohol more easily available in licensed house conditions does not necessarily increase alcoholism, but there must be some suspicion that the increased number of off-licence outlets does, but we do not know.

The hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) mentioned price. I wonder how important a factor that is. One can argue that, if alcohol is cheaper, more will be sold and that if it is more expensive less will be sold, but we do not know how important price is for the real addict. Is there not a danger that, if we double the price, addicts will simply spend more money on their alcohol and less on other things such as food, or go down to the market and buy meths, thus harming themselves in that way? We simply do not know enough. It could be argued that we should increase the price substantially and penalise the 98 per cent. of sensible alcohol users to dissuade the 2 per cent. who abuse it.

A lot more could be done in education. We must promote awareness of the problem of alcoholism among employers, for example, to achieve a sympathetic understanding of alcoholism and what can be done about it. We should encourage them to take a sympathetic approach to alcoholics and send them off for treatment. The same is true for employees. They often know that Joe is a bit the worse for drink and help him along by covering up his deficiencies. They would do him a far better service if they ensured that he got some help.

The problem of young people drinking and under-age drinking has been mentioned. It is a serious problem. I am keen on the idea of identity cards, as they would have a useful role to play in the control of crime and terrorism. This is not the time to develop that argument, but a useful side effect of such a sytem might be colour-coded cards, for example, which would have to be presented when buying alcohol so that the vendor would know whether the customer was old enough to buy liquor. We should remember that all hon. Members carry identity cards. They are in use in many walks of life.

Establishing age is a real difficulty. The problem has occurred in my family. When 18, my diminutive daughter was refused service and had to ask her under-age but strapping brother to buy a drink for her. Establishing age contributes to the problems of licensees, and identity cards could help.

It is important to teach youngsters the facts about alcohol and its effects on the system. They should be taught its long-term effects on the body, not just the fact that it can make people feel drunk. We must also teach them that that applies to alcohol in all forms.

We often hear disparaging references to hard liquor. I have mentioned my interest in the spirits industry, but it is as well to take account of the fact that the important thing is the fact that alcohol is taken, not the form in which it is taken. It is not always appreciated that a single whisky, a glass of sherry, a glass of wine and half a pint of lager contain exactly the same amount of alcohol. The form is irrelevant.

Many bodies are involved in research and education, and I have mentioned a few. Many trade bodies make grants without strings to research and education projects which are doing some extremely useful work. The Brewers Society has produced an excellent handbook for schools about drinking and driving, which is written in sensible and straightforward English which youngsters can understand and relate to. The Scotch Whisky Association has issued wall posters on alcohol, its effects, how it is made and the need for it to be used sensibly.

More impetus should be put behind research and education, and there should be some co-ordination. One begins to wonder whether the forum will ever take off, but the impetus might come from it. The DHSS has a role to play. Indeed, it has already produced publications such as "Drinking Sensibly". We might with some optimism look to the new Health Education Authority which is a beefed-up version of the Health Education Council. It could be a co-ordinating body and ensure that more resources are put behind education and research, as they are extremely important.

I am not suggesting that anything I have said is particularly new, but there is still not enough awareness of the problem and the extent of alcoholism. Indeed, there is much misunderstanding about it. If this debate helps to increase awareness and understanding, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate will have served a signal purpose.

10.39 am

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): It gives me particular pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims), whose constituent I am. He talked a good deal of sense and offered us a balanced view on the question of the relaxation of the licensing laws, but with a consciousness of the danger of alcohol in all its forms.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate (Mr. Banks) on his choice of subject. I am somewhat constrained in talking about the health element of this topic as I am PPS to my hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (Mr. Newton), the Minister for Health.

It will come as no surprise that I support my hon. Friend in his aim for sensible relaxation and reform of the licensing laws. I am, uniquely amongst hon. Members, a multiple licence holder and managing director of a small company which tenants and operates five public houses in the London area. It is right that I should make that interest clear.

Nearly 80 years ago my grandfather took his first tenancy in Pimlico road, SW1. We have been tenants of another public house in Pimlico for 55 years, and in 1984 we took another public house in Pimlico. As a family, we have been publicans in Pimlico for 80 years. For 75 years my grandfather, then my father and latterly myself, have been forced to cohabit with the same mistress—DORA. DORA was first thrust upon us in 1916. She had a facelift in 1921 and a further round of plastic surgery in 1964. DORA is now pretty ragged around the edges, but reports of DORA's imminent demise are, I fear, much exaggerated and premature. I have begun to think that were my son to follow me into the trade my one bequest to him would be the family floosy, DORA. This is not a confession to yet another Tory sex scandal.

DORA, as I am sure all hon. Members will know, stands for the Defence of the Realm Act, which was enacted in 1915 to curtail the overenthusiastic drinking habits of munitions workers during the first world war. Although there have been permitted hours for pubs at various times since the 17th century, and continuously since the Licensing Act 1872, DORA severely curtailed the liberal permitted hours under the 1872 Act—some 18 or 19 hours a day. DORA empowered a liquor control board to enforce quite draconian restrictions on opening hours.

The 1921 Act allowed a slight relaxation of DORA, allowing nine hours in London and eight hours a day elsewhere, with five hours permitted on Sundays. Licensing justices were granted a fairly minimal discretion as to opening and closing times, but a mandatory break of at least two hours was enshrined in the 1921 Act.

Permitted hours have been relaxed slightly since 1921. The 1964 Act gave us the mixed blessing of the 10 minutes' drinking-up time.

Hon. Members will remember that the Erroll committee report in the early 1970s recommended wholesale change in the licensing law, since when successive Governments have stood back and allowed the countervailing forces of tourism on the one hand and the health lobby on the other to be used as an alibi for inaction.

Scotland was luckier. Dr. Clayson reported later and a Labour Government, desperate to protect their base against the nationalists in Scotland, brought into being in 1976 the reforms which have been much talked about by the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) and by my right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine). Those reforms liberalised what had been, until then, the most severe restrictions in the United Kingdom and probably in Europe. The recent Office of Population Censuses and Surveys report suggests that that liberalisation had led Scots to drink in a more responsible way. I shall not take that any further because we all have our views on the OPCS report, and we can all use the report in our own individual cases.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Is my hon. Friend aware that people such as myself, who are teetotal, think that the changes in the Scottish legislation were one of the best things ever to have ever happened? The problems that came from the rapid drinking that was required by 9.30 pm, as it was in Scotland, created enormous problems, which have now vanished.

Mr. Couchman: There is no worse example of forced quick drinking than the legendary six o'clock swill in Australia, which was the most unpleasant and horrible way of drinking that the world has probably ever seen.

Many hon. Members will know that there is now a good deal of getting round the law. In the urban areas particularly, special hours certificates are not difficult to obtain, and many entertainment establishments can trade until 2 am and even later with the provision of the most minimal meals.

There is also widespread flouting of the law by irresponsible licensees who treat the law on permitted hours with contempt. Every area has its "afters" houses; they are well known and the police seem slow to act against them. The law is thus falling into disrepute, just as the law on Sunday trading has fallen into disrepute. That is not surprising, for permitted hours, which might have been justifiable in 1921—an era before the dawn of television and a time when people went to work earlier, worked longer hours and at more physically demanding jobs—are scarcely relevant today. People's living habits have changed.

The other major factor that has rendered our permitted hours anachronistic is tourism, both outward and inward. We visit foreign parts for our holidays and find more liberal regimes for the sale of drink almost everywhere apart from Scandinavia and the Moslem countries. Foreigners visit Britain and find our drinking hours in pubs and more particular in restaurants—as my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate (Mr. Banks) pointed out in some detail—puzzling and extremely irritating.

What is to be done? Since I was elected just three and a half years ago, there has been a tremendous growth of the realisation that our permitted hours are no longer relevant to today's way of life. It is a topic which is talked about, where I suspect it was not before. The licensed trade, publicans, restaurateurs and the brewers have done a good job in bringing the matter to the attention of politicians. Not unnaturally, I have been amongst those who are leading the campaign for greater awareness in the House. I have had the opportunity of bringing the matter to the attention of Ministers, both formally in the House and informally in discussion.

More than 200 Back-Bench Members have signed the early-day motion of my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale), which called for longer and more flexible licensing hours. That is an indication of the

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upsurge of opinion in the House. We all realise that early-day motions are not signed by members of the Government and do not lead to legislation, but they are an indication—a big indication when they are signed by as many people as signed my hon. Friend's motion—of the interest in the matters in hand.

Until recently there was a perception of disunity among the various parts of the licensed trade. Restaurateurs, hoteliers and publicans, whether tenants or managers, appeared not to agree on a programme of reform and relaxation. That problem is behind us. When my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) introduced his private Member's Bill recently there was a great sense of unity within the trade. It liked the Bill, which seemed sensible.

I should like to have seen a vigorous campaign of support for the Bill from the restaurant and pub-going public. That did not happen, but hon. Members will recognise that it is always much easier to motivate a campaign against an issue than to initiate a campaign in favour of change. The Sunday trading fiasco last year demonstrated that fact to perfection. We have not been deluged with letters of support, but we have certainly had almost no evidence of hostility to change.

I wish that my hon. Friend's Bill had been given a Second Reading. I regret that it did not get into Committee, where it would have been vulnerable to change and where it could have been fully and properly discussed. I regret that it seems unlikely to succeed.

I support the motion and I hope that it will spur the Government into bringing forward reforming legislation. Such legislation should not be left to the vagaries of our private Members' Bills mechanism. I am tired of my family's long-serving mistress. My affection for her is long since dead and it is time that DORA's rouged and raddled body was laid finally to rest.

11.2 am

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): My hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) referred to my early-day motion which was signed by 206 Members. I would not have tabled that motion if I had not believed that the time for change had come and that change would be beneficial, not only to tourism, but to public health.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine) referred in his eloquent speech to the fact that when a change of law was suggested in Scotland the police opposed the proposal. However, the police now support the change that was made. They have changed their view in the light of experience, and a similar process is happening in the House. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate (Mr. Banks) on tabling his motion.

In the light of the experience in Scotland, we know the adverse, and potentially beneficial, effects of change. During the past year I have had the privilege, as a fellow-elect of the industry and parliament trust, to spend 25 days with Scottish and Newcastle Breweries, and my interest in that company appears in the Register of Members' Interests.

Before my election to the House I made television programmes for teenagers. One series dealt with the problems facing young people and as part of the preparation for that series I took a training course in counselling in alcohol-related problems. More recently, I have worked in the treatment of alcoholics and I am involved in such a course at present.

Anyone who has experienced urine-soaked clothes and mattresses, bodies lying in pools of vomit and the knock in the middle of the night from a policeman saying that there has been yet another accident or yet another car crash, anyone who has witnessed the breakdown of a family, the loss of a job, divorce and misery caused to children, anyone who has heard and desperately wanted to believe the lies told by alcoholics, such as, "I am not drinking now", anyone who has had to search a house, looking for drink in lavatory cisterns, under beds and in the stuffing in the backs of chairs, and anyone who has noticed that a dog is being taken for walks more frequently and knows that somewhere out there bottles of spirits are hidden in hedgerows is more than aware that alcohol abuse is a serious illness.

I do not believe that any responsible hon. Member would wish to exacerbate alcohol abuse, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) said, the problem is confined to 2 per cent. or less of the population. They abuse what the vast majority of the population use properly and enjoy. We should not confuse use with abuse.

I was particularly involved with the problems of young people and my hon. Friend the Minister for Health has laid great emphasis on those problems. Many young people learn their drinking at private parties and get their ill-acquired drinking skills from the off-licence or supermarket. That is where the roots of abuse are most likely to be found. In the responsible and controlled environment of the public house sensible drinking skills —as they are termed by the Accept organisation with which I trained—are taught by good and responsible publicans.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point suggested that our licensing laws are a protection against alcohol misuse. That idea is desperately wrong. Our licensing laws do little or nothing to protect the alcoholic from his or her craving. The alcoholic will protect his or her lines of supply, whatever may be the opening hours of pubs.

Indeed, it could be argued that our licensing laws exacerbate the problem. Alcoholics are isolated. Most do not drink in pubs, though I accept that some will have started their drinking in public houses or clubs. The teenager, possibly under age, who is first legally taken into a public house by parents for a non-alcoholic drink learns drinking skills in a social environment. Those skills should also be taught in school. If we are to control the problems created by the abuse of alcohol, we have to start at the root of the problem and teach young people how to use alcohol and how to drink it properly and sensibly. We can do that through much greater effort in schools. My hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst referred to the publication that the Brewers Society has brought out and is issuing to schools that relates specifically to drinking and driving.

I should like to think and suggest that the members of the Brewers Society, the major brewers — this was certainly my experience with Scottish and Newcastle Breweries — make a tremendous effort and take their responsibilities in this direction very seriously. The amount of money that has been poured by the brewers into education is not inconsiderable. The amount of money that the brewers have poured into their houses to create an environment that is more socially acceptable than the

drinking houses of the 1920s and 1930s is also considerable. In Scotland, especially, the social attitude to drinking has changed dramatically.

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): Would my hon. Friend care to comment upon the commercial pressures that breweries are under these days in a highly competitive business? One understands that publicans have targets that they must meet. Does not the fact that they have to keep to these targets to earn a decent income in a highly competitive, pressurised environment encourage them perhaps to sell that extra pint to that extra individual which they should not do?

Mr. Gale: My experience is that most publicans will not do that. Most publicans behave responsibly. I have my own personal views on the licensing of publicans as well as public houses. I have made no secret of the fact that I would personally like to see premises and the licence holders themselves being licensed and for there to be a requirement that a licence holder should be on licensed premises at all times when those premises are open.

Mr. Couchman: I think I am right in saying, in response to my hon. Friend, that we are licensed as licensees. I am a multiple licence holder. I am adjudged to be a fit and proper person to hold that licence. Does not my hon. Friend agree that the last thing that a publican wants is a drunk in his pub?

Mr. Gale: I agree entirely. I shall come to that point in a moment. I clearly did not make myself plain. Yes, of course I understand and accept that the licensee is licensed, as are the premises. However, at present there is not a roving band, if I may put it that way, of people not licensed to a particular house, but holding a licence to run a house, as you or I, Mr. Deputy Speaker, have licences to drive cars. There should be, just as there has to be a qualified pharmacist in a chemist on duty at all times, a qualified licensee on the premises at all times. I am sorry if I did not make myself plain.

I shall refer briefly to the experience in Scotland. Before my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) sought to introduce his private Member's Bill, it was suggested that the British Medical Association had opposed him. It is true that, at the beginning of the week in question, the BMA held a press conference indicating opposition to the Bill. Having given bad publicity to the Bill, it is remarkable how quickly the BMA retracted what it had said. It was compelled to do that because it discovered, to its embarrassment, that the *British Medical Journal* had carried in January of this year a report from Dr. Martin Plant of the University department of psychiatry at the royal Edinburgh hospital that related specifically to the experiences in Scotland. I wish to put that report on the record. Dr. Plant says in the *British Medical Journal:*

"It may be concluded that since the licensing legislation of 1976, Scotland has improved relative to the rest of Britain in relation to drunken driving, drunkenness, total admissions for alcohol dependence and alcoholic psychosis. The position in relation to alcohol-related mortality is less clear. Alcoholism (later alcohol dependence) is a rare cause of death which may fluctuate considerably over time. Even so it can be concluded that relative alcohol-related deaths were increasing in Scotland before 1976. Since then this trend has continued in relation to liver cirrhosis. Available evidence does not clarify whether or not the 1976 legislation has influenced this trend.

To the extent that Scottish experience serves as a guide to the effects of relaxing licensing laws in England and Wales, this evidence is cautiously optimistic."

That is a psychiatrist's view of Scotland. My own experience, from visiting Scotland last year and having visited Scotland for many years prior to that, and having lived in Scotland prior to the change in laws, is that there has been a dramatic change in social attitudes. The incidence of drink-related crime, of drunken driving, of drunken affray and of drunken theft have all fallen.

If we contrast the experiences and the recommendations of the police in Scotland with those of hon. Members around the rest of the United Kingdom who represent seaside towns, we must conclude that the Scottish experience has been of benefit to tourism and socially desirable. Any hon. Member who represents a seaside town and who finds, on a summer Saturday afternoon at half past 2 in the afternoon, some 750 drunks, or people who have drunk too much, turfed out on to the sea front simultaneously must be aware of the control problems that the English and the Welsh police are faced with.

The change in the rest of the United Kingdom is long overdue. My right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point speaking in the debate on my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood's Bill on 30 January is reported in *Hansard* as saying:

"If the Bill ever goes to a Standing Committee we will get the facts, not the opinions of this chief constable or that chief constable. We shall get the opinions of the police officers who have the task of enforcing the law, who for example, have to deal with drunken youths late at night."—[*Official Report*, 30 January 1987; Vol. 109, c. 652.]

We have that, and the experience of the police officers who have to enforce the law is that the change that has taken place in Scotland has been, in policing terms, socially desirable. Those of us who have experience of the law in Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom can only endorse that view.

Sir Bernard Braine: As my hon. Friend sought to quote me, he might have gone on to recall to the House what I actually said. I said that a senior police officer in the town next to my constituency has been warning that under-age drinking is going on in many pubs. Our local newspaper carries accounts quite frequently of the police having to deal with drunken youngsters late at night in Southend and in Basildon. I said that, although an unnamed chief constable was supposed to be in favour of the Bill, in general police officers who have to deal directly with situations of that sort have no illusions about them, and any extension of drinking at that hour in the face of the facts already known to the Home Office and the Department of Health, any extension of drinking hours without other measures being taken, will increase that sort of behaviour.

We are dealing here not with alcoholics but with youngsters under peer pressure who are flooding into pubs, who are often below drinking age, and who then behave anti-socially. The licensing laws are there surely to protect the public. My hon. Friend was quite wrong in what he said to the House earlier. That was nonsense.

Mr. Gale: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on making his second speech of the morning.

Sir Bernard Braine: Be accurate.

Mr. Gale: I quoted my right hon. Friend very accurately from *Hansard*. The police in Scotland and

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certainly the police in the seaside towns around the United Kingdom would like to see sensible licensing hours so that those who have been drinking are not all tipped out on to the streets in mid-afternoon.

Mr. Bill Walker: My hon. Friend is probably aware that I represent a constituency with a huge tourist interest. Tourism is the largest employer. I assure my hon. Friend that the Tayside police are in favour of the changes that have taken place in Scottish law and that the problems that my right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine) has highlighted existed to a large extent in my constituency before the changes took place. They have substantially vanished and that is reckoned to be because of the changes in attitude that have developed as a result of the changes in the law.

Mr. Gale: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who is tee-total, and speaks with experience of the law as it now is in Scotland. I have given way many times, so I hope that the House will forgive me if I now conclude my speech.

There is no doubt that the call for change in the licensing laws has the full support of the Department of Employment and of the Back-Bench tourism committee, which recognises the tremendous possibilities for growth in the tourist industry and the contribution to that which a sensible change and an end to inflexibility in our licensing laws could make.

Foreign visitors find our licensing laws totally bewildering. It is nonsense that on a summer Saturday afternoon a foreign visitor can be thrown out of a pub, have the door locked behind him, go across the road to the supermarket, take a beer out of the fridge, pay for it, take it back across the road and drink it on the steps of the pub, leaving the can for the publican to clear up. That is arrant nonsense and the law should be changed.

In Scotland, the responsible attitude of publicans and brewers demonstrates that the time for change has come. I hope that the House will support the motion and that the Government will declare in their manifesto that they will introduce the change that is required in the next Parliament.

11.22 am

Mr. Alfred Dubs (Battersea): I welcome the opportunity for a wide debate on the subject of alcohol. I am sure that the House is grateful to the hon. Member for Harrogate (Mr. Banks) for making the debate possible.

Alcohol in moderation can be a source of pleasure for many, but alcohol in excess is a dangerous drug, with serious consequences for those who abuse it. Some hon. Members have suggested that about 2 per cent. of the population abuse alcohol. I beg to differ; I think that the evidence is that the percentage is higher than that.

Exactly a week ago today, the Secretary of State for Social Services made an interesting speech at a conference. He said that the problems of alcohol abuse were not those of a small minority. I commend his speech to hon. Members, and perhaps the Minister will refer to it. I hope that that speech is a sign of a more determined effort by the Government to pursue sensible policies.

Alcohol has caused many problems and difficulties in our society—indeed, in most societies. This is not an exclusively British problem, even though our approach to pubs and licensing hours gives the problem a uniquely British flavour.

If alcohol did not already exist and someone invented the product, and if we were able to assess the consequences, we would say that it should be banned. That is probably unrealistic now, because alcohol is so widely used. Countries which have tried prohibition have been unsuccessful. We must recognise the problem and the pleasure that it gives to many people, myself included, but we must also discover what steps we can take to prevent abuse. The problem requires a broad approach. I am not in favour of piecemeal legislation unless it follows a broad approach and a determined effort to tackle the problem in all areas.

One of the difficulties is that responsibility is divided between so many Government Departments. Today's debate, unlike the debate on the Bill to change licensing hours, gives us an opportunity to cover the problem widely. Piecemeal legislation is not the best answer, although I understand the force of some of the arguments in favour of certain types of legislation.

Alcohol has become more readily available in recent years. In the 10 years between 1973 and 1983, there was a 20 per cent. increase in the number of on-licence premises. In the same period there was an increase of nearly 40 per cent. in the number of supermarkets and other off-licence premises selling alcohol.

I would not mind if we introduced flexibility within the present 9½ hours daily limit for pub opening hours, although I would not wish legislation to be introduced in isolation. It probably makes sense to encourage people to drink with meals rather than without food. By a meal, I do not mean a sandwich and five whiskies. Drinking with meals is a sensible way of drinking. I look with interest at the Bill dealing with drinking in restaurants.

Some countries such as France have unrestricted licensing laws. The problems of alcoholism and alcohol abuse in such countries are more serious than they are here. There might be a variety of reasons. France has a large wine industry, and cultural and historic reasons might explain some of the differences, but I cannot help thinking that the easy availability of alcohol throughout the day in French cafés must be a contributory factor. Anyone who goes on holiday to France and has breakfast in a café will see people having their coffee and a cognac or two early in the morning. That easy availability must contribute something to the alcohol problems in France. I do not wish to go into that, but we need more assurances.

Some hon. Members have referred to the price of alcohol. Relative to personal total income, alcohol prices have about halved in the last 30 years. The hon. Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) suggested that making alcohol more expensive was not sensible. However, he will know, through his firm commitment to taking action against tobacco and cigarette smoking, that keeping the price up is a deterrent. The hon. Gentleman has not made out a convincing case. Putting up the price of alcohol, at least in line with inflation, would be sensible on health grounds. I am not talking about the needs of the Exchequer.

Mr. Sims: I was not arguing that case but suggesting that we do not really know, and that more research should be done. Such a policy would involve putting up the price for the sensible user as well as the abuser.

Mr. Dubs: I accept what the hon. Gentleman says, but I believe that we have done the people a disservice by making alcohol cheaper in real terms. The price of alcohol should keep up with the rate of inflation, at least. That would not price alcohol out of existence but it would prevent alcohol from becoming cheaper and cheaper, which encourages young people to drink.

Many hon. Members have referred to drinking and driving. In 1985 there were 107,000 drinking and driving convictions. The number has been increasing significantly in recent years. The only welcome change is that it is now much easier to refuse a drink at a social gathering on the ground that one is driving. People accept that, but 10 years ago they did not. Then people said, "Go on — have another one; it won't do you any harm". People gave that insane advice, "Have one for the road." The fact that that attitude has gone represents real progress. The fact that we have legislation on drink driving has meant that people do not say, "I do not want to drink when I am driving because I might have an accident." They say, "I might get caught and sentenced by the courts." It might even be a mixture of the two. I welcome the fact that the phrase "Have one for the road" is no longer used.

However, there is still a serious problem of people drinking and driving and, sadly, alcohol is a contributory factor in many road accidents. I understand that one in three drivers killed had consumed alcohol above the legal limit. We must consider whether there should be lower alcohol limits in breath testing and whether the powers of the police to test should be extended. I do not advocate it, but we should consider the option in the context of overall policy.

Sir Bernard Braine: Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that a far more serious statistic is that the major cause of death among males aged between 16 and 24 is a road accident in which alcohol has been a factor?

Mr. Dubs: The right hon. Gentleman has anticipated what I was about to say about young people and their drinking habits. There is good reason for saying that the under-18 law is not being enforced effectively, because all the statistics and survey information on the drinking habits of people aged under 18 suggest that alcohol is fairly widely available to them. By the age of 17, only one young person in 10 is still a teetotaller, and 82 per cent. of boys and 77 per cent. of girls had their first drink by the age of 13. Drinking and driving is the most common cause of death in the 15-to-24 age group, and 50 per cent. of road accidents resulting in death or injury involved young people aged between 15 and 24.

Mr. Gale: Will the hon. Gentleman make it plain that those statistics relate to England and Wales, not to Scotland?

Mr. Dubs: They refer to England and Wales. Nevertheless, they are especially disturbing and none of us should be complacent about the evidence of young people's drinking habits.

Some of the problems stem from the attitude of society. Advertising encourages or reinforces attitudes to alcohol in the context of social success and approval. Young people take their cue from the values and attitudes of our society. Too often, the advertising of alcohol shows glamour and social success associated with drinking the product.

I accept that to associate alcohol with sport through sponsorship is a travesty because no sensible sports person should drink a great deal. Indeed, those who are successful in sport do not drink much, because they know that they would not be successful if they did. Alcohol-related sports sponsorship fills me with unease.

Hon. Members have mentioned the relationship between alcohol and football hooliganism, so I shall not dwell on that. Some of the statistics from surveys carried out in Britain and in North America suggest that the relationship between alcohol and crime is very close and that there is an alarming relationship between some crimes and the likelihood that the person committing them had consumed a great deal of alcohol. For example, 58 per cent. of those arrested for murder were intoxicated at the time of the offence; about half of rapists had drunk the equivalent of 10 or more beers; and more than 30 per cent. of child molesters had been drinking heavily before committing the offence. These figures come from individual studies, and do not cover all crimes, but they are accurate enough to be alarming.

Other statistics show that more than half of violent offences are drink-related; that alcohol is a factor in nearly 80 per cent. of assaults; and that in two thirds of the cases of battered women, the man committed the offence while under the influence of alcohol. There is a list of other crime statistics which show the close relationship between crime and alcohol. Furthermore, alcohol appears to be a factor in almost one third of domestic accidents. In nearly 40 per cent. of drownings of people in their mid-twenties, alcohol was a factor. We must accept that alcohol can be dangerous and can sometimes be a killer.

Estimates have been made of the cost of all this to society and the figures are frightening. A study conducted by the university of York suggested that, at 1983 prices, the cost was about £1·6 billion a year. It is probably nearer £2 billion a year at present prices. The costs are made up of sickness, absence from work, premature death, admittance to mental hospitals and the consequences of road traffic accidents. There is a catalogue and a price list of the different ways in which alcohol imposes a heavy financial burden on society.

How do we move forward? The right hon. Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine) mentioned the Central Policy Review Staff report of 1979, which did not officially see the light of day but to which we have access thanks to a leak via Sweden. I repeat the sentence quoted by the right hon. Gentleman, because it is sensible:

> "It should be acknowledged that neither the present machinery within government nor the bodies outside it provide the means for coherent formulation of policies."

There can be no dissent from that statement.

We should think hard about the recommendation in that report to establish an advisory council on alcohol policy covering all Departments and other bodies concerned in the manufacture, sale and distribution of alcohol and the health problems of those who have taken it to excess. Such a body, or something like it, should also have regard to the relationship between price and consumption and our taxation policy on alcohol. It should consider sports sponsorship and whether we should have more controls over the claims made for alcohol in advertisements. There should be a positive move to encourage the sale of low-alcohol and alcohol-free drinks.

[Mr. Dubs]

I wish some of them tasted a bit nicer. They are not bad, but they could be made to taste nicer without putting extra alcohol into them.

As part of the overall review, we should consider the licensing hours. We must try to encourage pubs to move away from the drink-only atmosphere. Some pubs do that, but one still feels under social pressure if one simply wants a soft drink, tea or coffee in a pub. If there were more food in pubs, we would get away from the singleminded concentration on drinking alcohol which is a feature of pubs. As pubs are such useful places to meet friends and have a chat, it would be nice if they widened their range of products to include food and non-alcoholic drinks.

For the reasons that I gave earlier, we must examine the drink driving laws to see whether they should be changed. We must consider in greater depth the relationship between alcohol and crime——

Dr. Godman: I should point out to my hon. Friend that not all is sweetness and light following the liberalisation of the laws in Scotland. Crimes in which alcohol is a contributory factor are commonplace in Scotland.

Mr. Dubs: I thank my hon. Friend for that comment, with which I agree. I have studied the evidence from Scotland and it is mixed. It does not point clearly in support of the present licensing hours in Scotland. I accept that there is some evidence to support those licensing hours, but there is also evidence against. We cannot say that the case is absolutely clear cut and that because of the evidence regarding licensing hours in Scotland we must relax the licensing hours in England and Wales. I do not believe that the evidence supports that argument and I believe that we should be wary of those who promote that argument.

Mr. Gale: I agree that not all in Scotland is sweet; some of it is bitter — very good bitter. However, without wishing to be frivolous, the incidence of all drink-related crime has fallen in Scotland since the law was changed. I agree that such crime is still committed, but the incidence has fallen dramatically. That is the finding of the report as well as of the police.

Mr. Dubs: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that point, but having considered the evidence I still believe that we cannot reach such a clear-cut conclusion as he suggests. I believe that the evidence from Scotland is mixed. I would like to consider more evidence before reaching such a clear-cut conclusion.

There is a need for an advisory council or some similar body to consider the problems of drinking among young people, to which so many hon. Members have referred. We must acknowledge that alcohol is the country's third largest killer, after heart disease and cancer. In our approach to this matter, we must consider the dangers as well as the pleasures of drinking. There should be more support for non-statutory agencies, and more effort should be given to health education campaigns to counter the large sums of money spent on sponsorship and the advertising of alcohol.

We must also consider resources within the community, such as drying-out centres and other methods of support for those who suffer from alcoholism or alcoholic abuse. There should be some place in each area that provides support for alcoholics. We should aim to keep alcohol consumption within present levels. We should inform people of the danger as well as the pleasure of alcohol. We must stop people from thinking that buying alcohol is the supermarket is the same as buying soup — it is a different product and should be seen in that context.

There has been some disagreement in the debate but also a large measure of agreement. I hope that we will not simply say, "Well, we have had a nice, cosy debate and we have talked about everything," and then do nothing. If that happens, we have wasted our time. We face a major problem and it is important that there should be a sensible and co-ordinated strategy to deal with it. I have outlined the basis of a possible approach and I await the Minister's response.

11.42 am

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Waddington): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate (Mr. Banks) on using his success in the ballot to raise these important issues. We are indebted to him for his well-balanced speech and he set the right tone for the debate. I entirely agree that we must consider not just the need for reform of our licensing laws, but the problem of alcohol abuse. I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) whose Licensing (Amendment) Bill has focused attention on the need for reform. In that context, I must also mention the Bill introduced in another place by the noble Viscount Montgomery and I understand that that Bill, the Licensing (Restaurant Meals) Bill, is on today's Order Paper.

Our licensing laws had their origin in the very different circumstances of the first world war and what was thought to be the need to control the excessive drinking among munition and other workers. Many believe that the reform of our licensing laws is long overdue. My right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine) made a most interesting speech — I shall refer to it in detail later in my speech — but I am sure that he would not suggest for a moment that we should return to the position that appertained in those days. When the restrictions were introduced — I believe, in 1917 — the number of hours during which alcohol could be sold during the day was reduced to five. My right hon. Friend expressed his anxieties about any relaxation in the law, but he has conceded that the restrictions imposed many years ago to meet a special problem were rightly removed thereafter. That is a point worth bearing in mind.

All parts of the trade agree that the time has come for change. The tourist industry believes that a relaxation in licensing hours will be good for the industry and good for Britain. I am sure that the public recognise the absurdities and anomalies of the present law. I am sure they find it difficult to understand why we should be different from virtually all other countries. They find it impossible to understand why people should not be allowed to drink when they want to provided no annoyance is caused to others and public order is maintained.

I do not think that anyone is suggesting that we should return to the position in 1917, but nor is anyone suggesting that we should return to the situation at the turn of the century. At that time there were virtually no restrictions, and the licensing laws, in so far as there were any, allowed public houses to be open nearly all day. However, it is absurd that on a hot summer afternoon at the seaside a person cannot get a pint of beer at five past three o'clock.

It is also ridiculous that a licensee should not be able to choose to remain shut until midday, and then decide to open his house throughout the afternoon.

The advocates of reform are not advocating a free-for-all, but seeking the eradication of obvious anomalies. Most people recognise that alcohol misuse is a serious problem. They would be prepared to put up with the existing restrictions if they believed they were necessary to protect people from themselves and to contain misuse. However, most people do not believe that, and I believe that they are correct. I am afraid that some people will always be determined to drink to excess, whatever the controls imposed on the sale of alcohol. The question is whether others will be tempted to drink to excess if there is some modest relaxation in the licensing hours. I do not believe that that would happen.

One has to be very careful when examining the experiences of other places. Indeed, the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) was entirely right to caution us when we considered the Scottish experience. I do not believe that the experience in Scotland can be used by the opponents of change. My right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point cautioned us against making any change, on the argument that any relaxation of licensing hours is bound to lead to an increase in the consumption of alcohol.

Therefore, surely those who advocate change are entitled to look to the Scottish experience, not in order to say that it is obvious, by looking at what has happened in Scotland, that all is well with the world and we can ignore all the problems of alcohol abuse, but to say that there is no evidence that changes in the law to allow licensed premises to be open longer necessarily lead to more drinking of alcohol and more drink-related crime.

Let me remind the House of what happens now in Scotland. Public houses can remain open throughout the day and until late in the evening. The basic conclusion of the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys report was that the relaxations in Scotland have led to more leisurely and more responsible drinking. The study shows that between 1976 and 1984 there has been an increase in the consumption of alcohol by women, but no significant increase in consumption by men. Alcohol Concern has suggested that the fact of there being no change in men's drinking may be accounted for in part by unemployment, which is one of the points canvassed by the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow. But surely that sounds pretty unrealistic. If unemployment was a factor, one might have expected it to affect women as well, and I think that it is fair to assume that drinking by women has gone up in Scotland because of the more relaxed social attitudes to drinking by women.

There also seems to be no evidence that the Scottish legislation has caused an increase in alcohol-related harm. The rate of increase in cirrhosis of the liver, which has often been used as an indicator, has been worse in recent years in Scotland than in England, but it has been worse in Scotland for a long time, and there has been no change in the general trend since at least 1970.

Again, one has to look at the statistics for offences involving the consumption of alcohol with a great deal of caution. Some of the changes in the trends may be accounted for by no more than a change in police policy, so one does not just look at the statistics and say that there has been a smaller increase in this particular offence in Scotland than in England and that that proves the case. But opponents of change certainly can find no comfort in what has happened in Scotland because, in fact, in Scotland there has been a dramatic fall in drunkenness offences, and while drink-driving offences north of the border have gone up, they have not gone up anything like as fast as such offences in England and Wales. Therefore, with respect to my right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point, it is difficult to sustain the argument that drink-driving offences will increase in England if there is a modest relaxation in licensing hours.

This is a most important point. The Scottish police are quite convinced that the general extension of closing time from 10 pm to 11 pm has been of considerable help to them and to society. In their belief, it has reduced the number of assaults and disorder for one simple reason, which is that now groups of people tend to come out of public houses between 10 pm and 11 pm, and then disperse, whereas before the change in the law large crowds of people all left public houses at the same time. That is what the Scottish police say. We cannot ignore their view.

Sir Bernard Braine: Surely my right hon. and learned Friend is not looking at the problem in the round. He is relating the proposals for relaxation of licensing hours in England and Wales to the incidence of drink-driving offences. People may have been drinking in their homes, they may buy drink from a supermarket or a garage. The plain fact is that drink-driving incidents have increased in England and Wales in relation to the increasing consumption of alcohol. Will my right hon. and learned Friend relate the harm caused to the total increase in alcohol consumption, from whatever source it comes?

Mr. Waddington: I was just dealing with the the OPCS report and saying that my right hon. Friend and those who oppose any change could draw no comfort from it. I am saying no more than that.

The uncomfortable fact is that, in England, between 1977 and 1984, drink-driving offences went up by no less than 90 per cent. In the same period in Scotland, they went up by 40 per cent. Therefore, one cannot conclude that the result of extending opening hours will be a greater risk of drink-driving offences. I am saying no more than that.

Sir Bernard Braine: But the overwhelming proportion of the population in the United Kingdom is not in Scotland; it is in England and Wales. What is happening here concerns the majority of hon. Members.

Mr. Waddington: My right hon. Friend, unusually, has missed the point. I was talking about a percentage increase. The point that I made remains a good one.

I want to make it absolutely plain that the Government are certainly not advocating a free-for-all. This is certainly no time to throw all caution to the winds. Given the continuing problem of alcohol misuse and the need to protect the public from noise and nuisance also, we believe that adequate and effective controls on licensed outlets should be maintained. But my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made it clear last year that he supported the case for reform in principle, and we are now considering carefully what measures will be appropriate. In these circumstances, we find no difficulty in accepting that part of the motion which calls for the early introduction of legislation to reform the present licensing laws.

We must study carefully what type of reform will be most appropriate. Although, in my view, the Bill presented

[Mr. Waddington]

by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood, the debate on which is scheduled to resume on 27 March, has many attractions—not least, the requirement that it places on justices to consider whether a variation order allowing longer hours is desirable, having regard to where the premises are situated and the risk of public nuisance—we are concerned about the considerable burden that will be placed on police and on licensing justices as a result of all the applications for variation orders that will be made.

The noble Viscount Montgomery's Bill originally removed all restrictions on the sale of alcohol, provided that it was with meals, but it was extensively amended in another place, and it now will allow restaurants to serve alcohol with meals during the afternoon break. It is therefore a modest reform and seems to be difficult to oppose, except on the basis suggested by the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Dubs), that it is a piecemeal reform and it is perhaps better not to proceed in a piecemeal fashion but to recognise that change is necessary, not just in restaurants.

Dr. Godman: Public nuisance is of considerable concern when public houses are situated in tenemental property. One warning that needs to be taken from Scotland to points south is that there are public nuisance problems when people live in the same tenemental property as a public house that has extended hours.

Mr. Waddington: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. When one considers what is the most appropriate form of change, one must look not only at the most important matter of alcohol abuse but at the convenience of those who live close to licensed premises. I complimented my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood because, in his Bill, he met that problem head on. He said that one of the matters that licensing justices would have to take into consideration in deciding whether to make a variation order was whether it was appropriate to make such an order, bearing in mind the risk of annoyance to people who live in the vicinity.

Although I do not recommend the precise reform contained in my hon. Friend's Bill, I think that we should give anxious consideration, when we come to the question of what should be in any Bill, of the point made by the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow, because those who live in the vicinity of public houses are entitled to have their convenience respected as far as possible.

Mr. Dubs: The Minister referred to legislation to make alcohol more easily available with meals in restaurants. I said that I do not favour a piecemeal approach, but I also said that I thought that it would be good to encourage people to eat when they are drinking, so I am not against that Bill.

Mr. Waddington: I am very glad to hear that, because it seems to be a most modest reform. I was picking up the point made by the hon. Member for Battersea—that people are concerned about the whole of our licensing laws and that perhaps the time has come for us to look at a more wide-ranging change.

Mr. Robert Banks: Rather than say "piecemeal", does my right hon. and learned Friend not agree that the Licensing (Restaurant Meals) Bill, which is a very small measure, tidies up the loose ends, that it is an anomaly that people cannot obtain a drink with a meal between 3 pm and 5.30 pm and that such a simple little measure would be of great benefit and would make sense to many people?

Mr. Waddington: I do not quarrel with my hon. Friend, but if we were introducing a Government measure we should not pick out this aspect of the problem. However, half a loaf is better than no bread. Those who see so many absurdities in the licensing laws might well ask why one should oppose the correction of one of the most obvious and absurd anomalies, because the noble Viscount's Bill does deal with one of the most absurd anomalies. It is absurd that if somebody should leave a boat at Dover and go into a restaurant at two minutes past 3 o'clock he should be unable to have a glass of wine with the meal that he orders.

The difficulty that I have had in making this speech is deciding how to start. If I start with what I believe to be the necessary reform of the licensing laws, people say that we are relegating alcohol abuse to second place, but if I start with alcohol abuse, people say that it is about time that the Government grasped the nettle that our licensing laws are patently absurd. Because I intend now to deal with the problem of alcohol abuse, nobody must imagine that I relegate our licensing laws to second place and feel that they are not of the utmost importance.

The importance that we attach to this great social evil is well illustrated by the fact—mentioned by the hon. Member for Battersea—that only the other day my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services hosted a conference on the matter. We all know that much damage to health, much social harm and much misery results from excessive drinking. There are all too many indications that that harm to society is growing, not diminishing.

Because alcohol is so widely used on a social basis, the general public is largely ignorant of the cost of its misuse to society. Indeed, the public are very ignorant of the level of consumption that can cause harm. It is therefore of paramount importance that there should be effective health education.

For some years, the Department of Health and Social Security has funded the Health Education Council. It does the most valuable work in informing the general public about the use and misuse of alcohol. We hope that the new Health Education Authority—which it is hoped will be able to take up its responsibilities from April of this year—will continue to build on that work.

Furthermore, in 1983 the DHSS set up Alcohol Concern, which at present is receiving £500,000 a year in grant aid. One of the principal aims of Alcohol Concern is to provide better public information on sensible drinking habits and to set up new local voluntary councils on alcohol.

It is also important that we should educate ourselves in Government as to the type and size of the problems we are facing, and a number of surveys of drinking habits have been commissioned from the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys. The latest, on adolescent drinking, which was published in December 1986, has revealed some worrying aspects of the drinking habits of young people, and my Department, the DHSS and the DES are currently considering whether existing law enforcement and schools education are adequate.

This may be an appropriate moment to mention the call for some new machinery which enables all the various

Government Departments interested in these matters to come together. I hope that hon. Members will bear in mind that sometimes we are preoccupied with machinery. Much effort goes into setting up new machinery so that we can say to the public, "Look, we have an interdepartmental working group on this, that and the other." That may be good presentation but it conceals the fact that, before any such formal machinery was set up, there was much co-operation between Departments and a great deal was going on anyhow. I have just illustrated that. It is wrong to imagine that a great deal of work has not been going on in Government for a number of years. Indeed, more has been going on during the past few years than ever before and there is the closest co-operation between the Departments involved.

All of us know the link between alcohol and crime, and I am glad that that was stressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and by the hon. Member for Battersea. As someone who spent a great part of his working life practising at the Bar, I do not think that anyone who has practised in the courts can doubt for one moment the close link between alcohol and crime.

Through the Standing Conference on Crime Prevention, a working group has looked at disorder associated with licensed premises. It reported last November. Its recommendations are being followed up by the police and by the licensed trade. More recently, the standing conference has set up a new working group on young people and alcohol. Under the chairmanship of my noble Friend Baroness Masham, the group is looking at the part which alcohol plays in the commission of crime by young people and the problems posed by under-age drinking. It is due to report on its findings in November this year. The ministerial group on crime prevention, which co-ordinates the Government's crime prevention strategy, has been considering the scope for local strategies for preventing alcohol-related crime. An alcohol demonstration project is being established in Coventry under a local steering committee to tackle alcohol-related crime in the city centre. The chambers of commerce, the licensed trade, the police, the local councils, the Coventry alcohol advisory service and the crime prevention unit are all involved, and more projects are being considered elsewhere.

It is perhaps appropriate for me to remind the House about football hooliganism and alcohol. Following the disgraceful incidents of football violence in this country and in Brussels in 1985, the Government took prompt action. The Sporting Events (Control of Alcohol etc.) Act 1985 passed quickly through Parliament with support on both sides and came into force in 9 August 1985. It introduced controls on the sale and possession of alcohol inside grounds, on entry to grounds and on football special coaches and trains. The Public Order Act 1986 extended these controls to minibuses used to take football fans to and from matches.

The police and the football authorities are convinced that these alcohol controls played a significant part in the welcome reduction in incidents of violence at football league grounds last season. Although that was only one element in a package of measures aimed at reducing violent behaviour at matches, it shows that the Government will take swift action when misuse of alcohol can be shown to be a significant factor in a particular problem.

I have given examples of the work that is being done across Government Departments to explore ways of preventing the problems associated with alcohol. We are not complacent. We recognise that there is always scope for new initiatives. Alcohol education programmes have an obvious role to play, whether they are directed at reducing alcohol-related crime or the health problems that excessive consumption can bring.

It would be remiss of me if I did not take this opportunity to pay tribute to the work of the Alcohol Education and Research Council, which administers a fund to finance projects for education and research and for novel forms of help to those with drinking problems. My hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate was far too modest when he was introducing the debate because he mentioned only in passing, and without giving hon. Members time to absorb its significance, the fact that he has been a member of that council for some time and has made a considerable contribution to its work. Next time, I invite him to be properly modest, but not too modest.

Debates such as this serve to highlight the concern that exists about the extent of alcohol misuse. I hope that I have said enough to demonstrate that the Government share that concern and are playing their part in tackling the problem. A strategy of promoting sensible drinking and changed attitudes to alcohol is one to which I hope we all subscribe.

12.12 pm

Mr. Allan Stewart (Eastwood): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate (Mr. Banks) on his good fortune in winning the ballot and on his good judgment in introducing this subject. It has proved to be an excellent debate, due, in considerable measure, to the reasoned and considered way in which my hon. Friend introduced the subject.

We have been considering the relationship between the two topics of licensing law and the problems of alcohol excess. I believe that the Clayson committee was right when it declared in its report that

"licensing, a negative and restrictive process, can play only a strictly limited part in the control of alcohol misuse."

That is the Scottish experience. My right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine) referred to experience in the first world war. I do not think that one can extrapolate from the experience of the first world war to present-day conditions. Not only was there a rigid control on licensing hours but a severe control on the types of alcohol that could be served. There were also severe controls, not only on personal disposable income, but on the number of people likely to drink who were able to do so because so many of them were at the front fighting for their country.

I should like to underline what some of my hon. Friends, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale), have said about the industry. I believe that the industry is a highly responsible one and is genuinely concerned to do everything it can to help deal with the severe problems of alcohol abuse. The hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) criticised the industry for never putting forward advertisements encouraging moderate consumption. I do not agree with that. I have enjoyed the advertisements for a particular low alcohol lager which regularly appear on the television screens.

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My main point in relation to health education is that there is a strong argument within any given budget for a switch of expenditure towards the problems of alcohol abuse, even if that means, in relative terms, less being spent on the problems of tobacco. Tobacco can be a dangerous product and we in Scotland should pay tribute to the late Jock Stein for the work that he undertook in getting across the message about the danger of tobacco consumption to our young people through the Scottish football world cup squad. Adults who smoke tobacco harm only themselves. They may irritate others but they do not create a great deal of social harm. The potential harm to the rest of society from the smoking of tobacco is clearly a great deal less than the potential harm of alcohol abuse. There is an argument that within a given budget attention should be concentrated on the problems of alcohol abuse.

A main area of concern is under-age drinking. The recent report of the Scottish Council on Alcohol expressed considerable concern about the problem. It is worth recording that the council attributes the problem to the spread of off-licences. It has not concentrated on the relaxation of licensing hours as the source of the problem. The problem with under-age drinking and off-licences is that it is likely that within a group of young people there will be one who can enter an off-licence legally to purchase alcohol for the consumption of the other members of the group. That cannot happen legally in controlled premises.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North referred to the Scottish evidence, as did my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State. I shall not repeat the excellent summaries that they have presented to the House. I wish to take up what my hon. Friend said about the British Medical Association's interpretation of the evidence. It was intellectual dishonesty, to put it at its best, for the BMA to say that the Scottish evidence was controversial and highly questionable, to disregard that wealth of evidence, apparently, and to refer hon. Members to a study of road deaths in North Carolina that had been presented to a conference in Poland. The study, which is not generally available, analysed road traffic accidents after some North Carolina counties allowed spirits to be purchased with meals. By any standards that is a different proposition from the reform of licensing hours that hon. Members have been considering. When it was put to the BMA that many people apart from BMA spokespersons read the *British Medical Journal*, it retracted and said that the Scottish figures might be in favour of licensing hours reform.

The hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Dubs) referred to "other" Scottish evidence. He may have been referring to the parasuicide study which was published on 6 December by the *British Medical Journal*. The study was highlighted in a letter to hon. Members from Alcohol Concern on 17 January. It is unfortunate that the letter did not refer to subsequent articles in the *British Medical Journal* that appeared before 17 January. These articles contained strong criticism of the study, and it was argued that its validity was impossible to assess. It was said to be uncontrolled and that the results conflicted with an Edinburgh study over the same period. It is important that we consider carefully and cautiously all the evidence and all the statistics. I think that the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow advanced that argument extremely effectively. Against the background of the Licensing (Amendment) Bill, it has never been my case to suggest that all is well in Scotland. I agree with my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State that the Scottish evidence cannot be used by those who oppose changes being made to the licensing hours in England and Wales.

Dr. Godman: As Dr. Martin Plant said, we can be cautiously optimistic vis-a-vis the Scottish experience. He is one of our foremost experts on the problem of alcoholism, as the hon. Gentleman knows. Does he agree that police forces have an important role to play with regard to youngsters obtaining alcohol from off-licences? It is not just that older teenagers buy alcohol which is consumed by younger ones. There is room for policing the unscrupulous shopkeepers who sell to children who are manifestly under age.

Mr. Stewart: I agree. The conclusion of the Plant and Duffy article was cautious optimism for further change. It is important that the police ensure the law is obeyed. Even if supermarkets and off-licences obey the law, however, there remains a potential problem of under-age drinking which does not apply with pubs and clubs. That is the crucial argument. It is preferable that alcohol be consumed in a controlled environment. Pubs and clubs are controlled by legal obligations on licensees and by social pressures. It is undoubted that the law is biased in favour of consumption of alcohol bought from off-licences where it is cheaper and more generally available.

The other main argument, which has not been the focus of attention today as much as alcohol abuse, is the economic one in favour of reforming licensing hours. The estimate of the number of jobs which would be created — up to about 50,000 — has been criticised on the grounds that it is only a gross figure and that if expenditure is switched towards pubs and clubs employment will be lost elsewhere.

There are two reasons why I question the validity of that argument. First, increasing the number of opening hours would be labour-intensive and, secondly, the argument ignores the dynamic effect on investment and activity of such a change, especially as overhead costs would be spread more evenly throughout the day.

The hon. Member for Battersea said that he favours more flexible licensing hours but within the present total, and that he is cautious about extending the number of hours. The argument for extending the number of hours is that in some areas, such as tourist attractions, in the summer and in city centres, it might be the most sensible thing to do. Extension is likely to lead to a double shift and therefore increase employment opportunities.

As for public opinion, I believe that there is little opposition to modest licensing reform. If there was a great deal of opposition, I should have been one of the most obvious focuses of it recently.

At the moment, we have almost the worst of all possible worlds. The status quo satisfies nobody. Health education measures combined with licensing law reform would make a sensible package. That is the message which will go out from the House today and which my hon. Friend the Minister of State has so clearly taken on board.

12.24 pm

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in the debate

initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate (Mr. Banks), who gave an admirable introduction to the problems in all aspects of licensing and our attitude towards drink.

I have sat through almost all the debate. One of the main arguments that keeps coming up against the expansion of our licensing laws and a rather more relaxed atmosphere is the problem of drink among young people, and particularly under-age drinking. The problem is nothing more than a question of enforcing the existing laws. If we extended the opening hours of public houses, hotels and restaurants, it would still be just as difficult or easy to enforce the age limit at which young people can gain access to a public house and start drinking.

There are a considerable number of public houses in my constituency and I sometimes wonder whether there are more public houses than people. There are also a substantial number of working men's clubs, Conservative clubs and British Legion clubs. In the three and a half to four years that I have been a Member of Parliament and a prospective parliamentary candidate, I have never witnessed under-age drinking. I imagine that the statistics and evidence cannot have been obtained from Birmingham, Northfield. I might not have witnessed it, but I have no evidence that it is anything like the problem which the statistics suggest.

The public house can withstand some social change, and we should introduce it. It is an area which is generally confined to adult activity. That may be a drawback, because young people are encouraged to seek every opportunity to gain access to a public house so that they can appear to have grown up and entered the adult world earlier than they should.

When I am touring the countryside with my family on holiday, I wonder what is wrong in my children joining me inside a pub, where I can enjoy alcoholic refreshment and they can have a lemonade or orange squash. The law prevents me from doing that unless I am having a meal, when my children can join me.

It would be realistic to allow the law to be altered so that children could be allowed into pubs until 8 pm. Many people go to a public house to get away from their children, so they do not want it to be nothing more than a glorified kindergarten. A time limit could be enforced by the publicans. Any publican could decide not to take part in such a scheme. He could decide that he did not want children in his pub. Other publicans might decide, in the interests of attracting holiday traffic and the family, that they would welcome children joining their parents until about 8 pm.

I have listened with interest to the points that some hon. Members made about advertising. Drinks advertising is particularly entertaining, and very clever, but it has a hard message, which usually is that it is masculine, adult or macho to drink alcoholic beverages. If that is not the direct message, it is insinuated in a subliminal way that it is the thing to do.

A few years ago we had a campaign about "Ansells bittermen" — which was common elsewhere in the country, depending on the type of brew — showing hulking great swarthy macho men walking down the high street and bursting into their public house to buy a pint of Ansells bitter. The image created was not unnoticed by young people who, under the pressure of that advertising campaign, almost felt, by accident, that they wanted to become part of it.

Perhaps we should think hard about allowing alcoholic drinks to be advertised on television. I have no objection to advertisements in newspapers and on hoardings, but I wonder whether, when we are trying to control the abuse of alcohol, advertising on television, which is a powerful medium, is acceptable.

I am interested in the effects of our licensing laws on tourists and convention areas. Birmingham is undergoing a transition from being a predominantly industrial city and, while we still cherish our industry, we are redefining our role. That process started 12 years ago, with the building of the national exhibition centre on the outskirts of the city and construction has now started on the largest convention centre in the country.

Birmingham must look carefully at the facilities being offered to the highly discerning people who go to conventions. In seeking to attract conventions, we have to compete with places such as Hamburg, Las Vegas and many other cities throughout the world. Every American city worthy of the name has a convention centre and they are all trying to attract a highly lucrative business. If we do not offer the sort of relaxation that people who attend conventions require, that will have a detrimental effect on one of the largest growth sectors in our economy.

Even if we do not favour an overall reform of our outdated licensing laws, perhaps we could create a convention centre enterprise zone for pubs, hotels and restaurants within one or two miles of a convention centre. That would cover most of the city centre in Birmingham.

A serious and stupid anomaly has come to light in the past year and highlights the problem of new services being stymied by outdated laws which we are slow to alter. The moment a ship leaves a port in this country, the bar is opened and people are free to drink as much as they wish until the ship reaches its destination. The moment a plane takes off from Glasgow, the bar will open or a stewardess will bring drinks round and passengers can drink until just before the plane touches down at Heathrow. The airline does not have to ask the 100 or so licensing authorities between Glasgow and London for permission to open the bar as it flies over their areas. Bars open on trains, and drinks can be dispensed throughout the journey.

However, a different situation applies on express coaches. The Government have deregulated coach travel and that has been one of the most successful deregulation stories of recent times. The industry has grown substantially and the number of passengers travelling by coach seems to grow yearly. However, coach operators are prevented by our licensing laws from expanding their services by offering more facilities.

National Express is the main coach operating company, though, essentially, it is a marketing operation. It contracts the score or so operating companies to provide the coaches and to run the services. National Express runs the marketing operation, although to the public it is the company that apparently owns the coaches and employs the drivers. To that extent, National Express is highly delighted because it is interested in providing a strong, market-oriented image.

As National Express develops its coach travel from the early days of deregulation to the elaborate £100,000 six-wheeled double-deck repeat coaches, it seeks to offer the facilities that are now accepted as normal on the railways and on the airlines. To provide those facilities, it has

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installed video television and hostesses who dispense drinks, but they can only dispense coffee, tea and lemonade.

Many hon. Members would say that that was not a bad thing. Nevertheless, on a long coach journey from Glasgow to London, people desire something a little more refreshing than coke, tea and coffee. People cannot obtain it at the motorway halts, because they cannot buy an alcoholic drink there for reasons that are historical. There is nothing to stop people from going 100 yards off the motorway and buying a drink from a public house or from an off-licence, but that is by the by.

That is a serious anomaly. It can be got around, but it is horrendously complicated. It can be got around by going to each and every one of the licensing authorities on a particular route and applying for a licence for the coach. But then, if an operator applies for a licence for a coach, the registration number of which must be given, does the person who will dispense the drink have to be named in the same way as there is a little sign over the door of a public house which says "Licensed to sell intoxicating liquors"? Would that be needed on a motorway coach because a licence to sell and dispense drinks had been applied for? Would the exact route that that vehicle travels have to be defined? What about the ownership of the coach? Would it be in National Express's name or in Midland Red's name, Midland Red being the operating company?

The whole problem has become so complicated that, naturally, National Express and other operators do not bother to apply for a licence for their coaches. The desire is there on the part of the operators, the passengers and the tourists who use the services that, at the very least, the opportunity should be given to have a small tipple on the coaches, if that is what people want. People who come to this country cannot understand our quaint licensing laws that allow us to buy a drink on a train or on a plane, but not on an inter-city luxury coach.

The way around this is very simple. The company secretary could be the person who has the licensing authority. He becomes the licensee, the person who applies to a licensing authority for a licence, perhaps to the licensing authority where the headquarters of the company concerned is registered. In the case of National Express, it would be Birmingham. The company secretary would apply to the licensing magistrates in Birmingham for a licence for his company's coaches to offer alcoholic drinks for sale on their services.

I emphase that I am speaking of scheduled, timetabled services. I do not mean excursion traffic or the occasional privately hired coach. People who travel on private hire coaches can bring their own beer on board anyway. There is never any problem there, except on the privately hired football coaches which, as we have already heard, are not allowed to do that.

It should be possible to ask for a licence on a scheduled timetabled service, so that a customer travelling from London to Birmingham, for example, would know that on a particular service, perhaps the 10 o'clock morning service, the timetable would say that drinks would be served.

That is a modest alteration to our licensing laws. It again highlights the difficulties that we have in this country, as our society adapts and develops, of dragging along behind us outdated laws and regulations that prevent the growth of the new industries and the new services from providing the facilities that people want.

It would not require a great deal of time and trouble to make this change, which may be small in most people's eyes but which is important to the operators concerned in an industry that has grown substantially over the past few years and will grow substantially over the next few, to enable it to compete fair and square with other modes of travel.

This has been a good debate in which many important points have been made. I hope that my modest contribution about difficulties for inter-city coaches will be noticed and that some action will be forthcoming in the not-too-distant future.

12.40 pm

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): I wish to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate (Mr. Banks), whose views and conclusions I generally endorse. I also wish to talk briefly about a local matter —the future of an alcohol treatment unit in Somerset which is under threat.

I shall not join the general statistical warfare between those who claim that the Scottish experience proves one thing or another. It is always difficult to identify those factors which are affected by a change in the law. There are influences on alcohol consumption more important than whether pubs are open in the afternoon or late in the evening.

There is an analogy with the debate on capital punishment to which the House is periodically subjected. The opposing factions claim that the incidence of capital crime is decisively determined by whether capital punishment is abolished or introduced in various countries at various times. I am sure that there are more important influences at work.

The same applies to the subject under debate today. The prime determinants of alcohol consumption are more the relative price of alcohol, social influences such as the liberation of women, increased leisure time, and increased disposable income, particularly amongst the young.

It is possible to be very concerned about alcohol abuse and consumption in excess and at the same time to be in favour of some relaxation in our licensing laws. That view has been generally expressed in the debate. No one can doubt that alcoholism destroys lives, marriages and careers, and that it has a correlation with crime and with drinking and driving—a growing and major threat.

It has to be said that a world without any alcohol at all would be a duller, greyer, less social and less enjoyable place. It is a matter of degree and quantity. I am sure that restricting pub hours is an extremely clumsy way of trying to reduce the incidence of alcohol abuse, particularly since that would hit the success and vitality of the British pub, one of the few eating and drinking establishments of which we can be proud and which foreigners envy.

Man is such a social and communal animal that it is right that people should get together in their village or neighbourhood pub for company, conversation and entertainment. So many trends in modern life go in the opposite direction. People tend to sit isolated in their own homes, watching their own television sets and probably drinking their own drinks—on their own.

Drink increasingly is obtained in supermarkets. I said that I would not quote statistics, but the market

intelligence company Mintel has concluded that in 1972 about 20 per cent. of alcohol was bought in off-licences and supermarkets and that by 1981 that percentage had risen to 28 per cent. Additional evidence is that it will rise beyond 30 per cent. this year. Supermarkets are not subject to the same controls as licensed premises. The half bottle of spirits in the wire basket at the supermarket check-out is an increasingly familiar sight. This applies particularly to women, among whom can be found the fastest increase in drinking habits.

The pub is the stronghold of traditional English food, compared with the takeaway convenience outlets that are popping up in our high streets. It is absurd that an American tourist in my constituency has the choice between getting something to eat and drink in a pub, which may be shut when he wants it, or in the McDonalds restaurant that has just opened in the high street. He has not come 3,000 miles for that. It is odd that we are trying to encourage tourism while at the same time making it less attractive for overseas visitors. If a visitor to Wells wants a drink on a hot afternoon, he has to buy it in a supermarket and drink it on a park bench. That is an unintelligent way of promoting an important and growing area of employment, not only in my constituency but throughout the country.

Returning to the problem of excess drinking, may I say that medicine is becoming a matter of high technology. Very little attention to given to whether a pound spent obtains a good return in terms of the health and happiness of patients. The ordering of priorities in the National Health Service tends to be extremely haphazard, and one victim of this is the treatment of alcoholism, perhaps because it is an unglamorous area of medical care. Some doctors regard it as a social rather than a medical problem. It is unexciting. It does not have miracle drugs or new and exciting items of equipment. Much of it is a boring, repetitive, pedestrian process of counselling, of getting people around a table and of talking people through a course of treatment rather than filling them with modern drugs.

I should say in passing that the churches, which are always anxious to lecture the Government about economics, could play a greater role in the treatment and counselling of alcoholics.

I am a patron of the McGarvey ward which is attached to Mendip hospital, a large psychiatric hospital in my constituency. My hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Portillo) is also a patron of that ward and has taken a close interest in it, and my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Boscawen) is also concerned about this. The Mendip hospital is due for closure. Few people oppose that, because it is a large Victorian institution and is increasingly inappropriate for the care of mental patients in the 1980s and 1990s. But the McGarvey ward, which forms one small part of it, may have to close at the same time.

That would be highly regrettable, because it is the only National Health Service residential unit for the treatment of alcoholics in the south-west. It has a body of volunteers and paid workers who have built up considerable expertise. Their success rate is high, although they are the first to say that we must be cautious in claiming any percentage success rate because a cured alcoholic may relapse at any time. But so far, they have achieved a comparatively high success rate, and it would be wrong if the ward was closed simply because a separate mental hospital will close in due course. My hon. Friends and I are in correspondence with the relevant district health authority about this matter and it is my intention to raise it with my hon. Friend the Minister for Health in due course. I am hopeful of a satisfactory conclusion.

This debate is quite rightly trying to do something about the victims of alcohol as well as trying to improve facilities for the occasional, legitimate, casual social drinker.

12.50 pm

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): I am hoping to move the third motion on the Order Paper later today, so this will be a brief apéritif of a speech. I hope that I will have the opportunity to move the motion before you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, produce your towel, hang it over the beer pumps and shout, "Time, gentlemen, please."

A number of hon. Members have spoken about their Scottish experiences and I should like to recite mine. Afternoon opening in Scotland is a great boon. Nearly every year, my family and I try to take a few days holiday skiing in Aviemore, and very good skiing it is too. There are about 4,000 skiers on the Cairngorms on a particularly good day. The ski lifts close at 4 o'clock and about 2,000 skiers go to the nearest bar. There they can have a beer, a dram or — can one believe it in Scotland? — a Gluhwein. There is no disturbance and everyone is happy. However, if they were in England, all they would be offered is a cup of tea.

12.51 pm

Mr. Keith Best (Yns Môn): I believe that I am the last person to be called in this debate. It has been an excellent debate, but unfortunately I was unable to be here for the beginning. However, I had discussions with my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate (Mr. Banks) about what he proposed to say. I should like to join in the general approbation that he has received from the House and congratulate him on having moved this timely motion.

The last time that we debated alcoholic matters was when we discussed the private Member's Bill moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), the Licensing (Amendment) Bill. I am aware that a number of hon. Members present today were sponsors of that Bill and wished it to receive a Second Reading.

On the day in question, I spoke in the previous debate on the Crossbows Bill. Because I spoke for about 25 minutes, my photograph appeared in one of the popular newspapers that is known for its nudes rather than its news, and I was described as "Mr. Killjoy".

Mr. Greg Knight (Derby, North): Were you topless?

Mr. Best: I hope that those hon. Members who know me would not regard me as being a killjoy. I was sorry that that Bill did not receive its Second Reading, because it would have given other hon. Members and myself, who feel strongly about these matters, an opportunity to articulate their views about the second limb of my hon. Friend's motion — the problem of alcohol abuse. Unfortunately, it was a private Member's Bill and therefore unable to occasion public expenditure. Also, by virtue of its title—the Licensing (Amendment) Bill—it would have been impossible, by way of amendment, to enshrine in that Bill the matters that some of us wished the House to deal with. However, a Second Reading for that Bill would have given us the opportunity for further debate. We now have that opportunity.

[Mr. Best]

This debate takes place against the background of some 80,000 arrests for drunkenness every year and 10,000 drunks who are habitual drink offenders. Consumer expenditure on alcohol is the third highest after expenditure on housing and food. Collectively we spend half as much on alcohol as we do in total on food and half as much on alcohol as we do in total on housing. It is for the House and the public to judge whether that represents proper priorities in society.

I am not a killjoy, but I want measures taken by the House to deal more effectively with the problems of alcohol abuse that cause so much distress in all walks of life as mentioned by other hon. Members in this debate.

The study in 1983 by Professor Maynard of York university showed that the social cost to industry of alcohol abuse was, in sickness alone, £641 million, in unemployment, £144 million, and in premature death, £567 million. The social cost to the National Health Service, in hospital treatment for those suffering from some form of alcohol abuse, is over £25 million, and alcohol-related in-patient costs are some £68 million. I could go on, but I do not propose to do so because I wish to concentrate on the problems of alcohol abuse and crime, and the way in which they are related. In what I understand was an excellent speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate referred to that aspect.

All these are statistics, and, like every statistic, they can be used to support any argument, but they are the best statistics that are available. As far as one can ascertain, in the crime of murder, 58 per cent. of those arrested and 42 per cent. of the victims of murder were intoxicated at the time of the commission of the offence. Fifty per cent. of rapists have drunk the equivalent of 10 or more beers directly before the commission of that horrific offence, and 69 per cent. of those involved in child abuse have at least one parent, and 63 per cent. have at least one grandparent, who abused alcohol at some stage. Some 78 per cent. of all assaults involve intoxication or the imbibing of alcohol at some stage.

Those statistics alone—I could quote many others—should be reason enough for the House to take action. I say to my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State who sits so patiently on the Treasury Bench that the Government must address their mind more to the matter. I entirely accept that some initiatives have been taken by the Government, some of which I can welcome, but it is a matter of high priority for the social welfare of this country and the general fabric of society that we should address our mind to the issue. It cannot wait. It must remain no longer on the sidelines of legislation.

It has been calculated that if a detoxification network were set up throughout the United Kingdom, there could be savings of almost £3 million a year, to the police, courts and prison system combined. All hon. Members who take part in the debate will know that in 1972 the DHSS set up two detoxification centres in Leeds and Manchester and there were other experiments in Birmingham and Aberdeen. The responsibility shifted from the DHSS to the Home Office in 1981. In 1985 my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary discontinued the funding of those centres, so we now have no Government assistance whatever to any detoxification centres in the United Kingdom. The three designated places in Leeds, Birmingham and Aberdeen still accept referrals from the police, but they are in danger of failing financially.

I do not pretend for one moment that the detoxification centres that were set up were the answer to the problems of alcohol abuse, but they were a significant contributor towards overcoming those problems. In my respectful judgment, I say to my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister that there should be continuing funding for detoxification centres from the Government to try to deal with one aspect to which I shall address my remarks specifically—alcohol-related crime and those who come before the courts. Instead of referrals to detoxification centres, other than to the ones to which I referred, we have the police cautioning system. That has had a beneficial effect on the drunkenness statistics. I am pleased to see my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood here. I know that he has been here throughout the debate. In Scotland and in the rest of the United Kingdom we have seen a reduction in the number of recorded drunkenness offences, but it is not a true reduction. It is pulling the wool over the eyes of those who cannot see behind the screen. Those who are now cautioned for drunkenness do not become part of the criminal statistics.

Mr. Gale: Had my hon. Friend been able to be present earlier, he would have heard my right hon. and learned Friend explain that the reduction in Scotland relates favourably in percentage terms to the rest of the United Kingdom. My hon. Friend is wrong to try to show that, somehow, since the change in the law, there has not been a significant improvement in Scotland—there has.

Mr. Best: My hon. Friend did me an injustice. I do not pretend to do that. I am explaining why it happened. One of the reasons for the reduction—certainly in statistical terms—is the present incidence of cautioning. My hon. Friend, who is knowledgeable in the matter, will know also that, in 1980, alcohol was banned from football grounds and adjacent premises in Scotland.

Mr. Allan Stewart *indicated assent.*

Mr. Best: My hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood nods his head. I am sure that he and my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) will accept also that that ban had a significant effect on the reduction of drunkenness in Scotland.

Mr. Waddington: My hon. Friend is destroying his own argument. Does he concede that there was no change in the drunkenness figures in Scotland between 1976, when the change in the law took place, and 1980? I agree that there was a fall after 1980, which in part is accounted for by the factors that he mentioned. But he cannot get away from the fact that, during the first four years of the change in the law, without any change relating to alcohol on sports grounds, there was a fall in the number of convictions in Scotland.

Mr. Best: Yes, but my right hon. and learned Friend will accept also that that coincided with the introduction of police cautioning in Scotland.

Mr. Waddington: No. I thought that I made that point. The change came about in 1980.

Mr. Best: My right hon. and learned Friend is correct. I am sure that he will acknowledge that one cannot escape the logical claim that those are factors in the reduction of

drunkenness statistics. It must follow. Other factors may be at work. I do not in any way seek to detract from the argument of those who have put forward such factors. My right hon. and learned Friend is right to point out what I have said, but other factors are at work in the reduction of drunkenness offences. I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend is not saying that there is no place for detoxification centres in the United Kingdom to deal with the problem.

Mr. Waddington: Surely my hon. Friend is aware that far fewer people were admitted to the detoxification centres than was expected, and the response to the rather sophisticated services that were made available was nothing like as favourable as people had hoped.

Mr. Best: My right hon. and learned Friend is correct. He will have noted my earlier comments. I said that I did not pretend in any way that they were the complete answer to the problem of drunken offences. Of course they are not. There are various forms of detoxification centres.

I do not know what studies were undertaken by the Home Office of other forms of detoxification centre in other parts of the world. I do not know whether my right hon. and learned Friend is able to inform the House on that matter. I have not given him notice of it, so it may be unfair to put it to him. Various detoxification centres have been evaluated in the United States, for example. There is one in St. Louis, where 160 patients were assessed. Four months after discharge, 50 per cent. of them showed a significant overall improvement, 49 per cent. had improved in health, and 47 per cent. showed an improvement in their drinking patterns. A study was carried out at three rehabilitation centres in California, which accepted referrals from hospitals, social services and the courts. Over half came from the courts as an alternative to imprisonment. The length of stay, which was voluntary, was 90 days. The results were encouraging. The total arrest rate was reduced by 47 per cent. in the year following treatment. The cost of treatment was estimated to be between 41 per cent. and 75 per cent. lower than the judicial system costs. These detoxification centre figures ought to be studied carefully by the Home Office.

I refer to a study that was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate who opened the debate. Yesterday afternoon the Parliamentary Alcohol Policy and Services Committee, of which I have the privilege to be the chairman, listened to a fascinating—I use that word advisedly—presentation by Superintendent Flenley of Brighton police. My hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate mentioned the chief constable of Sussex, Mr. Birch, who pays close attention to these matters, which everbody can welcome.

The Brighton study was undertaken last year. For every single person who was arrested a form was filled in. Arrests in Brighton in 1986 were just under 7,000. The form lists various categories, and the results were fed into a computer. They showed the degree of alcohol imbibation during the period immediately prior to arrest for a particular offence. The figures showed that 60 per cent. of all those arrested for criminal offences had imbibed alcohol within a period of four hours before their arrest. A very sobering thought—I use that phrase advisedly in this debate—is that almost half of the alcohol-related arrests were of people who fell within the seven year age group of 18 to 25. Youthful drunkenness is a very significant problem. If society does not address it now, we shall be storing up great difficulties for the future.

Two previous studies, in Torquay and Bognor Regis, suggest that the results in those towns coincide within 1 or 2 per cent. with the results for each particular offence of this very sophisticated study that was undertaken and continues to be undertaken by the Brighton police.

Of the 60 per cent. of those arrested for all offences who had consumed alcohol within four hours prior to arrest, 71 per cent. had been arrested for offences of assault against the person, 73 per cent. had been arrested for offences of criminal damage, 98 per cent. had been arrested for public order offences, while 27 per cent. had been arrested for theft and 42 per cent. for burglary. It shows that after the consumption of alcohol the likelihood is greatly enhanced that such persons come to the attention of the police and are then arrested for offences of violence, because the three top ones that I have quoted are assault, damage and public order. That has a deleterious effect on society as a whole.

These figures are extremely useful in identifying far more carefully than has ever been done before the relationship between alcohol consumption and crime. When he returns to the Home Office, I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend will try to obtain better statistics on alcohol-related crime. He knows that one of the difficulties is that there is an absence of proper statistics. That example shows what can be done in an effective way.

Mr. Gale: I am sorry to intervene again. Many of the hon. Members who have spoken in the debate believe that drinking should take place in the controlled and responsible environment of a public house. That is especially true regarding young people. Do my hon. Friend's statistics show where the alcohol was consumed? That information would be helpful.

Mr. Best: They do. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for mentioning that. He will be pleased to know that drinking in public houses does not necessarily lead, as far as one can gather, to the greatest problem. The greatest problem occurs when only 13 per cent. of licensed premises are open but the clubs are open. It is true that many of the people who have gone on to the clubs have been drinking in pubs——

Mr. Gale: Or at home.

Mr. Best: Yes. But it is not true that the greatest problem occurs when the pubs close. The critical time, when most arrests are made, is between midnight and 4 am. That is interesting.

I shall give my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North precise figures to answer his question. Of the 60 per cent. of those arrested who had been drinking alcohol within the four hours before arrest, 40 per cent. had been drinking in pubs, 19 per cent. had been drinking in clubs —and probably pubs before then, although one cannot be certain—14 per cent. had been drinking at home or privately and 27 per cent. had been drinking at other places, which includes off-licence purchase and drinking in public places and in hotels. However, I should say to the hotel lobby in the House that only 4 per cent. of that 27 per cent pertained to hotels.

It is interesting that one third of all arrests took place between midnight and 4 am and, of those, 78 per cent. of

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the people arrested had been consuming alcohol within the previous four hours — a higher percentage than the overall percentage of arrests. I am sorry that I have given a number of statistics, but my hon. Friend did ask about that aspect. I hope that I have assisted him.

Mr. Gale: That was most interesting. But those are figures for England——

Mr. Best: For Brighton.

Mr. Gale: For Brighton, and by implication for England, not for Scotland where, as we have heard, the situation is rather different.

Mr. Best: I am sure that my hon. Friend would welcome a similar survey in one or more locations in Scotland. It would give tangible proof of what he no doubt firmly believes. I am not in a position to gainsay him.

A great deal more needs to be done by the Government and the House in dealing with the problems of alcohol abuse which pervade every aspect of society, cause immense misery and are an immense cost to society. This matter must be addressed now. It has been left on the sidelines far too long. I hope that the debate, even if it does nothing more, has focused the attention of the general public and the House on the problem. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate on the fact that he has brought these issues before the House. Once again, I say that my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister has listened patiently and carefully. I hope that he will address this serious problem with renewed impetus, vigour and determination.

1.13 pm

Mr. Robert Banks: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, may I say that this has been a remarkable debate, because it has been wide-ranging and well informed. I should like to place on record my gratitude to those hon. Members who have attended the debate for the quality of their speeches. I particularly thank my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister for being here throughout the debate and for his speech and I thank the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Dubs) for his contribution and attendance throughout. I am most grateful.

The outcome of the debate must surely be that the case is proven for reform of our licensing laws. In concert with that has been expressed a very real and deep concern about the problems arising from alcohol consumption, not least among young people. That is an area which deserves more attention from the Government in order to spur on the efforts now being made to inform and try to correct the problem, but to do so with greater resources and greater vigour.

It has been mentioned that many people purchase liquor from supermarkets or off-licences. In the case of off-licences, it is not unusual for young people to be serving behind the counter, sometimes below the age of 18. That needs to be looked at, because if younger people are going into off-licences and purchasing liquor, it is easier for them to do so from somebody under age. That needs to be corrected by legislation or whatever is necessary in order to ensure that those serving behind the counter in such places are over the age of 18.

We have called for a package of reforms and new measures to help deal with the great problems that arise from alcohol excess. I am glad that it has been said in the Chamber today that pubs in Scotland have greatly improved. I think that pubs in the whole of the United Kingdom are one of our great assets. When one hears people from abroad say how much they appreciate our pubs, it is a good reminder to us to remember that we are lucky to have them. The industry is a responsible one and the investment in pubs has been considerable in recent years.

I am grateful for the support that has been given to the Licensing (Restaurant Meals) Bill which is to come before us today from another place. I believe that that measure would be helpful and I hope that it will receive a Second Reading.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House calls for the early introduction of legislation to reform the present licensing laws in England and Wales; expresses its concern over the problems presented by those who consume alcohol to excess; and calls for further measures of action, education and research.

Information Technology

1.17 pm

Mr. Michael Marshall (Arundel): I beg to move,

That this House recognises the importance of the sustained growth and use of information technology in education and training, in increasing competitiveness and the creation of jobs and in the provision of improved welfare services; and further recognises the work undertaken by the Parliamentary Information Technology Committee in furthering these objectives.

I am glad to have this opportunity to raise the important issue of information technology. I welcome the fact that my hon. and learned Friend the Under-Secretary of State responsible for consumer and corporate affairs is on the Front Bench and that the hon. Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) is representing the Opposition. I hope that what I have to say may help hon. Members to take stock and perhaps afford an opportunity for Her Majesty's Government to show how far they too are taking stock on information technology. I shall certainly be interested to hear the views of the official Opposition, as represented by the hon. Member for Motherwell, South, who I know takes a keen and constructive interest in these matters.

Mr. Greg Knight (Derby, North): Is it not a matter of amazement to my hon. Friend that throughout today's proceedings we have not seen one member of the Liberal-Social Democratic party alliance in the House? Is it not a disgrace that alliance Members have failed to attend this important debate?

Mr. Marshall: I am sure that my hon. Friend makes a valid point. Their limited interest in some of the more constructive opportunities for debate in the House is well known to all Members present.

I do not wish to rehash the definitions of information technology, but it is important to remember that the combination of data processing, computing and communications, especially telecommunications, in low-cost convenient access and easy-to-use configurations is barely 10 years old. However, it encompassess some technologies going back, in some cases, as much as a century ago. It is clear that, as technology and, above all, software, lives up to many of its promises, the way in which our lives are led and businesses are run and the way in which Her Majesty's Governments conduct their affairs will be changed even more dramatically than in the past 10 years.

I wish to concentrate my remarks on that part of the motion that relates to the use of information technology in the United Kingdom. First, I shall address myself to education and training. I would assert that the introduction of microcomputers in our schools is possibly the single most important action to be taken by the Government. Leaving aside the fact that I had a small part in the early implementation of those arrangements, the extension of the provision from secondary to primary schools is of great importance. The idea of a digitally numerate generation coming from our schools with a basic skill upon which many job opportunities can be built is of great significance when we consider employment opportunities in the long term.

Only two weeks ago in my constituency, I saw an example of the way in which this development is working in practice. The Bognor Regis community college is one of our local comprehensive schools. It has provided an excellent example of how a local company producing software, a neighbouring company with two former lecturers from the local teacher training college, and a school can combine to work with an interactive television video system, which, as far as I am aware, is the first of its kind in Britain. It provides the pupils, who I saw demonstrating the system, with an opportunity to carry out scientific and industrial experiments with equipment that if placed in the school, if that were feasible—in terms of size and scale it would not be—would involve the expenditure of millions of pounds. By the use of video and interactive television, along with cursors, there was the opportunity through digital control to simulate experiments. The pupils were using equipment that could be related directly to what is happening in the outside world. It provided them with an opportunity of working in perfect safety in areas that would be extremely hazardous without prior training. I found great enthusiasm and interest in that form of real life experimentation.

In talking about the opportunities for training, I do not want to rehash the remarks that were made during a debate on employment and training on 12 February. The way in which industry and employers generally can meet the skill shortage is a subject that demands more attention. It is true that the National Computing Centre Ltd.'s surveys have shown that about 60 per cent. of companies involved in information technology do not provide training. Instead, they rely on poaching from the other 40 per cent. which provide it. This underlines a real problem.

As I have said on previous occasions, one of the best ways to resolve the problem would be the introduction of tax incentives on a wider front. I am delighted to see my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury in his place on the Government Front Bench. His timely entry has shown that, as ever, he is alert to what is in the wind.

The opportunities that tax reform would provide should be reviewed carefully. The opportunity for individuals and companies to provide training in information technology as a tax deductible expense would help in bridging the skills gap and would offer genuine opportunities for many of those who are unemployed.

Most information technology experts agree that within about 18 months it is possible for someone starting from scratch to acquire sufficiently wide information technology skills to become valuable in the job market. Therefore, there is every possible incentive to use the mechanism which I have suggested, which would produce returns in a reduction, for example, in the amount of public expenditure required for unemployment benefit.

Further considerations are competitiveness and job creation. I shall not dwell greatly on the former. I merely remind the House that in Japan we see the wholesale adoption of information technology and the use of robotics. These have been key elements in a policy that has given the Japanese 60 per cent. of the world television market, almost 100 per cent. of the world video recording market, 85 per cent. of large-scale capital goods such as heavy transformers, and 90 per cent. of the motor cycle industry, as we know to our cost. The lesson for improved productivity is obvious. Although I see some signs of it in Britain, notably in the export performance of companies such as Jaguar, we still have a long way to go.

As for job creation, I should like to draw on my experience as co-author of a book entitled "No End of Jobs" some two years ago to remind myself of some of the

[Mr. Marshall]

areas which we considered in a working party including Mr. Philip Virgo and Mr. Charles Christian. We came up with an estimate of 3 million new jobs by the end of the century, provided that certain measures geared around information technology were taken in industry and in Government.

I must express my appreciation to the Government and Ministers who were good enough to spend time discussing matters relating to their Departments and, through the opportunities provided by Pitcom, hon. Members on both sides of the House who contributed to the wide-ranging debate which followed. A further study compiled by Mr. Philip Virgo, who is on the executive of Pitcom, entitled "Reskilling Britain" has brought some of our work further up to date and concentrated on skill shortages and their relationship to employment.

Such work has been greatly encouraged by the interest shown by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment, who has taken on board several of the proposals which have resulted from work that some of us have been involved with and by discussions outside, especially through the parliamentary information technology committee, with some of our industrial and outside members.

I shall consider some of the main headings under which, two years ago, we looked for a substantial opportunity for job creation. We called for an acceleration in the cabling of Britain. It has not gone ahead as fast as many of us hoped because of some problems with capital allowances, but some progress has been made. Mercury Communications Ltd., in which I declare an interest as an adviser to Cable and Wireless, has taken on permanently 1,600 people who are involved with its cabling interests to provide an alternative network.

We called for a widening of educational material through video entertainment to provide a range of instructional and other material, recognising that education in modern society is for life. There has been some progress. I am glad that the House has shown itself to be alert, as has the other place, to the need to help to tackle some of the problems which must be resolved. My right hon. Friend Lord Eden was responsible for introducing legislation on video piracy and this House has recently had an opportunity through my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Mr. Powell) to legislate against computer software piracy. The House has shown itself to be responsive; it has reacted to advice.

As for education, the extension of the use of microcomputers in schools has gone ahead apace. I suspect that I speak for many hon. Members when I say that I am worried that demand is now well in excess of supply. I have found in discussions with local schools and parent-teacher associations that there is a demand which we must continue to meet. There are means of doing that with which I shall not detain the House, but the Government still have a part to play. I hope that my hon. and learned Friend the Minister will say something about how the Department of Trade and Industry regard that matter. Its work in that area and of the Department of Education and Science is of the utmost significance.

As to energy conservation, those of us who have been involved with the Neighbourhoood Energy Action schemes will have seen the way in which there are substantial opportunities for job creation in meeting a social need. That programme has been successful and can be built on.

With regard to Government procurement, particularly information technology, some important work has been done. I want to highlight—I hope that my hon. Friend will be able to reply to this — the proposal for the Government's data network. This procurement programme is of great importance in terms of improved administration. It presents an opportunity to bring together British and overseas companies in an effort to tackle some state of the art technology at a high level.

The programme has a significance beyond its immediate procurement implications. The data network is designed to provide services for the Department of Health and Social Security, the Inland Revenue, Customs and Excise and the Home Office. Initially, 85,000 terminals in 3,000 locations will be brought into this network, which will provide packet switched data and opportunities for a radical simplification, and will optimise the efficiency and cost of that system. I hope that I am not being too optimistic in seeing that as a way of introducing what many of us have called for for many years—a tax credit scheme which would bring together tax and social security in a simplified coding so that people would have one code number, under which they either receive or pay, and which would sweep away some of the enormous load of paper which confronts the average taxpayer and the average employer.

I now turn to the role of the parliamentary information technology committee. I want to touch on a summary of some of the areas of study that occurred two years ago on personal care and medical procurement. That is an area in which the parliamentary committee is particularly interested.

As to personal care, one of the major job creation opportunities that we saw was in the growth in sheltered accommodation. It has been estimated that by the end of the century two working people in the country will be involved in supporting one retired person. People are living longer and the number of pensioners is rising—we shall all join them at some date. The problems that are highlighted in that statistical sense also point to a substantial opportunity. Given the number of people who own their own homes, which is over half the population, it may make sense for sheltered accommodation to be developed for them on a wide basis. That would provide an opportunity for them to enjoy a more useful and comfortable life than might otherwise be the case. We can see the scale and scope of that opportunity. I foresee a substantial take-off in the development of sheltered housing, which I would wish to encourage.

I would tie that in with the help that has been given, and which could be supplemented, to the development of personal services — inter-active television, security systems, and the whole range of IT opportunities which would provide elderly people with alarms and other kinds of help.

As to medical procurement, the area that we identified two years ago, involving substantial purchasing by Government to meet the country's health requirements, touched on such things as surgery systems, strap-on alarms and powered limbs, where substantial procurement has still some way to go. We are getting some rationalisation, but there is still a piecemeal approach on the part of the DHSS. That has wider implications than

United Kingdom domestic supply. If we develop successful design and implementation, that will provide many export opportunities.

The hon. Member for Motherwell, South attended the exhibition this week at which we saw the work of the Science and Engineering Research Council and the Design Council. The exhibition was opened by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science and drew on the work being done in universities and polytechnics. I was particularly impressed by the working of an artificial hand. As a former member of the court of governors of the university of Southampton, I am happy to say that was an interesting example of design work at Southampton, assisted by an SERC scheme, to allow people with artificial hands to get a delicacy of touch which has previously escaped most designs. Most artificial hands simply open and close, but through the use of microprocessor controls and sensors, we are within sight of developing a hand with a measured grip, suitable to an individual's needs, which could help when speed of reaction is needed. That is an interesting and exciting development.

Much of the detailed work that some of us contribute to in debates and outside the House stems from briefings by and meetings with people working on these matters. In a few weeks time, Pitcom will have a meeting with the Comet organisation, which represents those who provide information technology for disabled students. Our session will cover disabled students of all ages. That is just one example of the work done in Pitcom. That meeting will be sponsored by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern) and I look forward to chairing the session.

We have already had meetings with British Telecom and, in our even-handed way as an all-party group, with Mercury. We shall shortly be meeting the chairman of the Cable Authority and his team to review the progress of cable, which raises some questions and worries. We are due to visit Martlesham to see that centre of excellence in British Telecom. We have a session planned with the Information Technology Users Standards Association, when the response will be made by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher), and we plan a session on the growth of small high-technology companies, when the Secretary of State for Employment will reply. Finally, we shall be reviewing the work of Oftel with the director general.

We put our proceedings into an excellent quarterly journal, with a substantial number of outside contributions, which are well regarded. I hope that hon. Members will forgive me for giving the parliamentary committee this commercial, but it has reached a watershed. It was founded six years ago and its first chairman was my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Sir I. Lloyd), who has done an outstanding job. As the incoming chairman, I pay tribute to his work.

The hon. Member or Motherwell, South, who is a good supporter of the committee, and many of my hon. Friends will recognise that my hon. Friend the Member for Havant was once a voice in the wilderness. His wisdom and enthusiasm have been part of the driving force that has carried the committee through to become a body of real value to both Houses. At the time that the committee was formed six years ago, my hon. Friend the Member for Havant was supported soon afterwards by the hon. Member for Blaydon (Mr. McWilliam) as the vice-chairman and by my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-West before he took Ministerial office.

Mr. Philip Virgo, to whom I referred earlier, was one of the first vice-chairmen at a time when it was possible to have an outside member in that capacity. Lord Lloyd of Kilgerran, who continues as our secretary today, has been with us throughout and has provided a valuable input to the thinking of another place in many of our deliberations.

Since then, we have seen the growth of a group which encompasses 70 hon. Members of this House, 10 Members of the other place and a similar number of individual members with more than 100 corporate members, stretching from the major telecommunications interests of British Telecom and Mercury through to such major computer companies as IBM and ICL to some of the most modest, small software houses.

The parliamentary committee has an executive committee and a council that is entitled to have 15 parliamentary and 15 outside members. We now have the additional support of the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mrs. Short) as the new vice-chairman with my hon. Friend the Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Henderson), who I am pleased to see in his place, and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) as our treasurer. We have continued the work which was done by those who went before us and which we hope will be of further value to the House.

I shall briefly add to that list the names of some of those who come and help us in this House for no pecuniary gain. It is true that they appreciate the value of the contacts within the industrial membership and with the hon. Members of this House. However, apart from Mr. Virgo whom I have mentioned, there is Mr. Brian Murphy who edits our journal, Mr. Graham Morris who looks after our membership and Mr. Derek Broome who provides a programme of the strength and depth that I outlined earlier. All those people and others have played, and continue to play, a notable part.

I wish to express my appreciation to this House of that voluntary help and support. In my experience, the committee is unique in its enthusiasm and in the way in which it has built up a relationship with so many people outside.

I shall end with two or three thoughts of my own, because I do not wish to prejudge work that is currently looking at Pitcom's future. A working party will be reporting on Monday of next week to our council and we shall wish to consider carefully what it says. However, I wish to highlight two or three perhaps personal observations and ambitions that I have for Pitcom. The first concern the opportunities to extend the basis of hands-on experience of Members of Parliament.

Many hon. Members will recall that, a year or two ago, there was a scheme through the Computer Sub-Committee of the House of Commons Services Committee and a link with Pitcom that allowed a number of hon. Members of both Houses to receive hands-on experience at the National Computing Centre. That was based on funding provided by the Department of Trade and Industry. My hon. Friend the Minister, who may be starting uneasily at that prospect, should consider that it is money well spent because it allows hon. Members to understand the personal value of information technology and makes them increasingly aware of it in its wider economic and

[Mr. Marshall]

administrative sense. Therefore, I hope that when I seek to revive a scheme that has gone dead I shall get a sympathetic hearing.

Having said that, I am also personally interested in looking at some sort of voluntary scheme which could draw on the help of some of our corporate members. There are obvious problems in terms of companies that are competing with each other, but they could be overcome.

Similarly, I should like to see Pitcom able to draw on the advisory capacity of many of the people who have great knowledge of this sector, especially when it comes to helping Members of Parliament to consider what sort of equipment is best suited to their needs, whether, in the case of hon. Members of this House, in their constituency work, or in their wider personal and other interests.

Many people are still confused by competing computer salesmen's claims. There is still a problem too that, in some areas of work, those who enter enthusiastically into the use of microcomputers may find that, unless they are given prompt and effective advice, the problem that I have experienced as an author of wiping out an entire index or chapter of a book can be very disillusioning. That could perhaps be headed off if the right advice could be obtained at the right time.

In relation to the broader range of information technology development, there is a parallel with the work of the Parliamentary and Scientific Committee in trying to see in what way some kind of a more permanent presence by way of a technological secretariat facility could be beneficial. I do not want to prejudge the recommendations of the working party which has addressed itself to that, but if industry saw value in creating such a technological centre it would help to overcome some of the competing claims from which it suffers from time to time. The industry speaks with a discordant voice occasionally. Such a service could be valuable to industry as well as Parliament.

With those thoughts for the future of Pitcom which I hope hon. Members will agree are related to the wider information technology scene, I welcome the opportunity of hearing what other hon. Members have to say. I hope that what we have tried to do within Pitcom points the way ahead to the changes and adaptations required in industry to meet the needs of the 21st century.

1.45 pm

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): The House will want to congratulate the hon. Member for Arundel (Mr. Marshall) on the choice of subject and on the terms of his motion, which draws attention to an important area of activity and rapid technological development. I welcome the Under-Secretary of State to the world of information technology. I understand that his colleagues who usually deal with the subject are engaged elsewhere. I am sure that he will find the debate of value, particularly as it applies to company law and company accounts.

Almost all of what I plan to say is a reply to and further development of the points made by the hon. Member for Arundel. We are in a surprising position. There is an appreciation on both sides of the House of the importance of information technology and, more generally, of science and technology which is not reflected in the Government's actions and policies. It is extraordinary that that should happen here when a country with a Government of a similar ideology — the United States — has put vastly greater resources, and a faster rate of increase in resources, into these important matters.

The simplest measure of the role, importance and declining fortunes of information technology in the United Kingdom is the balance of trade in information technology goods. They have been widely reported for years but the attention of the House has not been drawn to the most recent development. The closest measure is the standard international trade classification of electrical machinery —SITC 716. It seems that we have shifted from a trade balance of zero in 1979 to a deficit in 1986 of about £3 billion. The balance showed a deficit of £10 million in 1979, it improved to a surplus of £311 million in 1980 and deteriorated to a deficit of £2,855 million in 1986. The deterioration rapidly accelerated in the second half of 1986. It was running at £577 million in the first quarter of 1986; at £541 million in the second quarter; it jumped to £852 million in the third quarter and higher still to £885 million—an annual rate of about £3,500 million—by the fourth quarter. These are dramatic and extremely serious figures which highlight the increasing crisis.

It is not only in the balance of trade that we find a measure of the failure of Government policies. There is a sell-out in a number of important areas of data base applications. Access to legal data bases, not only statute law but case law, is monopolised by the United States. It is impossible to access British statutes or case law on a computer run in Britain. Lexis was allowed to take over and close Eurolex, the only British-owned legal data base.

Only last month, the British Library was forced to sell the compact disc rights to its catalogue to a United States firm simply to pay for the cost of digitising it in time to have the catalogue accessible by computer when the new British Library is opened. We have heard much about the crisis in the arts budget, the practical effect of which is that the British Library has been forced to sell our main national bibliographical source to an American firm for the next 10 years.

There is a degeneration of the Government's own management information system, which is their statistical service. We hear constant complaints in the House about the so-called adjustments of the unemployment figures, but in basic industrial statistics there has been a sharp deterioration in quality, coverage, timeliness and accuracy. There is such a wide gap between the practice of Government and what is technically possible that even the consortium of the Treasury, the Bank of England and the Economic and Social Research Council has invited tenders for the development of a modelling system which will link company models to national economy models so that the effects of changes in corporation tax, intensity of research and development or any other general measure of policy can be traced through to the response of individual companies and back again in to the design and adjustment of policies. There is no chance of the research that is under way at the London Business School achieving practical applications with the present degeneration in the Government's statistical service.

The Government have abdicated the development of an information technology strategy to the IT86 committee, which seems to have sprung from the brow of industry without any official brief or commission from the Department of Trade and Industry. I suspect that that is because the Department could not obtain Treasury

approval for a departmental committee that would be likely to recommend the increase in expenditure needed in information technology today.

In Europe, the Government are obstructing the renewal of essential European Community research programmes. The Framework programme is being blocked specifically by the British Government, with the result that essential programmes in information technology, including ESPRIT and RACE, have not had their funding renewed.

The overall lack of strategy is reflected in those piecemeal failures and in the collapse of our overseas trade in information technology goods.

We should consider the wider strategic questions that affect the development of uses in the United Kingdom. How can British Telecom plan the research and development, capital investment and training needed when it does not know whether it will be allowed to transmit television programmes to consumers over its cable network? How can the cable operators know where to invest when they do not know whether they can offer telephone services over the cable systems that they will have installed?

I do not wish to waste time on an indictment of the Government's failure and neglect of information technology, because I am anxious to return to the tone of the hon. Gentleman's speech and suggestions about what should be done in the future. Those who place a high value on the role of information technology in our national life should realise that it must be seen only as part of science and technology policy as a whole. If information technology is pressed at the expense of the science budget and general funding for research and development, there will be a backlash from scientists, engineers and industry who will state that information technology does not cover all their research and business activities.

Let us consider the overall position of science and technology. We are aware of the acute plight of the research councils reflected from the advice given by the Advisory Board for the Research Councils to the Secretary of State regarding the science budget and by the statement made by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary on 13 February with regard to the science budget allocations. Since the advisory board formulated its advice to the Government the depreciation in the pound has led to a reduction of about £20·5 million in the real spending power of the science budget. The rise in pay, not covered by the 3 per cent. allowance made when drafting the estimate last year, will erode a further £9 million off the budget, and that represents a total reduction in the budget of £29·5 million. On 6 November the Department of Education and Science announced the new money available for the science budget—£26 million. That left a shortfall of £3·5 million on the inadequate level that had been previously recommended.

It is no coincidence that the AIDS research budget increase—the announcements on 6 November represented an increase of £1 million, and the further announcement on Wednesday 25 February represented an increase of £2·5 million, a total of £3·5 million—has come out of the science budget as previously announced. It is not a question of the research money being deducted in the future as it has already been deducted from the Government's spending on the science base.

The science base is essential for the future development of information technology. It is also essential for the possibility of finding an AIDS vaccine. The Government are in danger of destroying, in one decade, the scientific tradition of this country that has been built up over the centuries.

The Advisory Board for the Research Councils is in such a state that it is having to consider serious cuts in the whole structure of the science base in Britain. I shall quote from its most recent advice;

"It would appear that the Government have set aside these arguments"—

the arguments for maintaining and increasing the science budget.

"The Government's declared policy, nonetheless, is to maintain and enhance the strength and quality of the science base. Our advice has to be that this policy and the cumulative tenor of the Government's financial decisions can be reconciled only by reducing significantly the scale of the science base in terms of the numbers of fields in which world class effort is maintained; the numbers of researchers employed and the numbers of laboratories. This kind of contraction will require substantial restructuring funds. We shall be addressing the implications of a major contraction in the strategy paper which we hope to have ready as a basis for consultation in the first quarter of next year. But our strategy paper will also restate our firm view that it cannot be sensible to reduce (whether by default or by overt policy) the research capability of an advanced industrial economy at a time of rapid scientific and technological development."

The acute problem that is faced in science and technology is shared by the crisis in industry. In industry there is a need to build up civil research and development particularly with regard to information technology. So I shall devote the remainder of my speech to information technology.

In a very fast moving area such as information technology, the failure of one partner to make the necessary moves and adjustments handicaps the whole effort. The Government's failure lies in training, in the public sector application of information technology, and in the failure to launch the initiatives that can come only from Government. The Government'is strategy, broadly, seems to be to wait until a particular technology has broken through to a popular price level and then to complain, first, that the equipment embodying that technology is made abroad, secondly, that the users in this country are slow to make use of the new possibilities, thirdly, that the software does not exist for the applications now possible, and, fourthly, that it is just as well that the software is not available because people have not been trained to use it.

I have no objection, and I do not think that my colleagues have, to the announcements by the Department of Trade and Industry during the past week on value added services. The liberal regime in which value added services should develop is entirely consistent with a planned development of an information technology strategy overall and of the information technology infrastructure, but in no way can that liberal regime be said to amount to a policy. It is generally agreed that wide-band telecommunications services are likely to be the major technology push in information technology over the next decade. Direct broadcasting by satellite is a justifiable development in the short-term for the transmission of more television channels and, in the longer term, for broadcasting to mobile persons and vehicles. However, the capacity of fibre optic cables is so vast and the installation cost per household and workplace is so low that there is no doubt that fibre optic cable will be the dominant mode of telecommunication in the future.

[Dr. Jeremy Bray]

The Government's present strategy, by piecemeal development of local cable systems licensed by the Cable Authority, has failed. It is not leading to the pace of development that was originally anticipated, and there is no chance of it producing a coherent national fibre optic network going into every home and workplace in Britain. There is no chance of it developing the coherence in the information technology infrastructure by which the value added networks are properly integrated with the engineering design of the system.

When people talk about future cable developments, in which I know the hon. Member for Arundel is much interested, the suggestion is still made that cable applications will develop on the back of the entertainment market. At present there is not the programme material to create an attractive market for new cable installers, and there is not the number of people offering cable services that justifies the emergence of programme providers. However, we might have it the wrong way round—it is not the wider applications that should ride on the back of entertainment, but entertainment should ride on the back of the necessary educational and training applications mentioned by the hon. Member for Arundel. The present cable policy is a strategy for the continued collapse of information technology in Britain. It lacks a coherent common carrier infrastructure, needing to be linked to value added services. It will generate a flood of imports, initially of consumer equipment, but later of capital equipment, leaving the United Kingdom unable to compete anywhere. It will lead to the further falling behind of application as well as manufacture of information technology goods and services in this country.

We can learn lessons from the unprecedented growth of the personal computer market in this country and, indeed, worldwide. Parents observed small boys playing computer games. They got hold of the idea that maybe the kids should know about this technology for their future education. A lobby built up for the installation of personal computers in schools, and then parents got hold of the idea that maybe little Johnny should have a machine at home. The hon. Member for Arundel and other Conservative Members, to their credit, put some effort into launching the educational applications. The fact that they were not carried through far enough, did not have adequate software and so on is a matter of history.

In the new field of interactive video, might not the educational applications be properly provided with properly developed, curricular support material available for each year in primary and secondary schools and in further and higher education, professional training, and in industrial training? If BT was asked to see that a fibre optic cable network was installed into every educational establishment and was able to support that volume of activity, the very commitment to provide that volume of application, just as in the case of personal computers, could stimulate such a volume of development of entertainment services, value added services of all kinds, business applications, and so on, that, by the time the system was in operation, there would be an entirely economic market for entertainment and value added services which would justify the installation of the system into every home and work place in Britain. That is to put the other way around the programme that people have outlined before. It requires a bold initiative from the Government, but I see no signs of any such initiative emerging today.

If the Under-Secretary of State wishes to get some feel for the pace of development in this subject, I recommend that he reads the February issue of the American computer magazine, "Byte", which is a special issue on educational developments in the United States. He will see not only the volume of activity there, which is huge, but the diversity of it, with which we, with our much more limited resources, must somehow catch up.

If, today, the cost of a compact disc player linked to a micro-computer and a high definition colour television screen costs, say, £2,000, within five or 10 years at most it will cost about £200. There is an opportunity to develop not only the cable system but the manufacturing industry, which could give information technology a new launch. Without such initiative and commitment on the part of the Government, and without a concerted effort by BT, equipment manufacturers, the BBC, the IBA, the Cable Authority and the education system, we shall see the continuing collapse of information technology to the lasting damage of the country.

2.8 pm

Mr. Barry Henderson (Fife, North-East): The hon. Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) took a long time to do what I should have thought was difficult to do, and that is to turn the lively dance and success story of the information technology industry into something resembling a funeral dirge. He mentioned data bases. I wonder whether he has seen the BEST system — that is, the British Expertise Science and Technology system—based in St. Andrews. I hope that he will see that system if he has not already done so. A private enterprise system, backed by the university directors of industrial liaison, has produced one of the finest data bases in the world, interlinking industry with the science community in this country — a marvellous British first. The hon. Gentleman cannot have seen today's tape, as I did as I came into the Chamber, announcing yet another British first. Yesterday, British Telecom and Plessey, using a computer language-based digital network, achieved this world first. The achievement involves a link-up between a digital network and a cellular radio link to prove that a series of moving pictures could be transmitted through a telephone exchange on to a television screen. It was a joint project which was part of the United Kingdom's research into a trans-European network which is due to be launched in 1991.

I do not think that the hon. Gentleman, who referred to fibre optics, can have seen the work that has been done in the physics department of St. Andrews university. It is using laser techniques to develop new forms of computer mechanisms. It passes belief that an Opposition Front Bench spokesman cannot recognise that today's investment in information technology by the private and public sectors far surpasses anything that occurred during the period of the last Labour Government.

Dr. Bray: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Henderson: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman has already taken up so much time that only five minutes are left for my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight), who has been here throughout the debate, and me.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel (Mr. Marshall) on so admirably initiating our debate. He played an important part in kicking off this work. I remember sitting behind him as a Back Bencher when he was one of the Ministers who introduced the British Telecommunications Bill. It is amazing that during the lifetime of this Conservative Government we have separated British Telecom—a new name at that time—from the Post Office. Until then there was only the Post Office, with telecommunications as a subsidiary. Now it is one of the largest employers in the country. It employs 250,000 people in one of our great growth industries and it is achieving much in the world at large.

The one criticism that I have of British Telecom, which has achieved so much, is that in its most recent reorganisation it has paid insufficient attention to maintaining a central focus in Scotland for its activities throughout Scotland. I hope that British Telecom will review its organisation and improve that aspect.

During the last eight years or so there have been tremendous changes in telecommunications and computers and, perhaps most significantly of all, in the convergence of those technologies. However, effort now needs to be concentrated on two major areas. I refer first to equipment suppliers. Equipment suppliers, who have traditionally lived in the cosy, fat-cat world of supplying the old, monopolistic British Post Office, are still not geared up to facing the more competitive world in which we live today. I hope that they will pull up their socks and do better, otherwise Britain will not be able to grasp the full opportunities that are offered by the growing information technology markets.

Secondly, a great deal of work needs to be done on the opening up of world markets in general and of European markets in particular. They must become much more free. We should say to other countries that we have liberalised telecommunications in this country to a remarkable degree, that it has benefited British consumers and that they must do likewise, because it would benefit consumers and industry in those countries, but that it must be a free and fair market—throughout Europe at least.

I hope that the work that has been done in the House of Commons to improve our information technology resources will continue. I hope, too, that the progress that has been made by the parliamentary information technology committee under the chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Sir I. Lloyd), to whose work my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel paid eloquent tribute, will continue. It has now been placed on a sufficiently sound base for us to be able to look forward to a continuation of that work. Under the leadership of my hon. Friend it will be important to the development of this industry.

2.14 pm

Mr. Greg Knight (Derby, North): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel (Mr. Marshall) on his good luck in the ballot and I am grateful to him for raising this important matter. We cannot allow the hon. Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) to get away with the picture of gloom and doom that he painted. My hon. Friend the Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Henderson) was right to refer to something that is on today's Press Association tapes regarding the high-tech link, which is described as being the best of British. It will prove to be very useful when there is a sudden need to carry out security surveillance at an airport or to monitor the state of a patient on his way to hospital.

One matter is causing me some concern. I hope that my hon. and learned Friend the Under-Secretary of State will proceed with care if he takes any action. Recently, we have heard a lot in the news about compact discs. EMI is seeking to release on compact disc part of the catalogue of the Beatles, probably the most prolific British pop group of all time. I think that hon. Members know what a compact disc is. It is a digital way of purveying information, usually music, and it does not deteriorate with use. It is not prone to scratching as gramophone records are, and, unlike gramophone records, the quality of sound does not deteriorate as the reading beam moves to the centre of the disc.

There has been consternation among British CD manufacturers about the Japanese development of digital audio tape. I understand that the Japanese have developed a tape system which has the advantage over compact disc that one can record on it. This development has caused some panic among British manufacturers. A recent article in *The Sunday Times* was headed "Compact discs are about to be made obsolete." I understand that the British Radio and Electronic Equipment Manufacturers Association was so worried about the article that it complained to the Press Council. It does not augur well if the manufacturers cannot even face the challenge of criticism, let alone competition. I hope that my hon. and learned Friend the Under-Secretary of State will resist certain calls for restrictions to be imposed on this Japanese system.

An article in *The Times* of 24 February stated:

"The West is threatening to ban DAT machines completely unless the Japanese put safeguards in their machines which prevent recording. The Japanese say this is an outrageous imposition on the consumer."

I wholeheartedly agree with those latter remarks. Long-term success in this, as in other matters, will not be achieved by trying to stop the march of progress.

2.16 pm

Mr. Ernie Roberts (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): The business of information technology begins in primary schools. I have visited a number of primary schools in my constituency and have seen young children learning to operate computers, not for games but for learning languages and doing arithmetic. There are not enough computers in schools. Teachers complain that they have to get several children around one computer to familiarise them with computers and find out how they function so that they grow up using and understanding this information technology.

I pay credit to the Inner London education authority which gives special attention to the introduction of computers in schools and colleges. Last week, I visited a British computer manufacturer in Oxford. I am concerned that the computers we have should be British made. Unfortunately, many of the computers in use, including in this building, are not British made. The company which I visited, Research Machines, uses British labour and is British owned. It produces an excellent machine which is so good that I saw one department full of computers awaiting delivery to the ILEA for use in schools and colleges. At the computer show last week, the company showed a new type of very fast computer called the

[Mr. Ernie Roberts]

Nimbus AX20, which is receiving a lot of attention because it is much better than many of the foreign machines used in this country.

The ILEA has set up a special organisation called the inner London education computer centre which teaches teachers how to teach with the aid of computers. That has to be done because there is deference on the part of some teachers with regard to computers. Some feel that they may be replaced by the machine. However, they are learning that that is not so and that computers are a tool to help them in the education of children, whether in mathematics, English or science. The use of computers in schools also familiarises young people with what a computer is, how it can function and how it can be used as a tool so that when they leave school they will be able to adapt themselves readily to the use of information technology.

I visited the inner London education computer centre and was impressed with the work being done there, particularly the use of computers to teach English to persons who are backward in that subject. There are people in my constituency who are connected with certain ethnic groups, some of whom came into the country not very long ago, and those methods of teaching are excellent for them. Computers can also be used to teach foreign students who come to this country to learn the language.

I have also visited a centre known as the Hackney information technology centre in my constituency which is teaching unemployed men and women, who have no other particular skill, to use computers as word processors and as a machine which can be applied to industry or commerce. They are finding that training extremely useful.

There have been problems. The main problem is usually insufficient financial assistance. All the schools find that to be the case, as does Hackney information technology centre and many organisations which want to introduce computers into the learning process in this country.

At ILECC one member of staff has produced some excellent books explaining the use of computers and the sort of software that is available for use in schools. I have read those books. In a simple way they explain to those who have very little knowledge of such machines how computers can be used.

I know that other countries are interested in what is happening in ILECC, which was set up by the Inner London education authority. They have been impressed after having visited and talked with the staff at that centre.

One young lady at the centre has been seconded to the organisation from one of the colleges. For some time she has been doing a considerable amount of work in initiating and showing the use to which computers can be put. We need much more financial assistance and support from the appropriate Government Departments such as the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Trade and Industry to see that the machines are made available in schools and colleges. Furthermore, the machines that are to be made available should, as far as possible, be made in this country because good machines are made here. I have mentioned only one company, Research Machines, but there are others and they should be given the necessary orders to produce the machines for our schools and colleges.

2.23 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Michael Howard): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel (Mr. Marshall) for having raised this important subject and for drawing attention to the central role of information technology in the United Kingdom today. We have had a most interesting and far-ranging debate, and it is only a matter of regret to me that the time left will make it impossible for me to cover more than a small part of the ground that I would have wished to cover, far less reply to the points that have been raised by hon. Members who have taken part. I shall certainly consider whether it is possible for me to write to them, particularly to my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel, on some of the important points raised.

There can be no doubt that information technology is vital to the performance and competitiveness of British industry and commerce and, ultimately, to the economic prosperity of the United Kingdom as a whole. Information technology has an important contribution to make to the development of even more efficient and effective community services, such as education, training, health care and care for the elderly and the disabled. It is because of the ubiquitous nature of information technology and the central importance of it to our future well-being that the Government attach such high priority to their policy for IT. That is why we have channelled considerable resources in this direction.

Our objectives have been twofold. First, we have sought to promote the widest possible use of IT in all sectors of the economy, in industry, commerce, the public services and elsewhere. Only by taking advantage of the benefits that information technology offers in terms of improved efficiency and performance can British industry compete effectively in world markets. By exploiting IT, our welfare and education services will be able to provide efficient, cost-effective and up-to-date services.

Secondly, we have sought to create an environment that will encourage the development of a healthy, internationally competitive, indigenous IT industry. It is important that so far as possible British industry and commerce should be assured access to competitive local information technology products and services.

I welcome the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and others about the importance of IT in education and training. The Government share this view and have funded a number of schemes to encourage the establishment of IT in schools and to make IT an integral part of school life. The House will recall my Department's "Micros in Schools" scheme, which ran between 1981 and 1984. My hon. Friend the Member for Arundel played an important part in that programme. Primary and secondary schools were offered the opportunity to obtain a complete computer package at half price, with teacher training support also available. Virtually all the country's 6,500 secondary schools and over 27,000 primary schools took part in the scheme.

To consolidate our investment and to take the matter forward, my Department is offering support for the purchase of educational software. The pace of change in the new technologies is fast and the Government will continue to look for ways in which innovation might be exploited for the benefit of the education sector. One good example is the approach that has been taken to interactive

video. We have made available £1·5 million to support the two-year educational interactive video project, which is examining the potential of interactive videos as a teaching aid throughout the education system. A number of video discs have been developed and they are now being used by schools on a trial basis. The results are being fed back for evaluation and for the purpose of further development.

The Government have also introduced a number of measures to increase the number of teachers of IT and related subjects. These include initiatives to attract mature students and to encourage students to switch to IT from non-shortage subjects.

However short the time available to me is, I cannot forbear from seeking to put into perspective some of the adverse comments that have been made by Opposition Members about the position of IT and the country's record on it. We had the usual whinges from Opposition Members, and I shall cite one statistic to try to put things into some perspective. The United Kingdom's share of exports, when set against OECD exports generally, increased during the last year for which records are available by about 14 per cent. There was a year-on-year increase, and that is a measure of the extent to which the United Kingdom industry can hold up its head when comparison is made with other information technologies in the western world.

It would be churlish of me to fail to mention an important issue that is drawn specifically to the attention of the House in the motion. In bringing the motion to the attention of the House, my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel is continuing to play a distinguished role in the work of the parliamentary information technology committee. Awareness of IT as a whole is an important part of its work, and I endorse my hon. Friend's comments and pay tribute to the valuable contribution which the committee makes.

I also acknowledge the debt of the whole House to my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Sir. I. Lloyd) for his sterling work as chairman of PITCOM during the past six years. Under his leadership, the committee has developed an important role as a forum which brings together hon. Members on both sides of both Houses with members of the information technology industry to discuss matters of common interest and concern.

The Government welcome all attempts to raise the profile of information technology and to promote consideration of issues that face the industry. PITCOM's activities are very much in line with those aims. Hon. Members on both sides of the House will wish to join me in acknowledging the contribution that PITCOM makes to parliamentary awareness of the potential, impact and challenges of information technology today.

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Orders of the Day

Private Members' Bills

SOUTH WEST (ENGLAND) DEVELOPMENT AGENCY BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Second Reading what day? No day named.

LICENSING (RESTAURANT MEALS) BILL *[LORDS]*

Read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House. —*[Mr. Robert Banks].*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I must tell the hon. Gentleman that, although I have no power to prevent him from doing so, Mr. Speaker has made it clear that he very much disapproves of the House taking a Committee stage without notice.

Bill immediately considered in Committee; reported, without amendment.

Motion made, and Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 75 (Third Reading), and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed, without amendment.

EDUCATION (NUTRITIONAL REQUIREMENTS) BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Second Reading [20 February].

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Debate to be resumed what day? No day named.

UNBORN CHILDREN (PROTECTION) BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Second Reading [23 January].

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Debate to be resumed what day? No day named.

HEDGEROW PROTECTION BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 24 April.

DEER BILL

Read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House. —*[Mr. Knox].*

Committee upon Friday 13 March.

Swale District General Hospital

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Maude.]*

2.33 pm

Mr. Roger Moate (Faversham): I am glad to have this opportunity to raise the plans for the Swale district general hospital and I am most grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister for being here to reply.

Perhaps I may also draw attention to the presence of my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) who, while silent, has been a staunch supporter of plans to expand and improve our hospital facilities in the Medway health district.

Medway is, and has been for many years, an under-resourced district. Year after year Medway Members have been hammering away at Ministers — as have many others — to try to get an increase in the resources available to the people of the Medway towns, an area that includes a large part of my constituency.

Less than a year ago I raised in the House the need for a Swale district general hospital. I make no apology for raising the subject again so soon. Developments since then have been such that it is of great importance that my hon. Friend the Minister, the Secretary of State and the regional health authorities should be giving renewed, urgent and sympathetic attention to the initiation and planning of a new general hospital for Swale. This is the sixth occasion in five years that I have raised in the House the question of local hospital facilities.

There are two fundamental aspects. The first is that the whole of our health district—which embraces much of Swale—is seriously underfunded, and is likely to remain so for many years. Even when we get the new major development at Medway hospital—which is one of the largest hospital projects in the south-east, costing some £40 million, but which will probably cost more at current prices—we shall still be below our resource allocation working party target. Despite the efforts of many Members of Parliament and others over the years, even with the current plans, Medway will still be an under-resourced district in the, theoretically, over-provided south-east Thames region. We are a deprived district in a theoretically over-provided area, and our area often suffers from the constant pull of resources between it and the London teaching hospitals.

The second aspect is that in the Medway health district, Swale has been the poor relation—the poor relation of the poor relation, which is a frustrating position for my constituents. We have old and fragmented hospital services. There is a further complication. The borough of Swale is divided, for hospital purposes, between Medway and Canterbury. We have seen a growth in the improvement of major district general hospitals at each end of the area—Medway at one end, Canterbury at the other—while in the middle, in a large widespread rural area, we have seen the contraction of our local hospital services.

I put it to my hon. Friend that it is unacceptable that we should continue to run down our hospital services throughout our rural, semi-rural and urban areas, thus causing considerable hardship to the local population. The only compensation that we have been offered is the prospect of a second general district hospital in Medway, which will be located in Swale at some time in the future. Sadly, the 10-year plan for Medway made no provision, even for site acquisition, for a Swale district general hospital. It is just a pipe dream to most people.

The challenge that we face is how to translate that pipe dream into reality. We cannot wave a magic wand and produce hospitals overnight, but we can and should be laying the foundations for a new hospital to serve future generations. We know what the lead time is for such projects. Unless we start this project soon, it will be for the 21st century, not the 20th century. We want a firm plan that can be launched before the expiry of the current 10-year strategy. That will involve serious planning and site acquisition now, and it may mean locating some services on that site at an earlier date than is currently envisaged.

The concept of Swale hospital is fundamental to planning in Medway. As far as I know, there is no dispute in the health authority about the need for this second district general hospital and, as far as I am aware, there is no disagreement on that subject with the region. It is a question of when resources can be allocated I shall give a helpful quotation from an earlier debate when the then Minister for Health said:

> "I know that the district health authority has the support of the local authority, the community health council, the regional health authority as well as that of my hon. Friend and his neighbouring colleagues who will be affected. Support for the Swale development is widespread—I know of no one who opposes it. Therefore, in principle, everything appears to be in its favour, the only problem being time and resources."—[*Official Report*, 9 May 1986; Vol. 97; c. 426.]

That was a welcome statement.

What has happened to make me bring the matter back to the Floor of the House? The health authority was expecting to maintain a high level of hospital services in Sheppey and in Sittingbourne. Its plan involved the retention of our splendid maternity unit at Sheppey and the retention of some surgery at Sittingbourne. However, because of a decision by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists to withdraw recognition from Sheppey and from Canada house for medical training, the health authority has been forced to propose the early closure of the Sheppey maternity unit and to present a plan involving the withdrawal of surgery from Sittingbourne. Suddenly, the pace of withdrawal of services from Swale has quickened and my hon. Friend the Minister will understand why the alarm of local people has intensified. The need for more urgency to be attached to a plan for a Swale district general hospital has also increased.

The response to the problems has been heartwarming in some respects. My hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham knows that the Medway health authority has given even greater emphasis to the importance of replacing our scattered, fragmented and reducing services in Swale with a new district general hospital. I cannot quote the regional authority, but I have a feeling that it has increased sympathy for our case and a greater understanding of the need for urgency. The support of my hon. Friend the Minister and of the regional authority could make all the difference between success and failure.

Another important initiative has been taken by Swale borough council which, in an imaginative move, has commissioned a firm of management consultants, Peat, Marwick, Mitchell and Co., to prepare a report on the case for a new district general hospital. The report will be

presented to the borough council fairly soon and will be passed to the district health authority, in the hope that it can be incorporated in a plan for submission to the region.

I wish to put on record my appreciation of the initiative taken by the borough council in commissioning such a report and my appreciation of the way in which the project has been accepted by the district health authority, which co-operated fully in the preparation of the report and shows signs of receiving it with great sympathy. Hon. Members were brought in to the early stages of consultation during the preparation of the report and all the signs are that it will get across the message that there is an established need for the hospital and that it makes economic sense.

We are right to be encouraged by what we have heard, but the important aspect is what happens to the report when it is received by the district health authority and passed to the region. The report should be the trigger for action. There is no point in our establishing the need for a new hospital unless we get a positive response from the region and the Government. I want to hear from my hon. Friend the Minister, not that he will open the purse today —things do not work that way—but that if he receives a submission from the regional health authority he will help the project on its way. I very much hope that he will receive such a submission.

There is another aspect to this. I am not just asking for something for Swale. I am asking that Government and region use this proposition as the means at long last of giving Medway 100 per cent. of its RAWP target. That is the way we can do it. If it is seen in this light, the Government can fully justify the diversion of resources into our part of north Kent.

If it helps us to attain 100 per cent. of RAWP my hon. Friend the Minister will see that there is scope for building a second district general hospital in Medway. At one stroke, albeit quite a large stroke, we shall have dealt with a degree of deprivation in health care in north Kent that has been a longstanding cause of unhappiness in that area. It can be demonstrated that there is a shortfall in the provision of hospital services that there is an imbalance in the location of hospital provision and that much of the building stock in north Kent needs replacement. All of those propositions stand out clearly and are beyond contradiction.

It can be established that there is a clear need for a new district hospital of 300 plus beds at a cost which could be borne within that 100 per cent. RAWP target. The borough of Swale which includes the towns of Faversham, Sittingbourne and Sheppey must look forward to the building of this new hospital. It is imperative that we start the ball rolling and do not wait until the turn of the century.

Before I conclude, I must say that I understand that my hon. Friend the Minister may soon have before him, if the consultative and appeal procedure takes its full course, the question of the transfer and the closure of the maternity facilities and the transfer of surgery from Sittingbourne at an earlier date than otherwise was planned. I fully accept that he cannot make a judgment, or even comment upon that now, but I must stress that, when he receives that proposition, he should understand that it is a serious blow to the people of Sheppey, who have seen a continuing reduction in local hospital services.

Just before the debate I was talking to one of the great campaigners in my area, Mr. George Lowe, who had engraved on his heart the words of the 1962 White Paper on the pattern of hospitals which he asked me to look up. The words in it are so applicable to my area that I wish to put them on the record. Command Paper 1604 of January 1962 states:

> "There will sometimes be justification on geographical grounds for providing maternity units at peripheral towns where the population to be served is sufficient to support a viable unit. Thus the retention of a local maternity unit of 15 to 25 beds serving a population of 35-50,000 might be regarded as justified if the nearest district general hospital was 15 to 20 miles away."

That quotation is so applicable to the Isle of Sheppey that it should be borne in mind when Ministers consider the whole question of the provision of hospital facilities in my area. At this stage we are paving the way for a proposition that may soon come to my hon. Friend the Minister. When it comes—I hope that it will come soon —I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to give it every support possible within the resources available to him.

2.47 pm

The Minister for Health (Mr. Tony Newton): I begin more than conventionally by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate) on securing this Adjournment debate. I find it difficult to believe that there are many, if any, cases where one Member of Parliament has raised in this way no fewer than six times in five years the issues of health care, and in this case especially hospital care, in his constituency. That is a formidable record of bringing those important matters to the attention of the House at large and to the responsible Ministers in particular, and I have no doubt that it has also had at least some of its intended effect on the other authorities responsible, which will certainly have read and digested what my hon. Friend has said on a number of occasions.

It is also typical of the concern of my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham with the health interests of his constituents that my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) is here this afternoon too. His capacity in being here is twofold, in that, as the House will know, he is my parliamentary private secretary; we therefore keep closely in touch about these matters. I had not in any way failed to register his interest, but it was borne in on me in another way in this case only very recently by the fact that I visited the Medway general hospital site in his constituency to plant a tree to mark the start of the development only a few weeks ago. I am conscious of all that my hon. Friend has done to promote the interests of the hospital service in his part of the area since he became a Member of the House. I am glad to pay tribute to both my hon. Friends for their efforts.

My hon. Friend the Member for Faversham spoke eloquently in the Adjournment debate last May about future health care provision for Swale and raised points then, as he did today, that rightly are close to his constituents' hearts. Important developments within the Medway health authority were discussed. At that time, I was not the responsible Minister, but I feel a little like the chairman of a company in being able to report a year's progress. I think that real and significant progress is being made in the provision of health care in the Medway health district. I have already mentioned one aspect of that.

My hon. Friend talked about the process of resource allocation, which is known so inelegantly as RAWP. My hon. Friend will be aware that within the last couple of

[Mr. Tony Newton]

months we have made additional funds available to the South East Thames regional health authority by a device known in the trade as the RAWP bridging fund to ease some of the transitional problems of achieving the fairer distribution of resources among the districts in the region. I cannot say in terms that any immediate specific additional money for Medway will arise from that bridging fund, but it is important to understand that it eases the problems in the region by continuing the redistribution of funds in the interests of Medway, an under-funded district. I hope that it is clear to my hon. Friend that that is part and parcel of our commitment to ensure that the money and the policies are available to enable the continued movement towards improving health services in the Medway district.

My hon. Friend referred — again in the inelegant jargon of the world which I now inhabit—to the bipolar strategy to provide a district general hospital at Medway in the west of the district and another in the borough of Swale in the east. I shall not repeat for the third time the exact words used by my hon. Friend the former Minister in the debate on 9 May, but I recognise the unanimity of support among local interests of various kinds for the Swale general hospital.

One pole of the bipolar strategy is the health authority's plans for a district general hospital at Medway. Those plans are now being realised, if not yet in terms of brick, glass and concrete, at least in terms of firm foundations. The access roads to the new Medway hospital, which were under construction at the time of my hon. Friend's last debate on the subject, have since been completed and the next stage of the development has begun. I had the pleasure on 9 December of planting a tree to mark the start on site of that stage. Before that tree is past its young growth — I hope that at least the tree survives the inclement weather — by the summer of 1989, the doors will be opened for the care of out-patients, the mentally ill and elderly people.

I understand that extensive foundation work is already well under way, despite the bad weather, and that the steel girders for the entrance block are already in place. A further phase of this major £35 million development is scheduled for completion in 1991 and will provide new obstetric and acute blocks, operating theatres and other supporting departments.

It is important to emphasise especially to my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Faversham that the services to be provided at Medway district general hospital will not only benefit the people of the Medway towns. The people of Swale currently travel to Medway for much of their acute care. Although I recognise that my hon. Friend regards that as less than ideal, it means that the new facilities at Medway will improve the services available to the people in Swale.

My hon. Friend recognised the points made by my predecessor in last May's debate about the difficulty for the health authority, and indeed any authority, of making rapid progress on all fronts at once. The district health authority judged it right to focus first on Medway, where two thirds of the district's population live and where much of the essential hospital infrastructure already exists. But it is clear that neither they nor anyone else has forgotten the people of Swale. When the development at Medway is completed in the early 1990s, there will be a swing to Swale as the health authority turns the focus of its development plans to that part of the district.

As my hon. Friend rightly said, future developments require careful planning well in advance, and I understand that a possible site for a new hospital in Swale has been identified by the district health authority and Swale borough council. However, some essential steps—again, this was fairly recognised by my hon. Friend—must be taken before committing funds to land acquisition. Any decision to commit resources to a capital development must be based on a clear statement of need, a clear definition of service and development objectives and an explicit appraisal of options. The regional health authority can purchase land for development only after an option appraisal study has been completed and it is intended to build on the site within the strategic planning period.

I am aware, as my hon. Friend emphasised during his speech, that Swale borough council has been actively involved in the matter and has commissioned a report on the need for improved hospital provision in Swale. I, too, pay tribute to the close interest which the authority has taken in these matters, which is a good illustration of the co-operation that we wish to see between local authorities and health authorities in such matters. I commend the council's efforts.

The district health authority, which is committed in its strategic plan to improved hospital provisions in Swale, hopes to use the report, when it is available, in its development of an option appraisal study. That will be sent to the South East Thames regional health authority, I hope by the end of the year. I know that the regional health authority looks forward to receiving the report.

It was clear from what he said that my hon. Friend is anxious that the regional health authority should fully recognise the urgency that is perceived in Swale about this matter, and I undertake to ensure that everything that has been said today, not least the important remarks of my hon. Friend, is drawn firmly to the attention of the regional health authority. My hon. Friend will agree that these steps of appraisal, which can sometimes sound bureaucratic, are an essential part of ensuring that if we commit substantial sums of public money we do so in a properly measured and responsible way.

My hon. Friend asked whether I could guarantee the sympathy of myself and of the regional health authority. For the moment, I shall concentrate on speaking for myself. I very much hope that the regional health authority will study carefully what my hon. Friend has said and the commitment to this project of all concerned in Swale; but in the end it must make its own judgment. I undertake to consider as positively as I can any proposals from the regional health authority, although inescapably I have my responsibilities to examine carefully and thoroughly any proposals for the large-scale expenditure of public money.

My hon. Friend mentioned the measures that have been proposed by Medway health authority for the provision of health care services in Swale during the next five years. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for recognising that the background to those proposals, or a significant part of them, is not some desire by the district or regional health authority or the Department to modify the services, but the withdrawal of recognition by the royal colleges. I also appreciate my hon. Friend's concern that the quality of services in Swale should not be diminished in the years before it is possible to build a new hospital.

I can assure him that the proposals will not be rushed through. The Medway authority is consulting widely on the proposals, having issued a consultation document in January. The closing date for comments is 17 April. My hon. Friend will be aware that if the local community health council wishes to object to those proposals, it will need to submit alternatives, but it is likely that, in due course, proposals will come to me for decision. Therefore, my hon. Friend will appreciate that there is little comment that I can properly make at this stage.

I hope that my hon. Friend recognises that, if those proposals do come to my Department, we will consider them carefully and thoroughly. Our considerations will be greatly aided by the views that he has clearly presented today on behalf of his constituents.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 2 March 1987

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

ROYAL ASSENT

Mr. Speaker: I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified Her Royal Assent to the following Acts:

1. Teachers' Pay and Conditions Act 1987
2. Licensing (Restaurant Meals) Act 1987
3. Advocates' Widows' and Orphans' Fund Order Confirmation Act 1987
4. Plymouth City Council Act 1987
5. Port of Fosdyke Act 1987
6. Brighton Marine Palace and Pier Act 1987
7. Mid Glamorgan County Council Act 1987

Oral Answers to Questions

WALES

Unemployment

1. **Mr. Ray Powell** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the consequences for the Welsh economy of the current level of unemployment in Wales.

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Nicholas Edwards): On a seasonally adjusted basis, unemployment in Wales has fallen in nine out of the past 10 months. This is in some measure a reflection of the success of the action taken by the Government to promote investment and new jobs and to stimulate and encourage future growth in the Welsh economy.

Mr. Powell: That does not really answer my question. The Library's research department estimates that £1,131 million has been expended on the payment of unemployment benefit and other related matters in Wales, and this figure, over the past seven years of the Tory Government, means that £7 billion to £8 billion could have been spent in the economy of Wales — money that industrialists, commercialists and others would have welcomed. When will the Secretary of State stop this lunacy and do something to get people back to work?

Mr. Edwards: I would have thought that the hon. Gentleman would be pleased that we have provided benefit on a substantial scale to those who have suffered from unemployment. Equally, I am sure that he will welcome the reduction over the past 12 months in bly npunemployment in the travel-to-work area covering his constituency, from 18·3 to 16·4 per cent. In particular, I am sure that he will welcome the announcement today by Sony of a major £30 million-plus project at Bridgend, which will employ over 330 additional people, bringing the work force at Bridgend to about 1,600.

Sir Raymond Gower: Do not indications, reports and forecasts by the Welsh CBI and other bodies suggest that the prospects for the Welsh economy are probably better now than they have been for many years? Is investment by British Coal Enterprise Ltd. commensurate with the jobs lost in the coal mining areas of south Wales?

Mr. Edwards: I agree with my hon. Friend's assessment, and I shall have more to say on that subject in the debate later this afternoon. As my hon. Friend will be aware, over £40 million has been made available to British Coal Enterprise Ltd. and over £5 million has already been invested in projects in Wales. British Coal believes that that would create, in due course, some 4,000 jobs in the affected area of Wales. That is only one of the many contributory sources of new employment and new job creation in the Principality.

Mr. D. E. Thomas: How many jobs have been lost in Wales since the Government took office in 1979? Is it 150,000 or 170,000?

Mr. Edwards: The hon. Gentleman has to look at the small reduction—about 2 per cent.—in the total number in the work force, taking account of the self-employed, following the massive loss of jobs in coal and steel and the world recession in the early 1980s. What is of much greater significance is the scale on which investment is taking place, the fact that unemployment is falling faster in Wales than anywhere in the United Kingdom, and the almost universally confident forecasts by those involved in industry and in a position to assess its prospects.

Mr. Terlezki: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Welsh economy is in infinitely better shape and is healthier than it was in 1978-79 because more than 200 foreign companies have settled and invested in Wales, employing over 44,000 people? Does he also agree that we have had fewer strikes than for the past 30 years, and that our coal and steel industries are also doing infinitely better? If they had been left in the hands of the Labour party, we would have been suffering from stagnation, inflation and unemployment.

Mr. Edwards: I agree with all that. When the Labour party was in Government, industry was overmanned and uncompetitive. Great advances have been made in improving the competitive position of British, and especially of Welsh, industry since that time.

Mr. Barry Jones: Does not unemployment cost Wales almost £3 million a day and are we not squandering our most precious resource—our people? May I remind the Secretary of State that nearly 15,000 people in Wales have been out of work for more than five years—some 9 per cent. of the total number of unemployed? Will he ensure that the forthcoming Budget is a Budget for Welsh jobs in housing, health, education, law and order, social services and industrial development?

Mr. Edwards: As I have said, last year's Budget has produced a fall in unemployment for nine out of the last 10 months, and unemployment has fallen faster in Wales than elsewhere in the United Kingdom. I am quite confident that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's Budget will accelerate that process in the months ahead.

A-Level Examinations

2. **Mr. Raffan** asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the future of A-level examinations in the light of the consequential change in teaching methods following the introduction of the GCSE.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Wyn Roberts): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science announced on 25 February that he is appointing a committee to review A-levels, with the aim of maintaining or improving the present character and rigorous standards of these examinations. The committee will certainly take account of the changes brought about by the introduction of the GCSE.

Mr. Raffan: Does my hon. Friend agree that as the GCSE involves radical fundamental changes in the structure and philosophy of secondary education it would be highly undesirable if those now studying for the GCSE had to revert to the old learning approaches, the old teaching techniques and to the old classroom methodology when they enter the sixth form? Is it true, that as the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) has recently alleged, that there has been a decline in A-level success rates between 1981-1985, or is it the case that once again the hon. Gentleman has not done his homework and is completely wrong?

Mr. Roberts: With regard to the first part of my hon. Friend's question, the introduction of the GCSE, which is regarded as a tremendous improvement by all involved in education, will have implications for other, more advanced examinations. With regard to the A-level results in Wales, the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) was, indeed, wrong. The truth is that in 1981, 57 per cent. of those who tried three A-levels were successful. By 1985, that figure had risen to 62 per cent. The success rate of those trying one A-level remained almost constant at about 57 per cent., and the success rate of those trying two A-levels rose from 41 to 45 per cent.

Mr. Roy Hughes: Will the Minister give us a clear statement as to whether he envisages GCSE taking over from A-levels, bearing in mind that the level of certificate is dependent on the whole school record? What is the position of tertiary colleges in relation to the current falling rolls? Will the Secretary of State encourage those colleges?

Mr. Roberts: There is no question of GCSE taking over from A-levels. We are trying to assess the effects of GCSE on A-levels, and to act according to the advice that we receive. Of course, we encourage local education authorities to consider tertiary colleges, sixth-form colleges and all the other options available to them.

Mr. Grist: Will my hon. Friend take the chance that the review opens up to him, to try to look again at the teaching of foreign languages in our schools? Does he agree that at both GCSE level and A-level or AS-level, our languages should be taught so that they can be used by people in business and in everyday life, rather than just to read Moliere or whatever?

Mr. Roberts: My hon. Friend is right, although I do not agree with him about the lack of merit in reading Moliere. We have given guidance on the teaching of foreign languages, and the fact is that we have spare teaching capacity in many foreign languages, such as Spanish and Italian, from which our children could benefit.

Mid-Wales Development

3. **Mr. Livsey** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what additional financial assistance he is giving to Mid-Wales Development as a result of the changes in Government policy towards rural areas.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Gross expenditure by the Development Board for Rural Wales in 1987-88 is expected to be £13·5 million compared with £12·8 million this year. The board's budget for the year allows for a 25 per cent. increase in the Mid-Wales Development grant, a 50 per cent. increase in expenditure on the DRIVE scheme, and the building of almost 120,000 sq ft of new factory space in Mid-Wales.

Mr. Livsey: Will the Secretary of State ensure that if the Development Commission in England receives more money for the coming financial year, Mid-Wales Development will also benefit by increased funding in that period?

Mr. Edwards: I have announced our proposed funding. I remind the hon. Gentleman that expenditure per head by the DBRW is some three times greater than in the Development Commission's rural development areas and some 13 times greater if the whole population of rural England is brought into the equation, so the hon. Gentleman need not fear that Mid-Wales is being neglected, on that basis of comparison.

Mr. Forth: Does my right hon. Friend not agree that the various agencies that hand out taxpayers' money rarely create new jobs, but move employment around from one part of the country to another? Can my right hon. Friend give any examples of the number of companies set up with taxpayers' money that have subsequently gone bust?

Mr. Edwards: I have to tell my hon. Friend that I do not agree. The development agencies in Wales have done much to transform the Principality's economic prospects and have helped us through a very difficult time during the decline of the old industries. Mid-Wales Development has made a major contribution towards the strengthening of the rural economy in Wales.

Mr. Barry Jones: That said, it helps to explain why the Conservative party lost Brecon and Radnor in the by-election. The right hon. Gentleman delivered a near fatal blow when he denuded Mid-Wales of assisted area status. Does he know that it costs £47,000 per day to pay the Brecon and Radnor unemployed? What is he doing to get unemployment down in that constituency?

Mr. Edwards: The hon. Gentleman, of course, is wrong. There is a great variety of ways in which we can help in Mid-Wales. For example, our success in obtaining the major investment by Laura Ashley, an internationally successful company, shows just how effective those measures are. Indeed, a vivid account was given to us by the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) on 16 February during a debate on hospital provision, of the way in which Mid-Wales is thriving and doing better at present. I thank the hon. and learned Gentleman for that positive account.

Nursery Schools

4. **Mr. D. E. Thomas** asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many pre-school age children attend local-authority funded nursery schools in Wales; and what percentage of the children of their age group they represent.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: At January 1986 about 3,900 pupils were attending local authority-funded nursery schools in Wales. That represents about 5¼ per cent. of 3 and 4-year-olds. Many more children of that age—nearly 64 per cent.—are in the nursery classes of primary schools.

Mr. Thomas: Is it the Government's policy that all children of pre-statutory school age should attend nursery provision, to develop their educational and social skills and to take stress off the parents, many of whom are working or are one-parent families and have problems in coping with young children?

Mr. Roberts: The number of nursery units has increased considerably during the period of this Government. From 1979-80 to 1985-86 the number increased from 563 nursery units to 673, which is a rise in full-time pupils from 29,000 to 41,000, so it is clearly the Government's policy.

Mr. Best: What is the policy of the Welsh Office towards funding of Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin? What efforts is my hon. Friend's Department making to ensure that parental wishes are observed as to the medium through which children are taught?

Mr. Roberts: Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin, the Welsh language nursery school movement, receives support from the Government—currently about £360,000 a year. It has increased the number of groups to some 700 in Wales. It has made tremendous progress. As to the medium of teaching and parental influence in schools, my hon. Friend will know that the Government have taken steps to increase parental influence, and a further step will be taken as from the autumn this year.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Does the Minister agree that the scheme known as Play Board Wales has an excellent record of achievement? Will he give a commitment for future funding to Play Board Wales so that it will not have to be wound up at the end of the current financial year?

Mr. Roberts: I am not familiar with the details of the application by Play Board Wales, but I shall consider them.

Mr. Barry Jones: In the nursery sector, cuts and closures have been proposed, not least in my constituency at Shotton, Aston and Buckley. Will the Minister take advice and give the £1·3 million grant which is proposed for public schools in Wales to the LEAs for nursery education.

Mr. Roberts: As to the last fact, I hope that the hon. Gentleman realises that the figure to which he referred—the amount which is given to the approved assisted places scheme—is 0·126 per cent. of the total spent on education in Wales. With regard to the Shotton nursery school, to which the hon. Gentleman referred, I can make no comment because no proposals have been published.

Labour Statistics

5. **Mr. Roy Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what are the latest unadjusted figures for unemployment in *(a)* Newport, *(b)* Gwent and *(c)* Wales; and if he will give the equivalent figures for 1979 on the most nearly comparable basis.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: On 8 January 1987 the total numbers of unemployed claimants in Newport district, Gwent and Wales were 9,990, 28,672 and 176,866 respectively. Unadjusted figures for 1979 are not available on a comparable basis.

Mr. Hughes: Do not these figures yet again reveal that the Government's policies are not working, particularly in Newport? To improve matters, will the Secretary of State prevail on the Central Electricity Generating Board to build a coal-fired power station at Uskmouth? That would be a useful development near the south Wales coalfield and would boost employment in the area during its construction and operation?

Mr. Edwards: The hon. Gentleman is wrong in saying that the Government's policies are not working. I have already said that there has been a substantial fall in unemployment in Wales. That is true of Newport, where the unemployment rate has fallen from 16·8 per cent. to 15·6 per cent. over the 12-month period. I shall draw the hon. Gentleman's remarks to the attention of the CEGB.

Mr. Harvey: Will my right hon. Friend welcome the fact that in the latest CBI report on quarterly trends, 16 per cent. of respondents say that they expect to take on new labour this year? Will he condemn the gloom that the Labour party shows at the good news that unemployment is declining in Wales?

Mr. Edwards: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend, and I shall have more to say on the subject later this afternoon.

Mrs. Clwyd: As the Secretary of State knows, there has not been a substantial drop in unemployment in my constituency in the Cynon valley. Will the right hon. Gentleman be precise and tell me how much that has cost in the Cynon valley in lost taxes, unemployment benefit and redundancy payments in addition to the cost in human misery? When will the right hon. Gentleman create some jobs in the Cynon valley?

Mr. Edwards: The hon. Lady knows that unemployment has fallen over the period in the Cynon valley, as elsewhere, that firms such as Hitachi are making major investments, and that there is substantial urban development grant support and urban programme support in the area. The prospects for the valley have probably been altered more than by any other event by the Government's action in completing the splendid new road access to the heart of the valley.

Mr. Raffan: Is my right hon. Friend aware that there has been an 11·5 per cent. drop in unemployment in my constituency during the past year? This is largely due to the dramatic success of the Delyn enterprise zone. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Labour party's concern about unemployment might begin to carry some credibility if it changed its position on enterprise zones from outright hostility to unqualified support?

Mr. Edwards: I wholly agree with my hon. Friend, especially about the success of the Delyn enterprise zone. The other enterprise zones in Wales are also making a notable contribution. The enterprise zone in Swansea has created some 2,300 jobs since we set it up.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Does the Secretary of State agree that one of the reasons for the high continuing unemployment in Wales is the fact that not enough people are employed in improving homes in bad condition? Is he not trying to conceal that fact by requiring local authority housing officers to sign a declaration under the Official Secrets Act *in connection with a Welsh Office survey on housing* conditions which is taking place at the moment?

Mr. Edwards: The hon. and learned Gentleman is quite wrong. As he knows, there has been a major programme of house renovation and improvement — indeed, the largest ever undertaken. We wish to have an accurate and full survey carried out. It is perfectly normal that those who are engaged in such operations should observe the normal rules of confidentiality until the report is prepared and that they should not go through the process that is all too common nowadays in Government, or around Government and local government, of leaking partial information before there is a complete and comprehensive report.

YTS

6. **Mr. Knox** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he plans to take to increase the proportion of young Welsh people who have participated in the YTS who go on from training to jobs.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The progress on two-year YTS is very encouraging. Fifty-eight per cent. of YTS leavers in the first five months of 1986-87 went into jobs compared with 52 per cent. in the same period in 1985-86. The recent introduction of approved training organisation status and the training standards advisory service will consolidate the improvements already being made.

Mr. Knox: I welcome that excellent news. How many young people in Wales have joined the YTS since last April? How many organisations have applied for approved training organisation status over the same period?

Mr. Roberts: As I told my hon. Friend, the progress has been encouraging. In Wales, over 27,000 young people have joined the YTS since April 1986 and some 188 organisations have applied for approved training organisation status.

Mr. Rowlands: Is the Minister aware of the importance in the creation of opportunities for young people of community projects which are run by our churches and by organisations such as the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders? Is he aware of the proposed 10 per cent. cut in these projects and that the impact on these projects in terms of morale and development could be serious? Will the hon. Gentleman ask the MSC to review this policy?

Mr. Roberts: Of course, I am very much aware of the importance of the community programme, which caters for about 22,000 people in Wales. We intend to introduce the job training scheme for young people aged between 18 and 25. I am sure that some of those young people will come from the community programme and, therefore, the burden of financing the community programme should be less.

Sir Raymond Gower: Does my hon. Friend recall allegations by the Opposition that these schemes were nothing better than a means of concealing unemployment? My hon. Friend's answers show that for 58 per cent. of these people it was a gateway to subsequent employment.

Mr. Roberts: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Moreover, the YTS is not just a gateway to employment —it also provides high-quality training. The aim of the new scheme, the JTS about which I spoke a moment ago, is to provide high-quality training as well. Training of this kind is now essential throughout working life.

Regional Development Grant

7. **Mr. Gareth Wardell** asked the Secretary of State for Wales how much Wales received in the form of regional development grants in 1979-80 and 1985-86.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Payments of regional development grant in Wales were £50·7 million in 1979-80 and £84·4 million in 1985-86.

Mr. Wardell: Will the Secretary of State confirm that the effect of regional development grant has been reduced in terms of the areas of Wales that now benefit from it? Will he also confirm that the Government are the only Government in the EEC who block any firm or enterprise from receiving aid under article 15 of the European regional development fund?

Mr. Edwards: The effectiveness of regional assistance has not been reduced. It has been improved. The Welsh share of regional assistance rose from 17 per cent. in 1972 to 22 per cent. in 1985-86, showing that Wales has not suffered from the changes. Over the weekend, the shadow Secretary of State for Scotland complained that Wales was getting a greater share of grant than Scotland even though its working population is half that of Scotland. Clearly, Wales is doing extremely well out of these arrangements.

Mr. Harvey: Will my right hon. Friend consider re-extending development area status to Denbigh in view of the closure of North Wales hospital?

Mr. Edwards: I know that my hon. Friend is concerned about the proposal by the area health authority to close a hospital there. He will also know that consultations about that proposal is at an early stage. Clwyd county council is organising consultation with a wide body of interests, including the Welsh Development Agency, about the way of dealing with the situation if the hospital closure goes ahead.

Job Training Scheme

9. **Mr. Gwilym Jones** asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many training places are envisaged for Wales by the recently announced extension of the job training scheme.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: There are no firm targets for the new job training scheme, but funding is available for up to 6,020 places by autumn 1987. The Manpower Services Commission will proceed at a rate consistent with demand and the maintenance of quality.

Mr. Jones: I am sure that my hon. Friend would agree that the most important part of the job training scheme is the quality of the training. Can he reassure me that there will be proper emphasis on the quality of training in the new scheme?

Mr. Roberts: Yes, I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. Trainees will be able to obtain qualifications from recognised examining and validating bodies. The managing agents will have to become approved training organisations, there will be a role for the training standards advisory Service, which is analogous to Her Majesty's Inspectorate in education, and there will be careful monitoring of performane and output.

Mr. Foot: How much of the extra cost of this scheme has fallen on local authorities which already have very heavy burdens to bear?

Mr. Roberts: I do not know the details of the cost of the current scheme but, as I implied earlier, it is being introduced in conjunction with the community programme.

Hospital Waiting Lists

10. **Mr. John** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is the number of patients on hospital waiting lists in the Taff Ely area at the latest convenient date; and what were the comparable figures for the same dates in 1979 and 1983, respectively.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Mark Robinson): The in-patient waiting lists for hospitals in the Taff Ely area at 30 September 1986 totalled 2,463. Comparable figures in 1979 and 1983 were 3,488 and 3,420 respectively. Relevant out-patient figures on 30 September 1986 totalled 4,842. The figures in 1979 and 1983 were 2,791 and 3,283.

Mr. John: Does the Minister accept that if one combines in-patient and out-patient waiting lists, one finds that in the last seven years there has been no significant difference in the numbers of patients awaiting treatment in this area?

When will he take a significant step towards cutting those waiting lists?

Mr. Robinson: First, I do not accept what the hon. Gentleman says. There has been a 25 per cent. increase in in-patients and a 16 per cent. increase in out-patients since 1979. As for the waiting list initiative, the hon. Gentleman will be aware that the mid-Glamorgan health authority has been able to bid and that we have been able to make funds available. Those funds are benefiting the Taff Ely area.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: As my constituency borders Taff Ely, may I suggest a single improvement to my hon. Friend? He will remember that at Welsh Question Time in December last he was able to tell me that it had been agreed that Hywel Rowlands, a convicted killer, at present in Whitchurche hospital, would be moved. Will my hon. Friend now join me in demanding that the Home Office should take urgent action to fulfil its promise?

Mr. Robinson: I am aware of my hon. Friend's concern but, as he knows, that is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary.

Bus Services

11. **Sir Anthony Meyer** asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received from local authorities and individuals regarding the operation of bus services in Wales since deregulation.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: My right hon. Friend has received 16 representations. None of these came from local authorities.

Sir Anthony Meyer: Is it not now clear that the prophets of woe have been confounded and that the combination of free competition with carefully targeted subsidy is providing Wales with a better bus service than it had before?

Mr. Roberts: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The opponents of the policy, who predicted major problems, have been proved wrong, as the Government have always maintained that they would be.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: In the year before deregulation was introduced, 49 per cent. of the privately owned public service vehicles in Wales failed their annual test. Can the Minister give us confidence that as a result of deregulation that figure will be lower this year?

Mr. Roberts: I can certainly assure the hon. Gentleman that the Government take the safety aspect very seriously. All existing safety checks on buses will continue, and even more spot checks on vehicles in workshops will be undertaken. The Department of Transport has employed additional staff for its vehicle inspectorate to increase enforcement capacity, and new vehicle examiners have been appointed in Wales. Vehicles found to be seriously defective will not be allowed to operate.

Mr. Terlezki: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Labour party's policy of closing the vehicle licence registration centre at Swansea will result in 4,000 people being unemployed in Wales?

Mr. Roberts: I noticed the Labour party's proposal to do away with vehicle excise duty and the licensing system and, incidentally, with the licensing centre at Swansea. However, I do not think that there is total agreement on the Opposition Benches as to the wisdom of that policy.

Mr. Roy Hughes: In relation to the Government's deregulation policy for our bus services, what will be the future of National Welsh? Will the Government allow it to be handed over to a firm of asset strippers? That would certainly be detrimental to bus services in Wales.

Mr. Roberts: That is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport. It would not be appropriate for me to comment on the bids that he has received. I assure the hon. Gentleman that my right hon. Friend will consider the bids very carefully before coming to a final view.

Mr. Best: Is my hon. Friend aware that one of the examples of greater service to the public since deregulation is a regular bus service between my constituency and his, carrying people to and from Ysbyty Gwynedd?

Mr. Roberts: Indeed, and there is plenty of scope for innovative services to be established. The rural transport innovation grant scheme is operating in Wales and it should be very helpful, particularly in rural areas.

Housebuilding

13. **Mr. Coleman** asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many new houses in the public sector were completed during 1986 in each of the following boroughs: Neath, Lliu

Valley, Afan, Ogmar, Taff Ely, Rhondda, Cynon Valley, Merthyr, Rhmney, Blaurau Gwent, Islwyn and Tarfgaen; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mark Robinson: The number of public sector completions in 1986 in the boroughs listed were 36, 48, 39, 40, 32, 12, 40, nil, 42, 38, 40 and 41 respectively.

Mr. Coleman: I compliment the officials at the Welsh Office on being able to interpret the rather remarkable spelling of some of the boroughs listed. Can the hon. Gentleman tell the House what those completions represent in money terms, as in the Grand Committee recently the Secretary of State referred to the very large resources being spent on housing in the valleys? Do not the figures given today for completions in the boroughs which form the valley communities shows a different picture from that which the Minister seeks to give?

Mr. Robinson: I am sure that my officials will welcome the kind comments that the hon. Gentleman has made about interpretation of the Order Paper. The hon. Gentleman is right to point out that expenditure on housing has increased and that housing allocations are up by 19 per cent. in the coming year. He will be aware that there is a serious problem with regard to older housing stock in the valleys. That is why we have launched our home improvement grant initiative. It is a matter of priorities and it is up to local authorities to decide how they should spend their allocations. Many of them have chosen to take advantage of the home improvement grant system.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Ministerial Duties

21. **Mr. Nellist** asked the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many hours in February he spent on his ministerial duties.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. Norman Tebbit): Sixty hours, Sir.

Mr. Nellist: Has the Chancellor considered a slightly less arduous job which would give him more time for moonlighting, despite the fact he receives more than £50 per hour wearing his present hat? Has he considered today's report from the Labour research department which suggests that perhaps the real reason why he and the Government take little action against the pimps and sharks in the City of London is that, in his other hat, as chairman of the Tory party, he gets a quarter of the company donations from that source?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must relate his questions to the Chancellor's responsibilities for the Duchy of Lancaster.

Mr. Tebbit: Once again, the hon. Gentleman is clearly labouring under one of the many misapprehensions that he probably shares with a number of his colleagues. My ministerial pay is £2,000 per year, which works at to rather less than £3 per hour. As ever, the hon. Gentleman has leapt from a wrong premise to an unfounded conclusion.

As to the City of London, if the hon. Gentleman can cast his memory back that far he may recollect that I was the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry who introduced the White Paper which brought about much tougher sanctions in the City and much tighter regulatory procedures which will soon be in force generally. Some parts are already in force. That is why we are having success in prosecuting for insider trading, which was not an offence under the Government which the hon. Gentleman would have supported had he been in the House.

Mr. Favell: My right hon. Friend will be aware that on 1 April the boundary commissioners start their work on the boundaries between metropolitan borough councils. When his official duties next take him to Manchester, will he tell the leader of Manchester city council that the people of Stockport are appalled at what is happening to that once proud city and do not want Manchester city council to encroach one inch into Stockport? With his usual delicacy of phrase, will he tell the leader of Manchester city council to turn his attentions elsewhere?

Mr. Tebbit: I am not sure whether it is the duty of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to get into such questions. However, I would always make it plain that the people of Stockport and, indeed, most of the people of Lancashire resent sharply the gross excesses perpetrated by Manchester city council. Indeed, I understand that the Leader of the Opposition also resents those excesses.

Public Meetings

24. **Mr. Winnick** asked the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many public meetings he has addressed in the last month.

Mr. Tebbit: On the basis of experience during February, about 15 hours a week.

Mr. Winnick: In view of all the rosy optimism that Ministers, including the right hon. Gentleman, show about the economy——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is question No. 24, about public meetings.

Mr. Tebbit: The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), who should have asked question No. 22, is probably still celebrating St. David's day.

My answer to the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) is: in the course of my duties as Chancellor of the Duchy, none.

Mr. Winnick: In view of all the rosy optimism that Ministers show about the economy, how does the right hon. Gentleman explain the fact that whenever elections give people the opportunity the Tory vote virtually collapses, as it did at Greenwich? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that many of his numerous political opponents hope that he will continue his job as party chairman, though not as Chancellor of the Duchy, for many years to come?

Mr. Tebbit: I note what the hon. Gentleman says. Presumably it is an expression of his hope that the Labour party will shortly lose many more of the seats that it has held for more than 40 years. I share that hope.

Mr. Yeo: Is my right hon. Friend aware that he would be most welcome if he could find time to address a public meeting in my constituency of Suffolk, South? It would provide him with a valuable opportunity to tell my electorate, especially the farming community, which is prominent in my constituency, what a disastrous future it would have if Labour or SDP-Liberal policies were ever put into practice.

Mr. Tebbit: Once again, I am not sure whether it would be the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster speaking in Suffolk or one of my other incarnations. However, in any of my incarnations I should certainly tell the farmers about the Labour party's proposals to introduce rating of agricultural premises and the great split within the alliance between the half that wants to introduce the rating of agricultural land and the half that does not.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Will the right hon. Gentleman tell us how many of his meetings in the past month dragged him away from the county palatine into Greenwich and how he would assess his success rate per meeting in Greenwich?

Mr. Tebbit: The Chancellor of the Duchy did not attend any meetings in Greenwich, so once again the hon. and learned Gentleman's question has gone sadly adrift. I shall be happy to come to the Dispatch Box after the general election and tell the hon. and learned Gentleman about the statistics of the general election if he has the good fortune to be here.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Historic Buildings

26. **Mr. Chapman** asked the hon. Member for Wokingham, as representing the Church Commissioners, what is his response to those parts of the House of Commons Environment Committee's report on historic buildings which relate to the responsibilities of the Church Commissioners.

The Second Church Estates Commissioner, Representing the Church Commissioners (Sir William van Straubenzee): The commissioners welcome the references to redundant churches and the ecclesiastical exemption, which directly concern them. I know that the General Synod's working party on state aid for churches in use will be especially heartened by what the committee has recommended in relation to VAT on repairs.

Mr. Chapman: I welcome my hon. Friend's reply. Will he encourage his fellow commissioners to urge the deans of our cathedrals to accept that if they expect public money to help with the repair and maintenance of our glorious ecclesiastical architectural heritage, they must play their part in seeking more voluntary funds in the form of entrance fees from the millions of people who visit our cathedrals?

Sir William van Straubenzee: I must make it clear that the commissioners have no direct responsibility for cathedrals. Speaking as an individual, I find it entirely acceptable when visiting cathedrals abroad to make a contribution to go in. There are a number of places in this country, such as St. George's at Windsor, where it has been entirely proper, right and accepted for many years that those going in, other than for services or to pray, should pay to do so.

Church House (Sale)

27. **Mr. Peter Bruinvels** asked the hon. Member for Wokingham, as representing the Church Commissioners, what are the financial implications for the Commissioners of the proposed sale of Church House and the move by the General Synod and the Church House staff into the Commissioners' headquarters at Millbank.

Sir William van Straubenzee: As my hon. Friend will know, the move of the Church House staff to separate accommodation adjacent to the commissioners' offices in Millbank was approved by the General Synod last week. The adaptation of Millbank for this purpose will cost around £4 million and is the most economical of all the options considered. The future of Church House , which the Synod will leave with sadness, will be the responsibility of the corporation of Church House.

Mr. Bruinvels: As staying at Church House would have cost £28·7 million and as there would possibly have been women ordained priests based at Church House, it is right that the Church of England organisation and General Synod staff should be moving to No. 1 Millbank. Does my hon. Friend agree that the savings are so incredible that that option was worth approving? Does he also agree that hiring the Queen Elizabeth II conference centre for Synods at £10,000 per year means that money will be saved to enable the church and the clergy to go out and attract more people to increase the flock which the church is losing, not because women may be ordained but because of modern services and the new Lord's Prayer?

Sir William van Straubenzee: My hon. Friend has included a good many points in his question, with the skill that we have come to associate with him. There is no doubt that the most economical and sensible of the various options has been chosen and I look forward with the greatest pleasure to a building that will encompass in one set of rooms both my hon. Friend and women priests.

Mr. Frank Field: As "Faith in the City" made much of what the Government could do to regenerate the inner cities, could not Church House and the Church Commissioners use this opportunity, instead of preaching to the Government, to set an example by moving from Westminster to one of the northern cities?

Sir William van Straubenzee: The hon. Gentleman with his close connection with these matters, will have noticed that the General Synod debated this with great care only last week——

Mr. Frank Field: And came to the wrong conclusion.

Sir William van Straubenzee: The hon. Gentleman says that it came to the wrong conclusion, but that would be the view of anyone in a minority. The decision was made by a group of people overwhelmingly drawn from outside London. They concluded—whether they were right or wrong is another matter — that it would not be appropriate for the General Synod to move out of London. I must make it quite clear that the commissioners have no responsibility, nor do they wish such responsibility, for decisions taken by the General Synod. However, the conclusion was taken after mature and careful debate.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Telephone Messages

28. **Sir Anthony Meyer** asked the Lord Privy Seal if he is satisfied with present arrangements for hon. Members to receive telephone messages.

The Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Biffen): Yes, Sir.

Sir Anthony Meyer: Does my right hon. Friend accept that the advent of new technology, in this as in so many other matters, has led not to an improvement but to a deterioration in the message system for Members of Parliament? In particular, would it not be possible for the brilliant new telephones to have their red lights go out when hon. Members receive their messages and to display on their dials whether a telephone is branched through to hon. Member's secretaries?

Mr. Biffen: I am sorry that my hon. Friend has had this unhappy experience as about 600 to 700 messages are taken daily. I will refer the point to the communications manager who, no doubt, will be in touch with my hon. Friend.

Mr. Boyes: While the right hon. Gentleman is looking at the system of receiving messages, will he also consider a particular aspect of sending messages, especially those to the European Commission in Brussels? Notwithstanding the right hon. Gentleman's attitude to the EEC, will he allow hon. Members to make calls on parliamentary business at Parliament's expense——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is wide of the question. The question is about receiving messages.

Mr. Boyes: I am answering the messages that I have received, Mr. Speaker. Will the right hon. Gentleman allow hon. Members to make calls to the European Commission on parliamentary business at Parliament's expense? Will he particularly consider allowing members of the Select Committee on European Legislation to have that privilege, along with members of other Committees?

Mr. Biffen: Although the question may have been somewhat wide of the original, the import was quite clear. The hon. Gentleman would like to have zero charge for something which is at present subject to a charge. I would have thought that, with the recent increase in secretarial and office allowances, he might feel that he could reasonably meet that kind of cost. I think that the matter has been considered recently, but I will look into it.

Mr. Rathbone: Will my right hon. Friend consider another form of message which can be received via telephones — the transmission of the business of the House into our offices? How is his consideration of that matter coming along?

Mr. Biffen: That matter has been considered. A highly controversial judgment will have to be made, and it will certainly require the authority of the House.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Will the Lord Privy Seal consider the other form of message that we get occasionally—the green card telling us that someone is here to see us—to see whether we can find a way of communicating news of their arrival much more quickly than at present, when often we hear much later that people were here, by which time they have gone?

Mr. Biffen: That is a somewhat controversial request. As I understand it, a report on radiopaging is being considered and will soon be available to the House.

Mr. Maxton: Is the Leader of the House aware that on one occasion it took two and a half hours for a telephone message to reach me informing me that my wife had been in a car accident? Such a delay is ludicrous. In those circumstances, will he consider two alternatives: first, a full paging system for Members of Parliament; and secondly, the idea that each Member's telephone should have an individual answering service which would allow us to put it on and to receive messages?

Mr. Biffen: I shall make those points to the communications manager, who will no doubt be in touch with the hon. Gentleman. As I have just announced, the report of the Services Committee on radiopaging will be available later this week.

Opposition Parties (Assistance)

29. **Mr. Peter Bruinvels** asked the Lord Privy Seal, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Leicester, East of 9 February, *Official Report*, columns *59-60*, if he has any plans to review the arrangements under which financial assistance is provided to Opposition parties within the House; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Biffen: As I told the House, I expect that, following past practice, these arrangements are likely to be reviewed later this year or next.

Mr. Bruinvels: I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement that there will be a review, especially since £630,000 was allocated to Opposition parties in 1986. Is my right hon. Friend aware that the Official Unionists receive £20,397, that the year before they received £19,889 and that they have one Member fewer than they did a year ago? The Democratic Unionists receive £6,788·75. With one right honourable exception, Unionist Members are not taking part in Northern Ireland business—which I can understand — or in any other parliamentary business. It is strange that they are claiming this money, especially as they voted against it. Could it not be interpreted that they are using the money to campaign against the Anglo-Irish agreement?

Mr. Biffen: I was aware of the figures because I supplied them to my hon. Friend. He should remember that each qualifying party is required to certify to the Accounting Officer of the House that the expenses for which reimbursement is claimed have been expended exclusively in relation to that party's parliamentary business. Therefore, the claims have been made on the authority of the party concerned. If my hon. Friend thinks that the arrangement is unsatisfactory, he should make that point when the matter is next before the House.

Mr. Alton: Will the Lord Privy Seal also consider the allocation of civil servants to Whips' offices other than those of the official Opposition, especially as four are provided to the Labour Opposition entirely at taxpayers' expense and Short money—something about which the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Bruinvels) will be concerned — has been frozen at the levels established during the lifetime of this Parliament? Will he confirm that Opposition funding will be increased in the aftermath of the general election?

Mr. Biffen: The hon. Gentleman will be the first to concede that the Civil Service arrangements to which he refers predated the advent of Short money and were not absorbed by the existence of Short money, but those arrangements can, of course, be considered when they come up for renewal.

Sir Anthony Meyer: Will my right hon. Friend consider increasing the support available to the Liberal party in

view of a recent report by that party claiming that, for example, my hon. Friend the Member for Conwy (Mr. Roberts) had failed to vote against the Government on one occasion? It would be helpful if the Liberal party had enough resources to discover that my hon. Friend is a Minister.

Mr. Biffen: Education that is self-financed is much more likely to be taken to heart than that which is publicly financed.

Mr. Bermingham: Does the Lord Privy Seal agree that if a democracy is to survive the Opposition should be properly funded so that the right and proper questions can be asked of the Government, thus probing Government policies in the interests of democracy?

Mr. Biffen: The hon. Gentleman will recognise that there was a sharp division about whether such public funding should be provided, and that the opposition to it was split across the conventional divisions in the House. However, I happen to agree with the hon. Gentleman.

WALES

Town and Country Planning Controls

14. **Mr. Chapman** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the proportion of land in the Principality on which special town and country planning controls operate, with the purpose of protecting the environment.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Mark Robinson): About 25 per cent. of Wales, comprising mainly national parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty, is covered by special development orders. Other controls covering these and other areas of land apply for specific environmental protection purposes.

Mr. Chapman: I welcome the relatively high proportion of land that has special protection. Will my hon. Friend assure the House that the protection of the environment will remain the dominant consideration in any future planning applications in such areas, particularly in the light of the recent consultation paper about the future of agricultural land use?

Mr. Robinson: I am delighted to give my hon. Friend that assurance. The need to protect the countryside from uncontrolled development remains as strong as ever. The special protection afforded to national parks, areas of outstanding natural beauty and other areas of special importance will be fully maintained.

Teachers' Pay and Conditions

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Kenneth Baker): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement about teachers' pay and conditions of employment in England and Wales.

The Teachers' Pay and Conditions Act has now received Royal Assent. The Government want school teachers to receive an average increase of 16·4 per cent., half with effect from 1 January 1987 and half on 1 October 1987. I am today sending a draft order for this purpose to those whom I am required to consult under the Act seeking their comments. The order covers the 1 January pay increase and sets out the conditions which will beome part of school teachers' contracts of employment. I am placing copies of the consultation letter and attachments in the Vote Office and Printed Paper Office.

I have considered carefully the responses to the proposals for teachers' pay and conditions which I set out in October, and to those which emerged from the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service discussions. I have also taken into account the settlement in Scotland, and I am now bringing forward revised proposals to apply in full from 1 October. The main features are, first, the top of the basic salary scale will increase from £12,700 a year to £13,300 a year, which is £600 higher than the figure in my October proposals. Secondly, there will be five levels of incentive allowances ranging from £500 to £4,200. Thirdly, the 105,000 teachers on scales 3 and 4 and the senior teachers' scale will receive allowances of £1,000, £3,000 and £4,200 respectively. Fourthly, there will be scope for 25,000 new promotions in October 1987, with an increase in the number of teachers qualifying for an allowance to about 165,000 in 1990. This is 20,000 more incentive posts than in my previous proposals. Fifthly, there are no changes to my original proposals for heads and deputies.

These proposals recognise the view put by the teacher unions in support of a basic salary scale, and I have moved towards their position. I have, however, retained a pay structure which provides good differentials and I have increased the number of incentive posts so that the proportion of teachers in them will rise to 55 per cent. overall in 1990. The order also covers teachers in special schools and unqualified teachers. I recognise the distinctive position of teachers in special schools, and the basic allowance for them will be £1,000 as against £855 in the ACAS proposals.

In my statement on 30 October I said that the increased expenditure of £608 million on teachers' pay must be matched by a clear definition of school teachers' duties and conditions of employment. On 27 November, I recognised the useful progress in the ACAS discussions on the definition of a teacher's job and on the length of the teachers' working year. The list of teachers' duties set out in the draft order are based closely on the ACAS proposals. The order provides for a working year of 195 days, of which five days are beyond the pupil year, and states that a teacher may be required to work for 1,265 hours a year at the direction of the headteacher. These requirements are consistent with the ACAS proposals.

The ACAS document proposed levels of cover for absent teachers but recognised that this depended both on finance and the availability of suitably qualified teachers. The Government believe that the ACAS proposals would have created difficulties for many local authorities. We have therefore decided that teachers should not normally be required to provide cover after a colleague has been absent for three consecutive days, nor to provide cover in the case of planned absences of more than three consecutive days. The question of cover will be among the matters to be taken into consideration in the consultations that I shall shortly be initiating about the numbers of school teachers needed and how their time can be used to best advantage.

I am asking for responses to my consultative letter by Monday 23 March at the latest. Ministers or my officials will be willing to meet those who are being consulted. I regard it as essential for these discussions to be completed before the end of this month. We can then lay the order before the Easter recess so that teachers will receive their back pay without delay.

I wish to confirm that the Government propose to increase education GREs in England and Wales by £118 million for 1986-87 and £490 million for 1987-88, with an increase in block grant to local authorities of £56 million and £200 million for those years. On that basis the local authority associations have already been sent information about the likely change in individual GREs and block grant entitlements. Formal consultations will be started shortly.

These proposals will improve the career prospects of teachers and give local management new scope to raise the quality of education. Teachers are being given a substantial pay increase combined with a clear definition of their responsibilities. I believe that parents will expect teachers to respond by giving their commitment to uninterrupted and effective education for all our nation's children.

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): Does the Secretary of State believe that his statement represents a genuine attempt to settle the teachers' dispute, or is it yet another round in the Government's war against the teachers?

I welcome the fact that the Secretary of State has modified the proposals that he announced in November and that he has at last recognised the need to offer all classroom teachers an improved basic salary scale. Does he not realise that his rejection of the ACAS agreement, which was freely agreed between employers and the teachers; his legislation, which has been through this House and another place, to remove teachers' bargaining rights; and now his decision to impose a settlement on the teachers, have left the prospect of a lasting peace in our schools still uncertain and that, by imposing a settlement, the Government are embarking on a dangerous gamble which, sadly — I regret it very much — could lead to further disruption in our schools?

Mr. Baker: As regards imposition, yes, I am imposing a pay increase which will mean that teachers have an average rise of 25 per cent. over 18 months. That is what I am imposing.

I do not agree that this is a constitutional outrage. The hon. Gentleman will know that I have tried hard to find a way through during the past three months. This is a genuine attempt. I have moved closer to the union stance. It is deeply regrettable that the teacher unions did not move at all towards the Government's position.

Perhaps I might say something about causing further disruption. It is not I who can cause disruption in our

schools. Only the leaders of the teacher unions can seek to take out their grievancies on children in this way. Despite the antics of the two cold war warriors of the main teacher unions, I do not believe that the hearts of teachers will be in further disruption. The settlement that I am implementing is fair to the teachers, to parents, to ratepayers and, most of all, to our children. I believe that most teachers who have taken action during the past few years have done so with a very heavy heart and that, with the better pay and prospects which this settlement provides, they will want to get on with their job in peace.

Mr. J. F. Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): Is my right hon. Friend aware that his statement will be warmly welcomed by teachers and parents and that, far from being another round in the Government's war against teachers, it is a further sign of the Government's good intentions? Will my right hon. Friend confirm that roughly 165,000 teachers will be in incentive posts by about 1990? How does he intend to publicise this good news to schools and teachers so that they can take that information carefully into account when deciding what action to take?

Mr. Baker: I can confirm what my hon. Friend has said. One of the features of my latest proposals is an increase in the number of incentive posts by 25,000 from 1 October this year. Many of those posts will go to scale 1 and scale 2 teachers, as it became clear in the negotiations and consultations that I have had that one group which did not do very well were those at the top of scale 2. They will be able to benefit from the higher number of incentive posts.

I am one of those who believe that good news travels by itself. However, I shall help it on its way by writing tonight to all head teachers setting out my proposals, and will enclose a copy of a booklet that sets out the proposals — they are very complicated. On Wednesday, I shall again be taking space in the national press to set out the proposals so that everyone will be able to see the advantage of them.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): While I welcome the Secretary of State's movement, I recognise that this is a gamble by the Government. Does the Secretary of State appreciate that many teachers regard the right to negotiate pay and conditions as being just as important as their level of pay and remuneration? In the long term, is not the need for an independent pay body essential? If we are to avoid this kind of trench warfare, which has led to so much loss of morale, falling standards, many lost days by teachers and pupils alike and so much hurt to parents, is not a mechanism required?

Mr. Baker: On my frequent visits to schools, I see many dedicated, committed and hard-working teachers, who, I am sure, will respond to the higher rewards and better prospects that I am bringing forward. I do not sense any urge to revive disruption.

Future negotiating rights were debated last Thursday, when the official spokesman for the Liberal party was in his place and put forward the case for an independent review body. I have made it clear that the advisory committee is an interim measure. We need a cooling-off period or breathing space to try to resolve the differences. I made it clear on Thursday, and I reiterate, that I am willing to open negotiations with the various parties to find a long-term solution. However, I ask the House to bear in mind that this move is against the background of a negotiating process that has become thoroughly discredited. That was the Burnham process, which, by the Royal Assent announced at the beginning of Question Time today, is now at an end.

Mr. Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden): Is my right hon. Friend aware that under his original proposals, many teachers were worried that there appeared to be too many rewards going to teachers who were promoted out of the classroom and away from the art of teaching? Will he confirm that even then, but especially now, under the adjustment in his proposals announced today, there is ample reward for the good teacher who wishes to remain in the classroom?

Mr. Baker: I am willing to confirm that. The position on incentives is that the five allowances which I have announced, which is an increase over the last proposals, will go for additional responsibilities — for example, a head of a department — for where there is a generally recognised shortage of skills, for recruitment to posts difficult to fill and for good classroom performance. We want to reward the teacher who does not wish to become a head of department but wishes to remain in the classroom teaching. The incentive allowances will be available to such teachers.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Will the Secretary of State understand that, while he has made some movement towards the unions' position, anger will remain in the teaching profession until negotiating rights are fully restored? Will he also understand that in many places, including Bradford, teachers are concerned about pupil-teacher ratios, the availability of equipment and the fabric of schools? What will be the maximum cost to individual local authorities as a result of the settlement?

Mr. Baker: When we came into office in 1979, the pupil-teacher ratio was 18·9:1. It has now fallen to 17·6:1 and by 1990 it is planned to fall to 17·1:1. These are historically low figures. At the same time, the proportion of classes in secondary schools with more than 33 pupils has fallen from over 2 per cent. to 1·1 per cent. The average class size now is 21. This shows clearly the Government's commitment to providing resources for the education system.

I reiterate my point about finding a better long-term answer beyond the interim advisory committee. When I met Mr. Smithers, Mr. Jarvis and Mr. Willis last week, they said that for the longer term they could deliver a negotiating forum that would act responsibly and not lead to the divisions and disputes of Burnham or to disruption in the classroom. I hope that the first token of their good intent will not be a call for strikes and stoppages, because that would bode ill for their aspirations.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): My right hon. Friend's statement proves that constructive consultation can work, and nothing that he said has given any further excuse for industrial action. However, is he aware that concern has been expressed that his proposed settlement may favour secondary school teachers at the expense of primary school teachers, who see little prospects for promotion and a general levelling down of scales? What can he tell us to assure primary school teachers that they will not get the rough end of the stick in his proposed settlement?

Mr. Baker: Once again, I pay tribute to the vast majority of teachers in primary schools, who do an outstanding job. I can give my hon. Friend some reassurance on the point that he raised. The first two levels of incentive allowance will be available in all schools so that the outstanding classroom teacher in the small primary school can be rewarded. In larger primary schools, the £2,000 allowance will also be introduced over three years to give a maximum salary of £15,300 for teachers other than heads or deputies. As from October this year, there will be 30,000 incentive allowances, rising to 55,000 in September 1990.

Mr. Gareth Wardell (Gower): While it is obvious that everyone will welcome the Government's move towards increasing the quality of teaching in our schools, does the Secretary of State accept that the conditions in the new city technology colleges, which the Government are setting up and which encourage payments over the odds for good teachers, should apply also to the inner city schools, which will still suffer because the rate of pay in them will not be sufficiently high to attract the good teachers whom those schools desperately need?

Mr. Baker: The hon. Gentleman is far too pessimistic. I have made it clear that the money for the city technology colleges will be extra, over and above the money available for the State maintenance education system. I was glad to go up to Solihull in the west midlands last week to announce the first city technology college, with support from the Hanson Trust and Lucas industries. In due course, I hope to visit many other cities and towns and bring them good news about the city technology colleges.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley (Surrey, South-West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, although record pupil-teacher ratios may be popular, the crucial variable in education is teacher quality, and that his proposals offer an opportunity for well-motivated and properly rewarded teachers and a decent career structure? It is now up to pupils, parents and the professions to make a success of those proposals and offer our children a period of uninterrupted education.

Mr. Baker: I warmly agree with what my hon. Friend has just said. The thrust of the proposals has been to try to improve the professional standing and status of teachers by better remuneration. For example, a good honours graduate would enter the profession at a salary of £8,500, which is £700 or £800 more, and he or she would rise, through several annual increments, to a salary of £13,300. That is an increase of 26 per cent. over what a teacher can now expect without promotion and it will be reached in a shorter time. That represents a substantial improvement.

I should like to reinforce my hon. Friend's comments. We must attract graduates of a higher and better quality into the teaching profession—that is no reflection on the existing profession. The pay scales and the rewards that I am announcing today will go a long way towards doing that.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Does the Secretary of State agree, while he is in his fairy godmother mood, that teachers' wages are now becoming commensurate with their rightful position, as they were between the two world wars? Does he agree that that seems—perhaps I am being cynical—to have some link with the fact that this is an election year? Perhaps if we had another election next year we could eventually reach a proper payment for the teachers?

Mr. Baker: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will speed the orders on their way because I am sure that, election or not, he would not want to delay the back pay to teachers, as it could be quite substantial. For example, if it is paid in the May pay packet, the deputy head in group 4 would qualify for £625 and a senior teacher for £450 in back pay. I am sure that that is what the teachers will want.

Mr. Steve Norris (Oxford, East): Given that the one thing on which most objective observers agree, regardless of their political credentials, is that the Burnham system was wholly discredited, and given the urgency with which it was necessary to replace that system, may I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the package that he has now presented to teachers? May I invite him to stress that the present arrangements for negotiation are interim arrangements? Will he tell the House what plans he has to produce a substantive arrangement for the negotiation of teachers' salaries in the future, to lead on from the excellent package that he has presented to the House today?

Mr. Baker: I reinforce what I said earlier, that the proposals are of an interim nature. That is their essence. There will be consultation. I shall appoint the advisory committee later in the year. There is ample opportunity for unions to make representations to it. I have already given clear undertakings that when I receive recommendations from the advisory committee, there will be widespread consultation with all the interested parties, which will tend to have the character of negotiations. Apart from that—I reaffirm this—we want to move to a system that is more satisfactory in the long term. I shall do all that I can in the coming months to do that. However, I emphasise that I believe that the unions need a cooling-off period and a breathing space to try to get over the bitterness—I witnessed great bitterness—of the past few months.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Is the Secretary of State aware that the wholly inadequate settlement that he intends to impose from today will not lead to the depoliticisation of the teachers' struggle but will only prolong, not remove, teachers' hostility? This is particularly so because, by taking this action, the right hon. Gentleman removes the basic trade union right of negotiation. If, in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden), he is looking for a target for pupil-teacher ratios for local authorities to aim at, we shall settle for Eton's—8:1.

Mr. Baker: If the Bill that was debated in the House on Thursday last week was a great constitutional outrage, removing negotiating rights, I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman was not in the Chamber. Not only was the hon. Gentleman not in the Chamber, but the debate packed up after three hours. It collapsed. So much for that great constitutional outrage. That was an opportunity for the Opposition to take the Bill right through the night and, indeed, into the next day, if need be. The hon. Gentleman's outrage is an outrage of rhetoric, not reality.

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the incentive payments that he has

announced, which will be widely welcomed, will rest on assessment of teachers' capacity, because continuous assessment is just as important for teachers as for pupils?

Mr. Baker: I very much hope that during the next year it will be possible to establish a system of appraisal for teachers. Six pilot projects are going aheaad at the moment, and that is very important. With regard to the level of incentives that are now available, this is the first occasion on which some members of the teaching profession will be earning over £30,000 a year.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): The Secretary of State announced that he would write to head teachers explaining the effects of his announcement. Is it the practice of the Department, through Darlington, to write to retired teachers to explain the effect on them? If not, will the right hon. Gentleman do that?

Mr. Baker: I did not have that in mind, but I shall certainly consider what the right hon. Gentleman has said.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, if some of the teachers are misguided enough to follow the advice that some Opposition Members would give them, and seek to continue industrial action, they will lose 1/195th of their pay every time they go on strike rather than 1/365th?

Mr. Baker: I shall need notice of the fractions. I hope, as I have said several times from the Dispatch Box today, that there will not be further disruption. An advertisement has been put in the press by the Professional Association of Teachers, which calls upon all teachers

"to reject industrial action at this time"

PAT says that teachers organisations should:

"Encourage teachers to adopt a responsible attitude to contractual conditions of service, since they will be based upon conditions agreed in recent ACAS negotiations."

I thoroughly applaud that line.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. We have an important Welsh debate today. I shall allow questions to continue for another six minutes, until 4 o'clock, and then we must move on.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (Derbyshire, West): Will my Friend draw the attention to the House to what teachers' pay was in 1979 and what it will be when this increase is given to them?

Mr. Baker: There will have been a substantial increase in real terms in teacher's pay when these proposals work through in October 1987. It almost seems indecent to bring a little party politics into this exchange, but the big drop in take-home pay for teachers occurred in the lifetime of the Labour Government.

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): Will my right hon. Friend accept that his action in putting these generous proposals out to consultation so promptly after Royal Assent will be widely received in the teaching profession as evidence of his good will towards teachers? Will he say a little more about how his proposals will affect teachers in special schools, who do an important job, and who felt that they were undervalued in the ACAS deal?

Mr. Baker: There are some 16,000 teachers in special schools. Any hon. Member who has visited a special school in his constituency will know of the enormous devotion and dedication which is shown by those teachers. It is inspiring to see the dedication that they show in dealing with children who are severely handicapped. I recognise the contribution that they make to our society. My proposals give to teachers on scales 1, 2 and 3 in special schools a £1,000 advantage at October 1987 over teachers in ordinary schools. That is an increase from the previous proposal of £855.

Mr. Tim Rathbone (Lewes): Will my right hon. Friend accept that his accent on the communication of this good news is crucial to its acceptance? Will he accept that many of the difficulties of the past have occurred because of lack of good communication due to the long chain of command from himself to the teacher in his class? Will he assure the House that he will pay particular attention in future to communications on pay and assessment so as to reassure teachers of the temporary nature of the Act that now exists to guide their pay?

Mr. Baker: I most certainly will do that. The other point in the PAT advertisement is that Sir John Wordie, chairman of the Burnham committee, says of the three years during which the interim advisory committee is scheduled to exist, that the unions ought to:

"use to the best advantage that period to produce a really good form of collective bargaining."

I re-emphasise that.

As to spreading the good news, I shall be writing to all hon. Members tonight giving them the basic facts that I have given to the House today, together with a booklet and some information, which I shall encourage all hon. Members to pass on to their constituents.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Cannock and Burntwood): Does my right hon. Friend agree that his proposals will be widely welcomed by parents and taxpayers throughout the country—who will have to foot the bill—as evidence of the Government's generous approach? They will not take lightly to those teachers who abuse the trust placed in them and cause further disruption in schools. Is my right hon. Friend able to tell the House whether he has been able to persuade the local authorities that his deal is a good one?

Mr. Baker: On the latter point, I had a meeting this morning with Councillor Pearman and other representatives of the local authority leaders. When talking about the willingness of local authorities to co-operate and implement the proposals, he said—these were the words I took down:

"the duty of LEAs to implement the law of the land. We shall implement it.

To suggest otherwise would be to play very dangerous games with the future of our children."

Councillor Pearman wishes to do everything that is possible to make education effective for our young people. I think that I speak for all sides of the House when I say that I welcome that. I hope that we will be moving to a better set of arrangements as a result of this offer, and I was glad to see that the local education authorities will play their part.

Mr. Roy Galley (Halifax): My right hon. Friend is to be warmly congratulated on the statement, especially on the improvement in the basic salary scale, while retaining substantial incentives. Is it not amazing that the leaders of some unions still threaten disruption in the face of what must be one of the most generous pay offers ever made to teachers, particularly when set against a background of

[Mr. Roy Galley]

low inflation and reductions in income tax? Since most parents are likely to receive rather less generous pay rises than 25 per cent. over two years, should not parents now impress upon the teachers the need not to disrupt education and to put children's education first? Surely disruption now will be an unparalleled case of greed and irresponsibility.

Mr. Baker: I very much share my hon. Friend's comment on that. The Bill allows for a new beginning in our schools and a necessary breathing space on pay and negotiating arrangements. I believe that teachers will recognise the need for that and will welcome the pay increases in the new salary structure. I do not believe that teachers like disrupting schools. I am sure that they put the interests of the children first. On my hon. Friend's last point, parents will not understand teachers who disupt children's education when they have won pay increases amounting to an average of 25 per cent. over 18 months.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am sorry that it has not been possible to call all the hon. Members who have risen, but I shall endeavour to give them precedence when the matter is next discussed.

EC (Expenditure Proposals)

4 pm

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): I seek leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter which should have urgent consideration and which appears to me to be one of the most serious and urgent issues which has arisen for years in relation to the rights of the House of Commons to control spending, namely,

"the decision of the Council of Ministers to proceed today with the discussion of a Commission proposal to approve a £2·3 billion spending programme when no resources are available within the legal budget limits and when the Court of Auditors of the European Community has stated that the expenditure would be unlawful."

This is not part of the continuing debate on EEC spending which goes on all the time in the House, its Committees and elsewhere. The issue is simply that, although previous modest excess spending has always been carefully cloaked in legality and matched by policies at least designed to claw back spending the next year, the proposal today is for a massive spending increase without any legal resources whatsoever being available to cover the spending. In addition, there is not even a pretence that policies recently agreed will produce savings to finance even a fraction of the spending which falls, in theory, to be repaid in 1989 or thereafter. That is why the Court of Auditors has taken the unusual step of describing the spending plan as illegal before today's meeting.

If the Council, despite this advice, approves the package, it will not just mean that millions of tonnes of butter will be cascaded on to the world market at knock-down prices. It will mean that the Council of Ministers has taken upon itself the power to fix EEC spending at whatever level it considers appropriate. Of course, there are some who would take the view that this would be a positive step, just as there are others who would feel that, without spending limits, any hope of EEC reform would disappear. We obviously cannot consider the merits of any such proposal in an application for a debate. I argue, however, that the decision should be made by this House and by other Parliaments of the European Community. It is not the kind of decision that should be made by the Council of Ministers, particularly when the auditors have stated categorically that the action would be illegal without a new treaty.

The importance of the issue is clear. The urgency is created by the matter being on the Council's agenda today. I therefore hope, Mr. Speaker, that you will allow a debate on the very narrow, but important, subject which I have proposed.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he believes should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the decision of the Council of Ministers to proceed with the discussion of a Commission proposal when the Court of Auditors has stated that the expenditure would be unlawful."

I have listened with great care to what the hon. Member has said. As he knows, my sole duty in considering an application under Standing Order No. 20 is to decide whether it should be given priority over the orders set down for today or tomorrow. I regret that I cannot find

that the matter which the hon. Member has raised meets all the criteria laid down in the standing order. I cannot, therefore, submit his application to the House.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Ordered,

That the draft Plugs and Sockets etc. (Safety) Regulations 1987 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Lennox-Boyd.]*

Welsh Affairs

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Lennox-Boyd.]*

4.4 pm

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Nicholas Edwards): Perhaps it would be helpful if, at the outset and to avoid too many interventions, I say that I shall speak on a considerable number of topics, including the Severn crossing, the Trafalger House proposal and the Avana project at Merthyr.

The annual Welsh debate held this year on the day after St. David's day is traditionally wide-ranging. It will have the length although not, I fear, quite the epic grandeur of last Saturday's magnificent performance by the Welsh National Opera of "The Trojans." Some may consider it foolish or ambitious to attempt to set our party arguments and our immediate preoccupations against the prospective of history. I do so because I believe that Wales has arrived at one of those turning points of history which, even if not recognised at the time, are later seen to have changed the way in which we think and live.

One such period was the time when people moved from the countryside and, from both inside and outside the Principality, flooded into the industrial valleys, doubling the population of Wales in 50 years. Much more recently, we have seen a similar phenomenon in modern America. In 1920, 40 per cent. of all Americans lived and worked on farms. In 1920, in Wales about 380,000 men worked in mining and the metal-making industries, about 40 per cent. of male employment. By 1960, that figure had reduced to around 200,000, and the decline continued steadily under successive Governments — Labour and Conservative—and had little to do with party policy. By 1976, coal and steel employment had halved again to around 100,000. Today, it is about 36,000, 10 per cent. of the total in 1920 and only 3 per cent. of the total work force.

The historical fact with which we are confronted is that the Welsh dependence on the old basic industries is over and the long-agonised decline from the peak of 1921 with all its painful social consequences is also over. We have entered a new period in which, though coal and steel will continue to play an important role, the Welsh economy will advance and grow on a broad base that will consist of the old industries modernised and brought up to date by modern technology, the new industries and the services needed by the 21st century man. That growth, which is already taking place, will involve a massive rebuilding and refurbishment of our cities and urban communities, a new diversity of employment in the countryside and the removal of the social and environmental evils that have scarred the lives of our people during the years of decline. It is a time for looking forward with confidence, not backwards with pessimism—a change that on its own will do much to transform our prospects.

I say that coal and steel will continue to play an important role. Let me first say a word about each.

The number of mines in Wales has halved and the number of men who work in them has almost halved since the coal strike ended. Although very generous redundancy terms and offers of alternative employment have eased the transition for individuals, the effect on the communities involved has been traumatic. For the core of the industry that we now have, the prospects are better than for many,

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many years. Productivity has almost doubled and nearly every pit has had recent investment in heavy duty face equipment. The board's announcement last June of the new Carway Fawr drift mine at Cynheidre provided firm evidence of the fact that good results create a climate of confidence in which really major investment can take place. Some £100 million has been committed in the South Wales coalfield over the past two years. More recently the board of British Coal has announced its wish to go ahead with the Margam project to create nearly 800 mining jobs, with 700 jobs during the construction period. It is the most exciting new project in south Wales mining for many years, and I very much hope that the negotiations that are now taking place between British Coal and the unions will allow it to go forward to become a highly productive coal mine. British Coal is exploring various options for the most appropriate financing of the scheme and is seeking support from the European Coal and Steel Community. British Coal has not yet submitted its formal proposal to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy, but it is discussing the funding with him.

The Welsh steel industry has also received very large scale investment. In the financial year 1985-86, the British Steel Corporation made its first net profit for 11 years. Llanwern and Port Talbot are now acknowledged to be among the most modern and efficient steelworks in Europe. At Port Talbot the £171 million hot strip mill was opened by the Prince and Princess of Wales last June, and work on the Concast plant at Llanwern is proceeding well towards commissioning next year. At Shotton I opened the £30 million Galvalume project last summer, and further large investment is now being made. At Trostre tin plate works £50 million is being spent on a second continuous annealing line. All this shows that British Steel is determined to provide the modern technology which, combined with the improvements in performance and productivity, will enable it to maintain its competitive position in the market.

Against a background of unemployment figures that are still very high, I shall explain why I am increasingly confident about the future of the Welsh economy. Despite the loss of some 67,000 jobs in coal and steel since 1975, unemployment in Wales rose less severely in the period up to early 1986 than in the United Kingdom as a whole. Since then it has fallen faster and further than elsewhere. That fact, the new industries and services and the increase in the number of self-employed, together with the very large share of United Kingdom inward investment taken by Wales—consistently around 20 per cent. of the total — have begun to act as an effective cushion to the disproportionate size of our losses in coal and steel.

Those are the statistics. Up and down Wales new industrial estates, new factories, and new firms demonstrate the nature of the change.

Since this debate a year ago the evidence has multiplied and the pace of recovery has accelerated. Unemployment has fallen in Wales for seven months in a row and in nine out of the last 10 months. I am glad to say that there are 13,000 fewer unemployed people in the headline total than there were at this time last year, and that the adjusted figure is over 11,000 below the peak figure recorded in March last year. In last year's debate the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) gave the male unemployment figures for a long list of travel-to-work areas and constituencies. While in all these places the figures are still too high, I am glad to report that in every one they are lower than they were a year ago. The improvement is not confined to particular parts of Wales, but is widespread. There is every reason to think that it will continue.

The British economy is now growing faster than the economies in almost every other developed country, there has been a staggering improvement in production performance, we are no longer dependent on deficit finance and capital goods imports and industrial investment are all rising strongly. The Confederation of British Industry, the chambers of commerce and firms throughout Wales have all expressed confidence about their prospects. A number of independent assessments confirm how widespread is this improvement. The CBI Welsh quarterly trends survey published in January reveals a sharp increase in business optimism.

The volume of orders is the highest for 10 years, the number of firms working below capacity has fallen sharply, and investment in plant and machinery is rising.

The evidence that Wales is entering a period of industrial expansion is reinforced by the remarkable statistics for the allocation of factories by Government agencies. In 1984 the figure was 1·8 million sq ft, in 1985 it was just over 2 million sq ft and in 1986 it was over 2·5 million sq ft. As a result of the high level of demand, the vacanacy rate for the Welsh Development Agency's estate has dipped to around 9 per cent. The highest figure for factory allocations under Labour was 1·125 million sq ft —well under half this year's total. In order to build on this success, I have told the WDA to plan on the basis of having £93 million available for its factory building programme over the next three years. The agency's chairman launched the programme formally earlier today. When the new programme is taken into account, the WDA will provide about 1 million sq ft of factory space a year in each of the next three years. This will virtually double the rate of completions delivered in any year since 1976 — apart from those affected by the special measures taken in the early 1980s to mitigate the steel closures.

The year 1986-87 was also a record year for factory building by Mid Wales Development. A major initiative was the completion of the Laura Ashley factory at Newtown. With that project behind it and with more receipts, the board will have additional resources and flexibility to carry forward its factory programme and its other activities.

Clwyd is a part of Wales that offers striking evidence of the transformation that is taking place and, within it, Delyn is a particularly good example of what can be achieved if Government, local authorities and the public sector co-operate effectively together. Since May 1979, Welsh Office support through job-related regional assistance in Clwyd involved projects with investment costs of over £670 million, with the promise of around 17,000 new jobs and the safeguarding of over 4,500 others. We have specially directed urban programme resources towards economic regeneration of the area.

Some £5 million has been directed to developing the Delyn enterprise zone. Already some 85 firms have located in the zone, of which 62 have moved in since designation in July 1983. Over half the jobs now being provided are new, and 86 per cent. of them are in manufacturing. Remarkable progress has been made in replacing the jobs lost through the closure of the Courtaulds plants at Greenfields and Wrexham.

We have also directed resources to the improvement of the Wrexham industrial estate and for infrastructure development at the Wrexham technology park and the Redwither industrial estate.

All this work is bringing new industry in substantial quantities, and this is in addition to major enterprises which are well established and growing. A number of recent announcements show that the transformation of the industrial base is gathering pace. The announcements were: Christie-Tyler 160 new jobs; Warwick International at Mostyn over 250 new jobs; Fibre Flame up to 300 new jobs; and Hurrall 60 jobs. Today, CP Pharmaceuticals announced a £4 million expansion which is expected to create more than 100 extra jobs.

It is not just Clwyd. Between 1979-80 and 1987-88 urban programme resources amounting to some £34 million were allocated to the counties of Gwynedd and Clwyd together. That is about 25 per cent. of the total for the whole of Wales.

All this is evidence that there is no north-south divide in Wales, either in terms of what can be achieved or in terms of the Government's commitment. The capital programme that I have described is only part of what is being done to improve the economic infrastructure of north Wales. A road programme larger than ever before is improving the access to the English motorway system, the routes north and south and, above all, westwards along the A55 where the new dual carriageway between Chester and Bangor is now two thirds completed and journey times have been dramatically reduced in the last year. Work has started on the Conwy crossing and the Penmaenbach tunnel. This new A55 dual carriageway will bring the whole north Wales coastal strip, Gwynedd and Anglesey, within easy driving distance of Manchester airport and the heart of industrial Britain.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): The right hon. Gentleman says that there is no north-south divide in Wales. Does he not agree that Wales is clearly a victim of the same factors that divide the north of England from the south? Will he confirm that, in terms of gross domestic product per head, Wales still lags behind almost every other region of the United Kingdom?

Mr. Edwards: In exactly those terms the growth in Wales in gross domestic product per head during the time of this Government has been faster than in any part of the United Kingdom except East Anglia. The change is taking place and is dramatic. I have been talking about the north.

Similarly in the south we are beginning to see the development pulled westwards. Road projects that are under way will remove the last serious obstacles on the route from west Wales to London. We have invested over £8 million in the Milford Haven enterprise zone; and a major deep water facility there should be available for shipping in the coming year. In Swansea the enterprise zone has attracted 2,300 jobs. This month, Swansea Computer Harnesses has announced that it will create 260 additional jobs in Swansea and that the parent company, Swansea Industrial Components, will create 120 jobs at Burryport. I hope we will see a start this spring on the long-awaited international hotel which will reinforce the great progress that has been made in the maritime zone of Swansea, while the WDA factory building programme at Baglan and a high-tech park to be developed at Bridgend are other developments designed to ensure that the economic recovery spreads westwards. I greatly welcome BP's initiative in setting up D'Arcy Development and in providing land, buildings and resources at Llandarcy and at Angle Bay in order to assist job creation in both places. At Kenfig the Japanese company Orion, which began manufacturing only last summer, expects to be employing 250 within the next few months and is planning a further large project.

As I told the House earlier this afternoon, Sony has announced that it is embarking on a major expansion at its Bridgend site. The project, costing over £30 million, involves a substantial increase in the manufacture of colour TV sets, tubes and components and will create an additional 332 jobs, bringing the employment at the plant to nearly 1,600.

The successful development of the enterprise zones and the tranformation of Maritime Swansea are examples of what can be achieved if local authorities take full advantage of the inititatives taken by this Government. They show that, whatever differences emerge in this debate, there is a great deal of common ground. There are shared objectives, a point that emerged very clearly during a visit I paid last summer to the Rhondda. That council has been energetically and imaginatively using this Government's urban development grant scheme to bring forward urban renewal projects and also making use of a variety of schemes that we have introduced for improving the housing stock. There is a "priority estates" project at Penrhys, enveloping schemes at Cwm Park and Blaenau Cwm, and in the same district, at Clydach Vale, private sector housing development by Barratts and factory development is following on the completion of one of the largest derelict land schemes undertaken in Britain. In last month's debate in the Welsh Grand Committee I announced that we were providing additional resources for the derelict land programme.

The Rhondda is also one of the authorities that has responded enthusiastically to the valleys initiative that I launched in this debate last year. I announced on 10 September that we had selected the seven towns of Aberdare, Ebbw Vale, Maesteg, Merthyr Tydfil, Pontardawe, Pontypool and Tonypandy to receive support over a three-year period. We made available £3 million of special capital allocations in the current year and I have announced a further £7 million for 1987-88. This expenditure is additional to the considerable sums of public money already available to the valleys for housing and derelict land clearance and urban improvement.

Another boost will come from the garden festival to be held in 1992 in Ebbw Vale. The site chosen is exciting and challenging. The local authority is responding to the challenge with energy and has rightly recognised that the success of the festival will to a great extent depend upon private sector participation, leadership and involvement. Although the festival is not to take place until 1992, the work is starting at once and there is much to be done. I am sure that the festival will give a massive boost to the regeneration of the whole area, particularly along the heads of the valleys where there have recently been a number of encouraging industrial developments. I particularly welcome the move of Hoover's headquarters to Merthyr.

In that connection I must refer to the announcement this morning of a package of support for a major development planned by Avana in the Dragon Park building originally constructed for Hoover, which is

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expected to create 800 jobs withing three years. This application for financial assistance was lodged and much of the property negotiation completed before the bid by Rank Hovis McDougall. We have processed that application under the normal procedures without regard to the bid.

I hope that, whatever the outcome of the bid, this very important and carefully prepared project will go ahead. Both companies have a high reputation; both provide significant employment in Wales; and Rank Hovis McDougall is at the present time carrying out a capital project in Barry. Avana has an outstanding record of growth, investment and job creation in Wales and elsewhere.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): This announcement is very welcome. The development will widen the range of job opportunities in the communities that I represent. May I take it that this project is guaranteed to go ahead, irrespective of what happens about the bid?

Mr. Edwards: An offer has been made to Avana. The rules mean that if the offer were successful and Rank Hovis McDougall succeeded, it would have to resubmit an application for the project against the background of the financial structure of that company. I do not know what the outcome of the bid will be. The chairman of Rank Hovis McDougall has informed me that his company would regard a number of the Avana operations as among the lead operations for the proposed merger. If Avana maintained its very strong performance record, the project would go ahead, but the exact future will depend on the decision that is made about the bid.

Mr. James Callaghan (Cardiff, South and Penarth): The right hon. Gentleman knows that great apprehension is felt among employees in Cardiff about this takeover bid. Avana has been a very prosperous Welsh company, as he pointed out. In his conversations with Rank Hovis McDougall, has the right hon. Gentleman received any undertakings about future employment if the takeover bid succeeds, because that is what is worrying my constituents and many others?

Mr. Edwards: Even before this project came forward, the chairman assured me that he believed that a takeover would not have adverse job consequences for Wales. He has told my Department that four or five of the Avana operations would be regarded as flagship operations in the new group. Since the right hon. Gentleman has pressed me on the matter, I must say, as a regional Minister, that I believe that there is particular value in companies like Avana, with outstanding management and good performance, having their headquarters in the regions. Therefore, I do not mind saying that I hope that Avana will maintain its position, but it will be for the market to decide. In fairness to Rank Hovis McDougall, it is also investing quite heavily in Wales and has given the kind of assurances that I have explained to the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Callaghan: What the right hon. Gentleman has said will be welcomed, because the general view is that if this company, Avana, can maintain its advanced position and the quality of the goods and services that it is now providing, it is far better that it should be managed in Wales, even if Rank Hovis McDougall has good reasons for thinking that it should be managed outside Wales.

Mr. Edwards: I do not disagree with the right hon. Gentleman.

I have already announced three new industrial projects this afternoon: CP Pharmaceuticals with more than 100 additional jobs, Sony with more than 330, Avana with 800, the overwhelming majority of the jobs being entirely new. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) shouts from a sedentary position that there is a general election coming. These decisions were taken by individual manufacturing companies that have confidence in Wales, which apparently the hon. Gentleman does not have.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that we were well aware of all these announcements when we came into the Chamber today? There were press releases in Cardiff before any announcement was made to Parliament. Only two minutes ago the Welsh Development Agency's property developments programme was put on the notice board. It is disgusting that only two minutes ago we saw this Welsh Development Agency document.

Mr. Edwards: If the hon. Gentleman had been in the House at the start of the debate, he would have heard me refer to the announcement and to the press conference that was held by the chairman of the Welsh Development Agency, but, as usual, he is out of touch and out of place.

I can also tell the House that Motil Plastics, which already employs 460 at Aberbargoed, today announced an expansion project providing 130 additional jobs by the end of next year; and I am also delighted that Penney and Giles Conduction Plastics Ltd. intends to create 100 extra jobs in a proposed expansion at Blackwood and Magnapower Transformers Ltd. 150 on the Treforest trading estate— *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Ogmore seems to regard all that as bad news. However, the people of Wales will regard it as good news and it shows the scale of the economic expansion now under way in Wales.

In this debate last year I told the House of my plans for the further redevelopment of south Cardiff, building on the tremendous progress that has been made in recent years. Those plans received a warm welcome on all sides. Since then we have carried forward our studies, consulting very widely and, with the united support of the local authorities directly involved, I announced on 5 December our intention to set up a Cardiff bay development corporation to bring forward this huge regeneration project which is attracting national and international interest. I have been grateful for the warm support of the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan) and greatly encouraged by the positive reaction of many experienced and successful people in the property world, the leisure industries and the financial markets. There is every indication that the commitments that the Government and the local authorities are making to infrastructure improvement will trigger private investment around Cardiff bay on a very large scale.

Our studies so far have shown that the proposed barrage is feasible and indicate that it is the key to unlocking a major development opportunity. One of the first tasks of the corporation will be to carry forward these financial appraisals and technical and ecological studies

with a view, if they prove favourable, to enabling legislation being introduced by South Glamorgan county council this autumn.

An order setting up the corporation is currently before Parliament and a single petition by one company is due to be considered by a Select Committee in another place on 17 March. I hope that Parliament will give its consent and enable us to proceed very soon. In the meantime, the chairman-designate, Mr. Inkin, is working with the local authorities, my Department and others on the preparatory work.

The Cardiff bay development has potential, not simply to make Cardiff one of the most splendid cities in Europe and greatly to improve the conditions in which some of its poorest citizens live — a broad mix of housing right across the market range will be one of the major elements —but hugely to strengthen the economy of the whole of south Wales and particularly the industrial valleys that are so closely linked to it.

All those developments and, indeed, the whole economy of the area are dependent upon the security and adequacy of the Severn crossing. May I make it absolutely clear and put it beyond doubt that the Government are determined to secure both requirements. I can tell the House that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport expects to award the main contract for the strengthening works on the existing bridge before Easter.

Since my announcement last year of the Government's decision to provide a second Severn crossing, we have been pressing ahead with the enormous task of planning this major and difficult project. We have protected the route for the new crossing—for planning purposes—on both sides of the estuary. We are drawing up a wide-ranging technical brief for consultants to undertake the next phase of physical planning and consultation. The brief is highly complex, but it will be complete before Easter. Soon afterwards we shall take the necessary steps to appoint consultants. We are working to a timetable that will meet our firm intention to be in a position to provide the second crossing by the mid-1990s.

The House will be aware of a proposal by Trafalgar House to provide a second crossing with private sector finance close to the existing bridge. The chairman has discussed these proposals with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport and myself. While we welcome the evidence that a private sector solution might be feasible, a possibility which I referred to in my statement last July, I told Sir Nigel Broackes that this proposal does not meet the requirements for a new crossing which remain as I described them last July. The Trafalgar House proposal is inadequate; it is in the wrong place; it does not provide the road links to the M5 that we want; and the legislative timetable proposed is unrealistic. In any case there could be no question of a contract being awarded before competitive tenders had been sought. If private financing is to be entertained, we would invite bids at the right time on the basis of Government guidelines.

Sir Raymond Gower (Vale of Glamorgan): As my right hon. Friend has rightly said, he is aware that that crossing is a sort of lifeline for Welsh industry. In those circumstances, is it a fact, from what he has said, that the horrendous forecast, made by the Member of the European Parliament for Wales, South, of private contractors taking over the contract and charging greatly enhanced tolls was completely without foundation? Can he confirm that?

Mr. Edwards: In my statement last July I said that we would consider the possibility of private sector funding but it will be on terms that fall within the Government guidelines of what is required, which is an absolutely satisfactory crossing for Wales, with a sensible financial base and without the sort of horrendous toll regime that my hon. Friend suggests. Any such proposal would simply not be acceptable to the Government. Already the Trafalgar House proposal includes, among other things, the cost of refurbishing and repairing the existing bridge, which is the subject of an entirely different tender and is being dealt with separately by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport.

Mr. Roy Hughes (Newport, East): Does the Secretary of State recall that in the Welsh Grand Committee on 26 November last I suggested that Trafalgar House was intent on making a bid for the second Severn crossing with an arrangement similar to the contract obtained under questionable circumstances to build the proposed new Dartford bridge? Will the Secretary of State also appreciate that on that occasion he gave every indication that he was concealing something and not being frank with the Committee? Would he agree with me now that the idea of Trafalgar House having control of the main access point in and out of Wales would be simply preposterous? Is there not an urgent need to get on with the construction of the new bridge, to make it a publicly owned one and to make it toll-free?

Mr. Edwards: As I said last July, I welcome the possibility of private sector finance on the lines of the Dartford precedent. I was entirely open and advanced the reasons for doing so. I welcome the interest of Trafalgar House. On the suggestion that I have something to conceal, the first I heard of the proposal was when Sir Nigel Broackes came to see my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport the week before last, and myself last week. I was given the detailed information about it on exactly the same day as it was given to the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes). So much for private information and consultation with Government. That proposition has been put forward by Trafalgar House for its own reasons without any discussion with Government. It will have to stand the test — [*Interruption.*] The hon. Member for Newport, East has said that he does not believe me. I give my word to the House that that is so and I hope that he will accept that.

If private financing is to be entertained, we would invite bids at the right time on the basis of Government guidelines. We will not be dictated to by any company. However, we hope that it will make a bid at the appropriate time.

Mr. Roy Hughes *rose*——

Mr. Edwards: Withdraw.

Mr. Hughes: I am not going to withdraw anything.

When I put the point of view in the Welsh Grand Committee last November that Trafalgar House was fully intent on putting in a bid for this project with an arrangement similar to that obtained in questionable

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circumstances for the Dartford bridge, is the Secretary of State telling me that he knew nothing about it? Does no one tell him anything?

Mr. Edwards: What I am saying is perfectly clear. I hope that Trafalgar House and other consortia will come forward with tenders at the appropriate time. I did not have the smallest knowledge, and neither did my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, of any approach by Trafalgar House with any proposal of the sort put forward last week until that proposal was put, as I have said, to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport just prior to the weekend before last. That is the fact. I very much regret that the hon. Gentleman is not prepared to accept my word.

Mr. Stefan Terlezki (Cardiff, West): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has explained himself thoroughly and positively, should not the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) withdraw his allegation, which has no foundation?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): I have heard nothing out of order.

Mr. Edwards: I bow to that ruling, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and we shall move on. I hope that the hon. Member for Newport, East is not questioning my word.

So far, I have concentrated primarily on what is happening in urban and industrial Wales. In rural Wales, we face a period of profound change. It is unavoidable; nobody seriously imagines that we can go on producing agricultural surpluses at huge cost. The level of support for farming is still very large. The question is not whether we should support agriculture, but whether it makes sense to support it in such a way that we produce surpluses that nobody wants.

Progress was made in the December negotiations. For the first time, we have a realistic mechanism for dealing with the problem of milk surpluses and we have laid the foundations for a much more sensible support arrangement for beef. It was a major negotiating success that we succeeded in removing the uncertainty that had attached to the continuation of the beef premium scheme and it must make sense to reduce the dependence on intervention.

In the negotiations that begin in Brussels this week, we have to make progress in reducing overproduction of other commodities, in amending the Commission's proposals so that they do not discriminate against British agriculture, and in reforming the highly unsatisfactory agromonetary arrangements which produce enormous green currency discrepancies.

Later this month, the Government will be publishing a comprehensive set of papers that will set out our proposals for assisting farming and the rural economy to adapt to the new situation. We have to find a new balance of policies, which will involve less support for expanding production, more attention to the demands of the market, more encouragement for alternative uses of land, more diversity on farms, and a better structure for the rural economy as a whole.

Mr. D. E. Thomas (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy) *rose*—

Mr. Edwards: I have already given way a number of times and I fear that I may be criticised for going on too long.

We have to balance farming interests, the economic and social needs of rural areas, with conservation of the countryside and its enjoyment by the public.

A great deal of nonsense has been talked about the possible effects of our proposals for revising the guidance to local planning authorities. In future, rather less weight will be attached to retaining all our agricultural land in production and more weight will be given to environmental and other factors, such as the need to encourage employment. Of course, the need to protect the countryside from uncontrolled development remains as strong as ever and it is perfectly possible to provide the necessary protection while permitting an increasing diversification of economic activity in villages and on farms.

I must make it perfectly clear that in Wales, as elsewhere, the special protection afforded to national parks, areas of outstanding beauty and nature and scientific reserves will remain, and the heritage coast and other areas of good countryside will continue to be conserved and protected.

We already have in Wales some effective instruments for encouraging the sorts of diversification that we need in rural Wales. I have already referred to the activities of Mid Wales Development, and the Welsh Development Agency has been strengthening its rural organisation. The range of measures available in support of investment and enterprise in rural Wales is extensive and we shall give a full account of them in a new publication, "Action for Rural Enterprise in Wales", which will be included in the package to which I referred.

I launched my rural enterprise initiative a year ago and introduced a new grant scheme called DRIVE. That scheme is already producing results. For example, it has enabled the Pringle company to develop a new outlet in the railway station at Llanfair PG, creating more than 100 jobs in rural Anglesey.

Mr. Keith Best (Ynys Môn): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Edwards: No. I did not give way to an Opposition Member, so I must not give way to my hon. Friend.

The resources available for the rural enterprise initiative will be substantially greater in the coming financial year than they are this year.

Just before our debate began, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science announced our intentions for handling teachers' pay. What he had to say applies as much in Wales as in England and I hope that we shall shortly see the end of the long dispute and shall be able to concentrate again on the important task of raising education standards.

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary who is to reply to the debate will have more to say about education and training. I dealt at length with our training measures in the November debate in the Welsh Grand Committee. Our planned education expenditure in 1987-88 of £846 million shows an increase of 16 per cent. over this year's planned level, and further increases are proposed for the later years of the survey.

When the planned expenditure is looked at in the context of continuing falling rolls in the secondary sector,

it becomes clear that local education authorities have been provided with the means to make substantial advances in the quality of the services that they provide, particularly if they address themselves urgently to the problem of removing nearly 150,000 surplus places.

In the Welsh Grand Committee debate on 4 February, I reported on the other increases that we are making in public spending and public services in Wales. National Health Service expenditure in Wales has risen significantly faster under this Government than it did under our Labour predecessors. Hospital and community health service provision in 1987-88 will be increased by almost 8 per cent. Discretionary capital allocations to authorities are up by, on average, 14 per cent. in cash terms over 1986-87 and that follows a period of the biggest health building programme in Welsh history.

I have been able to increase the gross provision for housing capital expenditure by Welsh local authorities. Hon. Members in all parts of the House have welcomed the increase in net provision for the Housing Corporation by £10 million to £54·7 million. I do not underestimate the scale of the problem that we face in improving the quality of housing in a part of the country where so much of it is old and run-down. The Select Committee on Welsh Affairs is now examining that matter. While I am entitled to point out that we have spent much more on housing renovations than did our Labour predecessors, I have no illusions about the need to find new ways of overcoming the problem.

During my speech, I have referred to other areas of public expenditure — the funding of the agencies the road programme and the urban programme. All those are expanding and all are being used with increasing effectiveness.

Huge tasks remain, but, sustained by an expanding economy which is enjoying its sixth year of growth, public services are being improved and enlarged in Wales, private investment is growing strongly, unemployment is falling and great projects of urban renewal have been set in hand. The long decline is over. If we in Wales press forward with a new confidence, there is every prospect of an improving future for our people.

4.47 pm

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): The Secretary of State started by giving us a history lecture which was no more than a debating smokescreen. If Wales has arrived, it has arrived after needless agonies since 1979, and the Opposition have not seen the arrival.

If massive building is needed, why has the Secretary of State savagely cut the rate support grant in successive years since 1979? He says that we have had a large share of the available inward investment, but we have certainly had an ever-larger share of redundancies year after year. The right hon. Gentleman's speech was made in anticipation of a general election and was drafted to attempt to defend vulnerable seats, including those of his ministerial colleagues.

The right hon. Gentleman gave us no genuine strategy in response to the massive unemployment problems of Wales. Problems have piled up while he and the Government have been in office. We were not taken in by his sweet words about the jobless totals. The Wales TUC has made a frank allegation that the Government are manipulating the unemployment figures. The general secretary says that, far from falling by 8,000, as the Government claim, unemployment increased in 1986 by nearly 7,000.

There is no doubt that the Government have been massaging the unemployment figures downwards over successive months.

Sir Raymond Gower: Is it not significant that not only have there been reduced unemployment figures in the past few months, but there has been an increase in the number of notified vacancies, which cannot be misinterpreted or disguised in the way suggested by the hon. Gentleman?

Mr. Jones: The Wales TUC calculations also include the fact that the unemployment figure could truly be described as over 200,000. The Opposition do not accept the attempt by the hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Sir R. Gower) to excuse the blatant massaging of the unemployment figures.

I commend the decision to invest in the Margam new mine and I am content that the final negotiations on the project lie in the safe hands of the president of the South Wales National Union of Mineworkers and his members. The Secretary of State made some important remarks about Avana. That company deserves credit for its consistent investment in research and development. It now appears that the Department and the agency are attempting to rescue Avana from the unwelcome predatory Rank Hovis McDougall bid. Few people in Wales would welcome that bid. The Opposition want Avana to survive and win. However, after eight years in office, the Government must face up to their responsibilities for engendering a climate in which slick bids are made by City-based opportunists.

With regard to the Severn bridge, it is clear that Trafalgar House has put the right hon. Gentleman into an embarrassing position. He attempted to respond frankly today to that development. I am glad that he will not dally with a scheme which could lead to the principal industrial artery in south Wales being in the sole control of a company merely out for profits. Clearly, Trafalgar House proposes a monopoly for itself. The right hon. Gentleman must know that public opinion in Wales would never wear that. The current bridge is not only the main link to the principal English markets, but a bridge to Europe.

The right hon. Gentleman referred to the development agency. I want to draw his attention to an article in the *Financial Times* on 19 February. Under the headline

"Tighter rein on Welsh agency"

a report by Anthony Moreton states:

"There is, however, no question of the Scots having to produce monthly figures for the Scottish Office as though it was the subsidiary of a large Public Corporation."

Will the right hon. Gentleman knock on the head the inference that the economic flagship of Wales is to be reduced to behaving like the subsidiary of a large company?

I am unconvinced by the right hon. Gentleman's posture as the guardian of the Welsh countryside. I believe that the right hon. Gentleman's plans and statements will be disastrous for Welsh farmers, damaging to the Welsh tourist industry, worthless as a contribution to the Welsh housing crisis and environmentally dangerous.

Would the right hon. Gentleman care to tell us whether the BBC governor for Wales will leave the corporation? There have been comprehensive but perplexing reports in

[Mr. Jones]

the media about that over the past few weeks. If the Minister catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he may respond to that.

I did not hear in the right hon. Gentleman's remarks how he proposes to help the survival of the Sherman theatre. We read daily of the events at the University college of Cardiff about that troubled seat of learning. How does the right hon. Gentleman propose to take up an initiative in that respect?

Mr. Terlezki: I very much appreciate the hon. Gentleman giving way. Does he agree that it would be most helpful if the South Glamorgan county council would contribute infinitely more to the Sherman theatre, because the Cardiff city council already contributes a great deal towards that theatre as well as to the new theatre in Cardiff? I would have thought that the hon. Gentleman would agree that South Glamorgan county council should contribute infinitely more than it does now.

Mr. Jones: The hon. Gentleman forgets that he has made consistent attacks on South Glamorgan county council for its expenditure policies. He has supported the strict controls that his right hon. Gentleman has placed upon that excellent local authority.

The Secretary of State said on 23 May 1979:

"There is a clear and paramount need for more jobs."

Indeed there is. The then new Secretary of State in his speech said that unemployment would temporarily remain on the increase. He added:

"It will take longer than a few months for the measures which we shall introduce to produce an improvement."

Some eight years later, unemployment in Wales stands officially in excess of 176,000. When the right hon. Gentleman spoke in the House in 1979, it stood at 83,000, having been reduced under the previous Labour Government over the previous year by 19,000, or 19 per cent. Having endured eight years of the Secretary of State's measures to produce an improvement, unemployment has risen by about 125 per cent. In the constituencies of some of my hon. Friends, unemployment still stands at 25 per cent. among males. The Government have introduced measures that alter the number of people classified as unemployed. Perhaps that manipulation of the unemployment figures is the sort of measure that the Secretary of State had in mind.

In his famous speech on 23 May 1979, the right hon. Gentleman said:

"I believe that there has been too much interference by the Welsh Office with the day-to-day management of local authorities and indeed with other bodies that have been given responsibility for executive action, such as area health authorities. I have already given instructions that will very substantially reduce the . . . part played by Welsh Office Ministers."

However, the Government's stranglehold on local authorities has tightened each year since 1979 and the Association of District Councils for Wales and the county councils argue that they are now less free from interference than has ever been the case. Our chief council officers plead with the Welsh Office for the freedoms that they enjoyed under the previous Labour Administration.

Again in 1979 the right hon. Gentleman said:

"we recognise that there will be a continuing need for an effective regional policy to reduce the disparity between the richer and less prosperous regions of the United Kingdom."
—[*Official Report*, 23 May 1979; Vol. 967, c. 1130-37.]

The gulf between Wales and affluent south-east has grown wider each year. Indeed, it is now a chasm and chronic unemployment has been largely to blame.

Since 1979 we have seen the wasted years, the years of Cabinet complacency. I call in aid to my assertion the reasonably independent document, the publication of the 1984 census of employment. It states that between June 1979 and June 1986 Wales lost a greater proportion of its employment than any other region in Great Britain, a total of 175,000 jobs. Between June 1979 and June 1986 Wales lost a greater proportion of its manufacturing employment than any other region — about 112,000 jobs. Wales suffered a 3 per cent. drop—or 20,000 jobs—in service employment. Even in service employment there was a loss —between 1979 and 1986, according to that census.

Unpublished Department of Employment statistics, which were reported in the *Financial Times* of 19 January, show that between September 1983 and September 1986 employment in Wales increased by a smaller proportion —0·2 per cent.—than in any other region. In the south-east, the figure was 5·6 per cent. and in East Anglia it was 13 per cent. So much for the glossy, superficial approach adopted by the Secretary of State in his speech. The people of Wales are worried most of all about unemployment.

Those statistics, shocking as they are, only add to recent figures that have shown the Welsh economy to be under performing in several key areas. In 1985, gross domestic product per head in Wales was the lowest of all the regions, measuring 88·9 on the scale which takes the United Kingdom average as 100. My source for that figure is *Economic Trends*. That shows the right hon. Gentleman's stewardship. That is the truth, not the glossy veneer of his speech today. The *Employment Gazette* shows that, in 1985, redundancies in Wales increased from 4·7 per cent. to 6·4 per cent. of the Great Britain total.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The hon. Gentleman has quoted the GDP figures at me. Will he also confirm that GDP at constant prices has risen by 16 per cent. since 1979, faster than any part of the United Kingdom except for East Anglia?

Mr. Jones: The right hon. Gentleman is trying to get off the hook. I shall return to that point later. I was about to tell him that a report from the independent Low Pay Unit in December 1986 revealed that take-home pay in Wales is considerably below the United Kingdom average and that one third of Welsh workers receive a wage that is below the official EEC poverty level. That is a chronicle of wasted years.

The Government's approach is piecemeal. They lack a strategy and their approach is reactive, fitful and tactical. The main thrust of their policy should take into account the massive trade deficit in manufactured goods. The Government try to emphasise the productivity figures. They are up, but they have increased on a falling level of production. I remind the House that manufacturing output is still below its 1979 level.

To advance beyond even a marginal resurgence in manufacturing capability, the Government must comprehend the need for widespread investment in British industry, or more investment in research and development and for more investment in education and training. We should aim to have the best-educated work force in Europe. In that way, Wales will restore its fortunes, because in the future the major economies will compete entirely on the basis of skill and training.

I give two examples of the investment required. The Secretary of State mentioned coal, and I wish to put a plan to him. We want investment in the construction of new washeries and coal preparation plants. They are a great priority in the coal field. We want improved coal haulage and conveying systems underground. We want improved shaft facilities, because the shafts are literally the lifelines of all pits. There must be more surface exploration in the south Wales coal field. There should be an increase in development below ground. We want projects to replace existing face capacity. The Secretary of State mentioned the new mine at Margam. I have outlined a six-point plan which could be implemented over several years. I give credit to the Government for starting the new mine at Margam.

A second area where investment would be highly desirable is aerospace. We must invest in Britian's civil airframe industry and in the new Airbus family. If the Government do not invest in the new Airbus, Britain can say goodbye to its powerful presence in Europe's burgeoning civil aerospace industry. Other nations are queuing up to take our place. Recently, we have heard expressions of unease from hon. Members on both sides of the House. Airbus needs launch aid of £750 million spread over six years. I remind the right hon. Gentleman that the A320 Airbus which was launched at Toulouse in southern France is a riproaring commercial success. Boeing is running scared.

The Secretary of State may know that 4,000 of my constituents at Broughton, Clwyd works have made Airbus a success, and I demand that he fights his corner in Cabinet, because a thumbs-up to Airbus will help to underpin the economy of north-east Wales. The right hon. Gentleman should act now; to help him, I should say that the aerospace industry's contribution to the nation's balance of trade in 1986 was a massive £1·9 billion—the best ever recorded. By backing the new Airbus family, the right hon. Gentleman would shore up many jobs in Wales and would ensure the future of an important industry for the next century—to the massive benefit of our balance of trade.

The Secretary of State mentioned the Health Service. I must tell him about the problem of waiting lists, with 120,000 people awaiting treatment at Welsh hospitals, of whom 9,500 have been waiting for more than a year. That has happened despite the Government's special fund of £1 million. Progress is too slow. Why have 2,997 people in mid-Glamorgan waited for more than a year for hospital beds? In Clwyd, the in-patient waiting list is 4,689, while there are 9,000 out-patients in the queue. In Gwent, 11,000 out-patients await appointments. In Gwynedd, 1,900 people are awaiting admission to hospital, and there are 4,000 out-patients in the queue. In the Secretary of State's constituency in Pembroke, 2,400 in-patients are waiting. That is not good enough, and the £1 million is miserly when one considers the size of the problem.

The Secretary of State must spend more to tackle one of the most urgent problems for ordinary people in the Principality. One of the best cases that he could make in the Cabinet is to remind his colleagues that they spent tens of millions of pounds floating off British Gas. If they can spend that sort of money on such a project, why cannot our sick and elderly citizens in Wales have a better deal in terms of the waiting list?

Mr. Best: The hon. Gentleman tries to convince the House that he knows his subject. Will he tell the House of the increase in the number of in-patient and out-patient cases since 1979?

Mr. Jones: I can tell the hon. Gentleman that his health authority is screaming at the Government for more money. Instead of asking obscure questions, he should be fighting for more money to attack the problem of waiting lists. Male unemployment in Holyhead is more than 25 per cent. The Government should be doing something about that urgently, but I heard nothing from the Secretary of State that would help the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Best).

As ever, the Secretary of State responded to the housing problem by trying to put up a smokescreen on funding. In 1979-80, about £330 million was spent on housing. For 1986-87, only £154 million is under consideration, and the White Paper on public expenditure gives a figure for 1989-90 of only £132 million. Clearly that is not good enough. Against the background of claims for outstanding renovation grants totalling £55,000, it is disgraceful. Lately, figures were published showing that 66,000 homes in Wales are totally unfit for human habitation. Fifty five thousand homes lack a bath, shower or an inside lavatory. Over 150,000 are in serious disrepair. In fact, the summation must be that nearly 30 per cent. of private homes in Wales are inadequate for 20th century living. These figures and opinions stem from a politically impartial body, the environmental health officers in Wales. Private housing in Wales is in an appalling state. I heard the right hon. Gentleman say nothing today about how the Government will tackle the growing housing crisis.

A gloss was put on education again today, but the Government's successive cuts in the rate support grant have struck heavy blows to the school service in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The cuts in the rate support grant have not done what the hon. Gentleman said. Expenditure on the education service in Wales has been higher in real terms in every year under the present Government than 1979, in spite of falling school rolls. Expenditure in real terms today is 2·5 per cent. higher than it was when the hon. Gentleman's party lost office, although there are 10 per cent. fewer children in schools.

Mr. Jones: The right hon. Gentleman has not read the reports by Her Majesty's Inspectorate. Since 1979, its reports have successively pointed to a serious state of affairs. Her Majesty's Inspectorate is not politically inspired. Its reports point to a disgraceful situation that has developed during the right hon. Gentleman's term of office. The right hon. Gentleman should be ashamed of his education record. *[Interruption.]* No number of sedentary interruptions will in any way deflect the truth.

Mr. Terlezki: The hon. Gentleman mentioned housing repairs and habitation. How many thousands of houses were made habitable and were repaired before 1979?

Mr. Jones: I have been talking about education for the past five minutes. The hon. Gentleman should have woken up earlier. We have moved on since 1979.

Mr. Donald Coleman (Neath): Will my hon. Friend remind the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Terlezki) of the article that appeared in the *Western Mail* under the heading,

"Thousands of homes are unfit to live in"?

Mr. Jones: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's intervention. I am sure that his voice carried across the Chamber.

The Secretary of State did not refer to the important report by the Welsh Development Agency. The right hon. Gentleman referred to the valleys initiative. The biggest boost that he can give the valleys is more housing investment. I note the letter sent by Mr. Waterstone to all hon. Members, which accompanied the new programme for 1987-92. In that letter, a rather plaintive sentence refers to property throughout most parts of Wales. It states:

"We have therefore had to make some difficult decisions about the allocation of resources in the new programme."

Why is that so? In the current financial year, the Welsh Development Agency has been selling assets of £15 million. In my own constituency a project has been lost because the agency could not provide a bespoke factory. Why is the agency short of factory buildings? It is a serious problem. We are losing out to neighbouring regions. To the credit of the agency, it has the vacancy rate down to 9 per cent. and under. If we are to use more venture capital, we must provide better salaries for investment staff. We cannot attract sufficient staff to use any increased venture capital.

I note that, in the right hon. Gentleman's review, he stated that the need for public intervention in Wales is well attested. I note, too, that the review was not independent. It was conducted by Welsh Office and Treasury officials. Clearly, it is flawed by its acceptance of the Government's philosophy of private sector solutions to economic problems. That leads its authors to spend considerably more time devising ways in which the private sector can be persuaded to participate in Welsh Development Agency activities than proposing how to expand its activities and make them more responsive to community needs.

Mid Wales Development finds it difficult to attract private sector capital to the area because it still does not guarantee a sufficient return on capital. There is clearly a continuing need for public subventions through regional policy. It was a grave Government error to remove assisted area status from that part of Wales. I advise the right hon. Gentleman—I attempted to do so during Question Time—to put it to the Cabinet that the Budget will have a crucial bearing on the quality and standard of life of many of our underprivileged and unemployed Welsh citizens. I wish to see a determined ministerially led attack on the grave housing situation. I wish to see a well-funded approach to the decay in our schools that is disturbingly portrayed in the impartial reports of Her Majesty's Inspectorate. There is a need for a coherent and effective plan to reduce the waiting list problem in the Health Service.

The right hon. Gentleman the Secretary of State should know that, in Wales, there is a consensus for greater investment in the social infrastructure. I particularly have in mind teachers, day nurseries, day care, the elderly, leisure facilities, home helps, meals on wheels and environmental improvements.

Last week, the Prime Minister told the Institute of Directors that it was immoral for the state to take money from the citizen by way of tax revenue. Why have Her Majesty's Government raised the tax burden for most ordinary families? Indeed, why is it more moral to encourage personal consumption to rise while, for example, in Wales public services are allowed to decay? When the Chancellor of the Exchequer has £4 billion extra revenue to spend, how can the Government afford major tax giveaways but not adequately fund programmes for housing, education, health and for the Welsh Development Agency and Mid Wales Development—indeed, for a balanced regional policy?

Increases in VAT and cuts in other taxes will not help the principal Welsh victims of Thatcherism. By ignoring the need for humane policies based on sensible increases in public expenditure, the Government are courting electoral disaster. I have no doubt that a Labour Government will tackle Wales's problems to the satisfaction of the people.

5.19 pm

Sir Raymond Gower (Vale of Glamorgan): The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) has painted a rather dismal picture, which is somewhat at variance with that delineated by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. The hon. Gentleman referred to the unemployment figures at some length. He said that they had been manipulated and argued that that was the sole reason for the apparent decline in unemployment.

Mr. Barry Jones: I did not.

Sir Raymond Gower: The hon. Gentleman said that it was one of the chief reasons for the apparent decline. His assertion was answered during Question Time earlier today, when the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Conwy (Mr. Roberts), explained that 58 per cent. of those who had attended training schemes had taken permanent jobs afterwards. That is not manipulation, but a step forward into a job.

The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside was at pains to point out that the decline in the unemployment figures had not affected Wales. He quoted figures which, he claimed, demonstrated that Wales was the worst hit part of the United Kingdom. He must realise that many people were employed in coal mining 20 years ago and that the proportion of people employed in the coal and steel industries was far higher even nine years ago than in comparable areas in other parts of the United Kingdom. As a result, the effect on Wales of the difficulties encountered by those industries both here and overseas was all the greater. The steel industries of most countries had vast overproduction and it was essential to reduce capacity and modernise so that production could be more efficient. That has now happened. The same is true of coal mining. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State produced figures to illustrate that.

When the Government took office in 1979, we did not pretend that everything was difficult or wrong, but we faced many serious problems because of the nature of our economy. The great shake-out in the coal and steel industries had still to take place, many other industries were heavily overmanned and Britain had borrowed heavily, notably from the International Monetary Fund, so the task facing the Government was not easy. We experienced the difficult years of the early 1980s, but my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is entitled to be a little more optimistic now. Indeed, it would be surprising if he were not. It would certainly be surprising if my right hon. and hon. Friends did not take pleasure in the fact that unemployment has declined. We are sometimes accused of being without feeling, but any decline in unemployment gives us enormous pleasure. Strangely enough, however,

as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State reeled off statistics showing the decline in unemployment and the creation of new jobs, misery spread across the faces of Opposition Members. That is quite incredible—it is as though they had expected, or hoped for, unpleasant figures.

Mr. Gareth Wardell (Gower): Nonsense.

Sir Raymond Gower: One could gain that impression. Every good statistic seems to increase the Opposition's misery. After all these years, inflation is still generally being contained at a low figure, and after many years of disappointment and trial we now know that unemployment can be contained, although we have still to establish whether it can be reduced at a greater rate. That must be our challenge for the future. One of the most important figures to consider is the number of notified vacancies, and it is significant that they have increased steadily while unemployment has come down. That is partly due to the efforts of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, the Welsh Office, the Welsh Development Agency, other associated agencies and private industries.

The improvement has been accelerated by the great improvement in our communications. The M4 is now nearing completion, and the main north Wales route from Chester to Bangor is three quarters complete. One most valuable improvement in south Wales is the extension of the connection between Cardiff and Merthyr. I hope that it will soon reach further to Brecon. A second Severn crossing is vital to the communications of south Wales. I accept that the statement made by Trafalgar House and the interpretation of it by the Member of the European Parliament for Wales, South were completely without foundation. I hope that, whatever happens, my right hon. Friend will give an assurance that there will be no further large increase in tolls of the kind described by the MEP for Wales, South. The crossing is so important to south Wales industry that anything which could upset its efficiency or impose new burdens would be unacceptable to the vast majority of people in Wales. The impact of tolls on industry is not, perhaps, so great as is sometimes claimed, but it must be substantial.

Our great objective now must be to improve and extend our existing industries and to obtain a fair share of new industries available in the United Kingdom or likely to come from overseas. I congratulate my right hon. Friend and the Welsh Office on the progress that they have achieved in this respect. Their achievement is most remarkable in regard to the creation of new factories and jobs. We must also remember the importance of British Coal Enterprise Limited, which has invested £21 million in the United Kingdom and is likely to create 2,500 jobs. I believe that my right hon. Friend said that quite a large proportion of them will be in Wales. I share the pleasure expressed by hon. Members on both sides of the House at the support of the Government and British Coal for the new super-pit at Margam. I understand that approval is still subject to certain conditions, including a six-day week, but I hope that terms can be agreed at a reasonably early date so that this great undertaking is not imperiled in any way.

The massive new investment in steel is also most impressive, but the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside did not mention it at all. Some £171 million has been invested in a hot strip mill at Port Talbot, and there has been investment in the Concast plant at Llanwern. I do not know how much—perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister can tell me in his winding-up speech—but I understand that the investment is on a substantial scale. One could also mention the arrival of new industries, such as the electrical industries, new technology and biotechnology.

My right hon. Friend the Minister did not refer today—although he has previously done so—to the great increase in self-employment in Wales. As in the rest of the United Kingdom, the self-employed have increased in number and I understand that there are now about 154,000 of them. Compared with the small scale of self-employment even a couple of decades ago, that statistic is impressive. It represents 12 per cent. of our working population, so we should not deem it an unimportant factor on the road to improvement.

Mr. Alex Carlile: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I join him in welcoming the improved level of self-employment in Wales, but does he agree that we should be concerned about the mobility of some of the self-employed, and also about the high number of personal bankruptcies among them?

Sir Raymond Gower: I do not agree entirely. Recently, a friend of mine from the United States was asked what he thought about employment in Britain. He said that, compared with the United States, we had far too few failures. That is a remarkable thought.

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): The Government are putting that right.

Sir Raymond Gower: No, in America there are many failures, but also an enormous number of successes.

Mr. Alex Carlile: America has only half our interest rate.

Sir Raymond Gower: To some extent, I accept what the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) said about mobility. However, the self-employed are less likely to want to move than big industries or their employees. The self-employed tend to establish themselves in small communities, so mobility would be less important for them than for most industries. I adduced the example of the United States to show that success is sometimes accompanied by difficulty. In a competitive area, one cannot expect great successes without some failures, although many people will doubtless disagree with that thought.

WINvest has not been mentioned, but I understand that it has been instrumental in assisting 155 projects in Wales with an investment of £570 million. That represents a valuable contribution to Welsh industry. Eleven thousand new jobs have been involved and WINvest has safeguarded another 8,000 jobs. Seventy eight of the companies concerned are from the United States and Canada, 58 from Europe and most of the remainder from Japan. That shows that the Welsh scene and economy are not unreceptive to new ideas, and that Wales is attractive to companies from overseas. I am sustained in my hopefulness not only by the speech of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State but by the forecasts of independent bodies, including the CBI Wales.—*[Interruption.]* I am talking about experienced industrialists who have to bear the difficulties as well as the advantages of industry. They foresee a period of increased employment, which is encouraging.

[Sir Raymond Gower]

The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside criticised the Welsh Development Agency, but I think that its achievements have been great. It has created 1,252 advance factory units, 21 bespoke factory units and 95 factory extensions. That is a large contribution in a relatively short period. As the hon. Gentleman admitted, the unoccupied proportion of its factories has now declined to just under 10 per cent. That is a good figure when one recalls that only a few years ago a larger proportion of its completed factories were difficult to let. That is another sign of the improved buoyancy of the Welsh and British economies.

I am sorry to have to refer in less hopeful terms to the present state of Welsh agriculture. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, who represents part of the county of Dyfed, will know that the difficult period in relation to milk quotas is not yet entirely over. Many farmers also have fears about beef production and some farmers in my constituency share the fear that the change from milk to beef production will increase their difficulties. Most of them feel — right or wrongly — that the best solution would be some devaluation of the green pound, and they have impressed that view on me time and time again. I know that it is a difficult issue, but I hope that the Ministers concerned will think about what could be achieved in that direction.

Let us not be foolishly over-optimistic. I, for one, am not. Enormous problems face the Welsh and British economies, but there are some brighter signs than we could have foreseen even a short time ago. There are signs that the continuous increase in unemployment has been stopped. Indeed, there are hopeful signs that it is slightly in decline. Let us hope that that decline will accelerate and that the new jobs will last for a long time. We do not want a false dawn and I do not think that this is one. Had it been even brighter, it might have been false, but it has taken the form of a slow improvement. That is more likely to be permanent and that is why I am hopeful.

5.37 pm

Mr. James Callaghan (Cardiff, South and Penarth): The speech made by the hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Sir R. Gower) contrasted in its sober realism with what we have heard on other occasions about the prospects for the future. He painted on a large canvas.

I was reminded by what the hon. Gentleman said about America—that perhaps we did not have enough failures — of what a delegate said to me at the National Farmers Union conference: "How do you make a small fortune from agriculture? Start with a large fortune." I fear that that describes the future for much of agriculture.— *[Interruption.]* Perhaps I should declare my interest. The point is that I did not start with a large fortune; I started with a small overdraft that has become larger. Some of our small Welsh family farms have better prospects of survival because of their capacity to use the family resources than have farmers in other parts of Britain, but they face a tremendous slog.

I was also pleased to hear the hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan tell us about the wonderful work of the Welsh Development Agency. It pleased me greatly to hear of his conversion to that great organisation, which his party spoke against, voted against and described as socialist excess when it was in opposition. Indeed, this afternoon we have seen a Raymond come to judgment.

I do not wish to speak on the same broad canvas as the hon. Gentleman, because I have a feeling that this is the last opportunity that I shall have to make a speech on Welsh day. I wish, therefore, to make an unashamedly constituency speech. Although I have been very fortunate in holding a number of governmental offices, none of them could have been held without the steady and consistent support of the people of Cardiff. We should all speak for and represent the interests of the people who sent us here, and that is what I want to do this afternoon.

In some senses, Cardiff presents a paradox. As the Secretary of State said, there has been a constructive period in my own constituency, as well as in the centre of Cardiff, for which he, the county council and the city council take all the credit. The lead that the county council set when it decided that the new South Glamorgan headquarters should go down to the docks began to give new hope to an area of considerable dereliction. That was followed by the imaginative concept for which the Secretary of State has been responsible: the barrage from Cardiff docks to Penarth, which will encourage leisure activities, new economic activities, shopping facilities, housing and much else.

I pay tribute to the combined efforts of the leaders of both councils. Too often there has been unnecessary friction and a feeling that they must stand on their dignity. But on this occasion councillor Watkiss for the city council, Lord Brooks and councillor Kitson for the county council, and the Secretary of State have all subordinated their individual interests. No doubt those who come after us will be as proud of what they have provided as we are of their forefathers, who established the wonderfull civic centre which we now enjoy and which was built some 80 years ago.

I have observed that the Secretary of State cares about the large issues that concern and improve the environment. However, I feel that the right hon. Gentleman should show the same sensitivity about the quality of life in considering some of the smaller, more personal issues that concern my constituents. I heard only yesterday — I now move deliberately from a large issue to something that is tiny, yet matters — about a dispute over the laundry of elderly people in geriatric wards. The argument is about whether they can have their own underwear and whether it can be laundered. It is absurd that something that matters so much to old people should be the subject of controversy because there are not sufficient funds.

Such tiny things matter to our people: they are what the quality of life is about. But I believe that we have missed out on a number of them. I hear stories about how nursing staff in the geriatric ward of one of our hospitals are being stretched almost to the limit in trying to look after the patients who are so dependent on them. It is unedifying and unfeeling for such things to be happening in Cardiff today.

My hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) spoke about the problem of jobs. We know how Wales has suffered, and I do not intend to repeat the figures. There is too much bandying of statistics today. I am reminded of Disraeli's comment about "lies, damned lies and statistics".

If he had been listening to the exchanges at Question Time — not only today but over the past few months — he

would have added a fourth category—election figures, which are statistics inflated by adjectival ministerial excess and bear no relation to reality.

We have lost one third of our industrial workers during the 1980s—over 100,000 men and women—but we have gained no more than 25,000 jobs in the service industries to offset that. Of course, we are moving into a different era; the Secretary of State is absolutely right about that. However, I see no prospect that the jobs now arising in the service industries, which are many fewer than those that we have lost in manufacturing, are likely in any measurable period to offset them.

I still do not know what the Government intend to do to remedy the position. It is having an appalling effect in my constituency, among others. The paradox is that, while great schemes such as the Cardiff barrage are going ahead and the centre of the city is being revived—it looks better than I can remember in all my time in Cardiff—in the housing estates and the homes of our people there is evidence of a different attitude, a depression in morale. Why is that?

On the Llanrumney estate in my constituency, one man in three is out of work. It is the same story in Tremorfa. In Splott, one man in four is out of work, and in Bute town in the docks, where the position has always been worse than in the others, every other man is out of work in every other house. That is the extent of the problem.

I do not know the remedy. I am not my right hon. Friends. If they win the election, as I hope and trust that they will, I should like them to make a real attempt to carry out their plan to reduce unemployment by a million. That would offer hope to our people. No doubt mistakes will be made but, as I walk in and out of those homes, I believe that it is essential that a real effort is made. The social consequences of that continued depression are extremely serious.

Let me give another illustration of the paradox. I would say that our more elderly people are better looked after today, in the geriatric wards and in the bungalows that are being built. But, in my view, the young people now suffer more than they did. Somehow the position has been reversed. Forty years ago, they had something to which to look forward; today that is no longer true.

Of course, I am not speaking of everyone, but the cancer has certainly infected our estates. Recorded crimes in Cardiff have increased by 50 per cent. during the past seven years. I am not making a political point; those happen to be the years for which I have figures. Admittedly, the 50 per cent. figure may be a little inflated. Some areas are now included in the record because of values that were not hitherto recorded. Nevertheless, the thought of an increase in crime of anything up to 50 per cent. during this decade must seem absolutely shocking to all of us, and we must consider where we are going.

I asked the chief constable what had been the increase in the police force in that time, and was told that it had gone up from 3,025 to 3,064. I do not want to start bandying statistics, but I believe that the Government should clarify the record, because that is what is worrying my people in Cardiff. Only a few days ago, I received a letter, which I took up with the chief constable, from a very sensible constituent in Llanrumney. He said:

"As one of your constituents, I write to tell you of my serious concern at the recent escalation of violence and burglaries on this estate. Could you use your influence on behalf of the majority of your constituents to see if something could be done to rid us of this? Most of the incidents might be regarded as trivial, especially if they had not happened to oneself. I have had some personal experience of that, but it is my opinion that failure to crack down on minor matters allows a climate of lawlessness to build up. I speak as the father of five. The business establishments in Countisbury Avenue have experienced a spate of burglaries. One has been 'done' three times in a week. I hear there was a fake motor cycle accident in Ball Road when a motorist was stopped and robbed. Buses have been stoned, resulting in their withdrawal, and glue sniffing in the area is notorious. The police, it seems to me, must be strengthened to enable more officers to give their enthusiastic attention to the situation until it is cleared up so that people can walk the streets and sleep in their beds without trepidation, as was once the case. I am afraid that if this is not done, the public or some member of it at some time to come will take the law into their own hands."

I sent that to the chief constable, and he wrote back saying:

"As far as the specific matters . . . are concerned, in the majority of cases the culprits have been arested and either have been dealt with by the courts or are awaiting trial. We have also mounted a number of operations with both uniform and CID personnel in an effort to reduce the incidence of crime. We shall not hesitate to repeat such exercises when necessary. In addition, we are giving the most careful consideration to the policing needs of the Llanrumney area as part of our current review . . . the current force establishment is totally inadequate. We intend to assess the proper manpower level to meet modern requirements and I hope to present the findings to the police authority at their next meeting in March."

I hope and expect an assurance from the Secretary of State that if a request comes for an increase in the establishment of the police in South Wales, this will be conceded and the funds will be forthcoming. This is what concerns my constituents.

Mr. Best: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Callaghan: No. I am speaking about my constituents and I do not think that the hon. Gentleman knows too much about that. Perhaps he will allow me to continue.

Cautious sociologists and perhaps complacent politicians may say that there is no proven connection between unemployment and crime, but the common sense of my electors in Cardiff tells them, and they tell me, that an aimless youth without sense of hope for the future, sense of purpose or a steady job is the one who is the most likely to turn to vandalising housing estates, theft, burglary and other crimes. This is what concerns my people on estates. I hear this time after time.

I was glad to hear what the Secretary of State had to say about Avana Bakeries. Rank Hovis McDougall has considerable interests in, and therefore a commitment to, Wales. Nevertheless, Avana Bakeries is essentially Welsh, and under the guidance and leadership of Marks and Spencer some years ago built itself up into one of the most efficient enterprises in Wales. I cannot believe that there will be the same depth of commitment if the control of this firm moves outside of Wales as there will be as long as it remains inside Wales. I hope that the Secretary of State will use such influence as he can without going outside his proper responsibilities to ensure that this is so. He made a good statement this afternoon and we ask him to continue the good work. The Avana Bakeries may not be so efficient and its workers may be less secure if the firm is handled from outside Wales.

Apart from all this, the issue most affecting my constituents, to judge from their letters and from what they say when I have interviews with them, is housing, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside

[Mr. Callaghan]

referred. I do not wish to bandy figures with the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Terlezki) about how much was spent on modernising housing before 1979. That is not the problem.

Mr. Terlezki: It is.

Mr. Callaghan: It is not. The problem is that when the coal industry expanded, Cardiff became the premier export port for coal and Cardiff's population doubled within a short time. A large number of huge housebuilding programmes took place. Now those houses are nearly 100 years old. The problem — here the hon. Member for Cardiff, West will not disagree, although he may disagree on other points — is that those houses are almost reaching the end of their lives, although they can be rehabilitated. The guttering has rotted, the roofs have reached the end of their lives and in many places floors need to be replaced. The city council has had to face this problem.

Mr. Terlezki: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Callaghan: Allow me to finish my point. If the hon. Gentleman disagrees with me I shall give way.

In addition, housing built only in the 1950s is showing signs of premature old age. It has not stood up as it should have done. The standards adopted then were not as high as they should have been, or as they were in the case of the late Victorian dwellings. This housing is absorbing resources unexpectedly, to avoid deterioriation or abandonment.

In addition, the city is faced with the normal demand for housing from young families on the housing list. There are now 4,500 applications on the housing list, many of them from young families waiting to be rehoused. Last year, another 700 were added to the list, all hoping for a home to rent because they cannot afford to buy. Many remedies have been put forward for that. I will not go into them this afternoon, but I wish to state the case. Frequently, the cases on the waiting list are the most desperate of all because these people do not have a roof over their heads.

It is easy to paint a composite picture of these people. Every hon. Member knows them. On the Saturday morning when we do interviews, we hear them outside first. Then they come in. Frequently, there is a young mother with a toddler who runs round the room until one can find a sweet to settle him down. Perhaps there is another child, a baby in her arms. Yes, she has been to her councillor and he can do nothing. Yes, she has been to the housing authority and it can make no promises. Yes, she has seen what she can do to find private accommodation to rent, but there is no prospect of it.

The next move is to ask about the circumstances. Often, such families are living with one set of parents and younger brothers and sisters in a three-bedroomed council house. The husband and wife with two young children are sleeping in the box room, where it is impossible to put up a cot as well as a double bed. Such people are asking for help but one cannot give it. One probes and asks, for example, about the health of the parents. It may be that the father has a bad heart condition, or the baby has asthma. One asks whether this has been recorded on the file, and whether the local authority knows about it. If one finds out that it does not, one writes to the local authority, but with a sinking heart because one knows that if one succeeds in this case, one will push somebody else further down the list. This is the problem that we all have to face. I do not paint an exaggerated picture. This is the experience of every hon. Member. Such people come to me often.

Mr. Terlezki *rose*——

Mr. Callaghan: Allow me to finish my point. I have not done so yet, but when I do the hon. Gentleman may intervene if he still wishes to do so.

Frequently, all that we can do is listen with sympathy and understanding, but with a sinking heart, as we tell the brutal truth that there is nothing we can do to help such people. When young people marry and establish a family, that should be a happy period in their lives, but often it is miserable, a period crowded with domestic strife with parents, or by differences between wife and husband. Never mind what the statistics say—that is the reality and every hon. Member knows it.

Last year, the council in Cardiff—to stop the hon. Member for Cardiff, West rising again I do not criticise at this moment—did not build a single new home. Those 4,500 people could find accommodation only if other houses fell vacant into which they could be decanted.

Mr. Terlezki *rose*——

Mr. Callaghan: I shall give way at the end as I have advised the hon. Gentleman. He should contain his patience for a moment.

Indeed, the council now has to decant some of those young families into bungalows that were built for pensioners. That, too, creates problems because pensioners who were hoping to live in quiet circumstances are now disturbed by the inevitable noise that comes when children are around. Therefore, unhappiness spreads.

This year, the council has started to build 300 houses. Thank God for that start. However, it is totally inadequate set against the needs rather than the demands of our people who come to see us on a Saturday morning. The reason why no new houses were started last year was that the council decided—I do not criticise it—to allocate its resources to improving the older existing properties, to which I have referred, and to preventing them from falling even further into disrepair.

One cannot envy the council its task in this matter. It has a huge waiting list of people, who have already made applications for grants, not within the past six months but some years ago, to improve their houses. I am not referring now to the young people on the council's waiting lists. I was told not so long ago that the council can only meet applications that were made in 1982 from people living in the older houses and who want grants to improve them.

It is no use discussing what happened before 1979, because this is the situation with which we are faced in 1987. This almost insoluble problem comes down quite simply and shortly to the inadequacy of the resources available. The council does not have the resources necessary to do both. It has had to make the choice of directing the money to the people who are living in the older houses. That has increased the misery of many young families. Those twin problems are beyond the capacity of the council.

What kind of society requires parents to serve their married daughter with a notice to quit, or even an eviction

order, so that the council can fulfil its legal obligation to provide some temporary accommodation, at a tremendous cost, when construction workers are sitting idle at home on those estates waiting to build those houses?

Finally, I remind the Secretary of State that we have been told that the Chancellor may have up to £5 billion to give away. I urge him—I believe that the House will demand it—to use every ounce of authority that he has in the Cabinet to ensure that, before any resources are devoted to reducing taxation, these unmet needs should be fulfilled. The major part of any resources that are available should be put into building houses and improving the lot of the elderly and the hospitals and fulfilling the needs that we all know exist.

I have some confidence about the future of Wales because our people have survived before and will do so again. The hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan may be right and there may well be a new start for Wales. I know that such things go in cycles. However, there will be a great deal of misery before that happens. Some will be unnecessary because we have been told that the resources are available. It now lies upon the Government's conscience to devote those resources to meeting the needs of our people.

6.3 pm

Mr. Ian Grist (Cardiff, Central): As my neighbour in Cardiff, the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan) and fellow Hampshire-born Member has said, this is his swan song in a Welsh day debate, and he made it in fine style. Earlier, he told me a little mischievously that he was going to make an electioneering speech. I must admit that I wondered whether he would make the sort of speech he made in Penarth at the last election because that was a fine electioneering speech — quite the best — and perhaps there is yet time for him to repeat that performance.

The right hon. Gentleman spoke about Cardiff. I spent yesterday afternoon with some of my Bangladeshi constituents, celebrating their national day, their martyrs' day, and it was extremely interesting. Later, in the evening, the deputy lord mayor and I transported ourselves to St. David's hall, that fine concert and conference hall, to the entertainment that some hon. Members may have seen on BBC Wales later. When one looked around St. David's hall, it is sad to say that one was not aware that we lived in a multiracial society, and perhaps one of the changes to which we can look in the years ahead is for those celebrations to incorporate others who live in our midst.

I suspect that this is the last St. David's day debate to which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will contribute. I should like to pay tribute to the way in which he has led Welsh Conservative Members, in opposition and then when in government, for many years. He has made a magnificent series of speeches for us both when as our spokesman when we were in opposition when we were fighting those dreary debates on inflation, state control and devolution—heaven knows all the things that we are promised again by the alliance, Plaid Cymru and the Labour party. I feel sheer horror at the thought of going into opposition and having to go round the tired old track of the 1960s again. What a policy or promise to hold out to the people of Wales or Britain.

Of course, my right hon. Friend has been recognised in some quarters that we may find surprising as the finest Secretary of State that Wales has ever had. He has transformed Welsh life for the better in many ways. Above all, there is now an awareness—although perhaps not widespread enough—that Wales will be helped most by its own exertions and by seeking value for money.

Wales now has a fine story to tell—we now have efficient and not overmanned industries. We are linked to all the great markets of Britain, and when the Channel tunnel comes we shall be linked directly to the continent of Europe. Wales offers a wonderful opportunity for relaxing, or for being more energetic if one wants, for those who want holidays, whether they come from Britain or from abroad. That also applies to the growing conference business that every town and city in Wales now seeks and to which, 10 years ago, we did not give a moment's thought. Wales is aware that industrialists who seek new sites, especially those coming from overseas, will find in Wales, probably more than anywhere else in the United Kingdom or the EEC, that mix of finance, labour and real welcome that has brought so many Japanese and north American firms among us.

Above all, my right hon. Friend has raised the eyes and minds of the people, whether employed in large firms or self-employed, so that they will be free from the trammels of state control and the terrors of trade union domination. Rather they will be encouraged to seek their fortune in an expanding economy in which profit and success are applauded and not looked on either with envy or simply as a source of redistributed revenue.

Of course, there are problems. Finding sufficient jobs in a modern economy for all those wanting them is common to virtually all advanced economies. I join the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth in stating that the likelihood of our ever being able to offer jobs to everybody, all the time, in the years ahead is nugatory. There is no real chance of doing that in a modern economy. People will have periods in and out of work. However, we have to ensure that they will not be out of work for long at a time, and that they will have chances to train in between those jobs. However, I do not think that we shall ever return to full employment or at least to the appearance of full employment that we had in previous years. Incidentally, one of the reasons for that is that modern industry and modern developments in offices have tended to make more work available for women.

That change has come in the past 20 years, and it will continue for the rest of the century. Who would have believed, 20 or 30 years ago, that we would have lady bus drivers? Of course, with power-assisted steering and all the electronic aids, one does not have to be a muscle-bound man to swing vehicles around. Whether driving buses or operating computers in the office, and so on, a woman is on an equal plane with a man for any job. In some circumstances, she is better placed. Just ask Hitachi and other electronics firms that want to have components put together. The small fingers then come into their own.

There are problems with falling school rolls, which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State mentioned. There are far more schools than we would ever build for the present number of pupils. But care must be taken when proposals are made to close community schools. Such care was never shown by South Glamorgan county council when it drew up proposals for secondary education in eastern Cardiff. That can be seen from the fact that the controlling Labour group on the county council was elected pledged, despite all the evidence to the contrary, to close no schools. When reality became too great to

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withstand, a hastily produced proposal was cobbled together which involved the closure of the most successful, best built, most centrally placed and most socially and ethnically mixed school in east Cardiff — Howardian High — and the establishment of a tertiary college, not close to the centre, but on the fringes of the city, where it would be uniformly inconvenient for most of the youngsters intended for it.

My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State who will reply to the debate will be aware of the hornets' nest that the proposals have stirred up. The matter is now before him, and every person, every group, every parent and every party in central and east Cardiff now look to him to squash that travesty of an educational plan, and to tell South Glamorgan to go back to the drawing board, look a second time at secondary education in the county as a whole and produce a policy to which the majority of citizens can give their support.

Meanwhile, on another educational front, which is not directly the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State but surely of considerable interest to him, is the serious problem of University college, Cardiff and its finances. It has led to a real threat to the continued existence of the Sherman theatre. I need not rehearse the full story of the theatre. I say just that, even with the final gift of the university to the Sherman, the theatre is in peril of closing from August this year at least until new money can, we hope, be raised for next year. That means that some £200,000 is needed. At the moment there is a clear game of pass the parcel between local authorities and the Arts Council. It seems that all feel that the books are closed for the current year. I hope that my right hon. Friend can find some way of helping that money to emerge from some account somewhere.

In the meantime, as regards the university itself, far too much is being said. I believe that a refusal to face facts and a somewhat irresponsible approach to financial control over the years have led to the present situation, but the university will not close. It has many extremely fine departments and is a worthy college for the capital city. Under a new principal, to be appointed in the near future, and with a new and more professional financial team, the college will pull through. When, in three years' time or so, the merger with the University of Wales institute of science and technology takes place, Cardiff will have one of the most powerful academic institutions in the United Kingdom. That will coincide with other major developments in Cardiff — the new national museum, in which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has played such a part and the new national centre for the arts at the Cardiff bay development. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend for being the motive force. It was his idea above all others, and he promoted it. What a reminder to future generations that development will be —"Better than Baltimore", indeed.

The new Cardiff, no longer a city of fumes and belching chimneys or run-down docks, but a centre of life for the 21st century, with modern industry, fine leisure, shopping, housing and cultural facilities, will serve all our peoples. I want people to say, "You come from Cardiff? How I envy you." My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has been a great friend to the capital city of Wales. He is leaving us with the foundations of a magnificent heritage for the oh, so close, turn of the century.

6.16 pm

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): Debates on the Floor of the House on Welsh affairs are rare, so it behoves us all, for the sake of our constituents and the people of Wales as a whole, to be positive during such debates. The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) knows that I, as a defeated election opponent of his on two occasions, have considerable regard for him but I am bound to say that although in his speech he seemed to be trying to bring the surgeon's knife to the economic malaise of Wales at the crucial moment he seemed to shut his eyes, fail to cauterise the wound and lose the stiches that need to be applied to cure the economic ills of Wales.

In the positive spirit in which I set out, I welcome the developments to which the Secretary of State referred in his speech, particularly the numerous factory developments. In my own constituency, I very much congratulate the Development Board for Rural Wales — Mid Wales Development — on its continuing and remarkable success in improving life and the economy in mid-Wales. The whole of mid-Wales is grateful for such Government support as is given to Mid Wales Development.

The fact remains, however, that Wales is still suffering from considerable economic sickness. I shall not fall into the trap, particularly as I run the risk of rebuke from the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan), of indulging in a welter of statistics to show that there is still a considerable lack of economic success in Wales — some were mentioned by the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside — but there is little sign of Wales climbing up from the bottom of the league table in terms of gross domestic product or employment.

One measure of industrial development in Wales is the business expansion scheme — an imaginative concept introduced by the present Government. The value of the 700 or more schemes created throughout the United Kingdom is twofold. First, they are entrepreneurial and involve the use of risk capital, which is a good thing. Secondly, and very important from the point of view of Wales, they involve the creation of indigenous industry. Of course, we welcome industry from outside — always, and with open arms — but it is exceedingly important to create our own home-grown industries as well. Sadly, however, despite the efforts of the Welsh Development Agency and Mid Wales Development, Wales has had fewer than 2 per cent. of the business expansion schemes — a poor record, and a sign that all is far from well in the industrial and economic environment in Wales.

We also see in our constituencies — I certainly observe it in mine — that the infrastructure is in physical decline. The deterioration is perceptible. In many areas, rural roads are in a deplorable state, but Powys county council — a good county council which is trying hard to meet its obligations — has no money to repair them.

The education system is also in a sorry state. School inspectors have reported on school buildings which are falling apart. That is not a good environment for children to learn in. Indeed, teachers are troubled by the way that resources are being distributed in education. We welcome the arrival of TVEI money in schools in Wales, but many teachers and parents feel that there is a disproportion between those subjects which have the benefit of TVEI, and therefore reasonable funding, and those which do not and are severely under-funded.

At Question Time this afternoon the hon. Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Grist) raised the issue of language teaching. I took him to be referring to languages other than Welsh, which is extremely well taught in Wales. In my constituency, and in the whole of Powys, there are clear signs of a lack of resources for the teaching of European languages to pupils. Bright, ambitious pupils who may wish to play their part as Welsh people in a Europe which includes Wales must have better opportunities to learn French, German and other European languages.

The condition of many houses in Wales is deplorable. It is an open secret—if it is a secret at all—that the Welsh Office is conducting a housing condition survey and requiring local authority housing officials to sign a declaration pursuant to the Official Secrets Act. That is an extraordinary subject on which to demand the rigours of section 2 of that Act. What comes next? A Zircon housing estate in Welshpool?

Health Service waiting lists are grotesquely unacceptable. I do not dispute what the Secretary of State said about spending on the Health Service. If that is right, so be it, but it is not coming through to the patients. An example which has been the subject of several letters in my postbag in the last fortnight is the time that it takes for test results to be given for cervical smears. In my area it has been taking between four and five months for the results of cervical smears to become known. That seems to be regarded as acceptable by one health authority with which I have corresponded. One of the constituents who wrote to me on this subject was found to be suffering from cancer. She was not just worried but exceedingly anxious, and her anxiety was heightened by the fact that she had to wait so long for the result of the test. I ask the Secretary of State to ensure that waiting lists—particularly in this crucial area which is of such importance to women—are reduced quickly and substantially.

There are, however, some rays of sunshine in the Health Service in Wales. I hope that the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, when he replies to the debate, will join with me in welcoming and congratulating the Laura Ashley foundation and the Ashley family on their gift, which was announced today, of a £230,000 grant to the University of Wales college of medicine, £130,000 of which has come from the foundation and the balance of £100,000 from Sir Bernard Ashley and the rest of the Ashley family. The money will be spent on research into the prevention of kidney damage in children caused by urinary infections in infanthood. That welcome gift is a generous memorial to Laura Ashley, one of the great industrialists of Wales.

I turn to a less fortunate event in recent months. Every week at my constituency surgeries, earnest, hard-working farmers, often with farms that have been in the family for generations, show me their accounts, letters from their bank managers or other evidence of the desperate financial state in which family farmers find themselves today. There are quick remedies for this. For the life of me, I cannot understand why we do not join the European monetary system now. The Government say that they think we should join it, but not yet. The Labour party says that it thinks that we should join it, but not yet. But neither will tell us when. For the sake of farming—indeed, for the sake of the British economy — we should join the European monetary system now. That would bring an immediate alleviation of the interest rates which our farmers face. In real terms, farmers in the United Kingdom are paying twice as much as borrowers in the United States and about 50 per cent. more than farmers in France. No wonder they find themselves in such a parlous state by comparison.

The way in which the proposals for land use change were brought about in Wales was insulting and chaotic. From what I have been told—I shall be interested to hear the Minister's comments—there was no consultation whatever between the Department of the Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on the one hand and the Welsh Office on the other. It was confirmed, in answer to a parliamentary question from me, that there was no consultation between the Welsh Office and bodies such as the farming unions or even the Development Board for Rural Wales before the document was produced.

The Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Wyn Roberts): I must contradict the hon. Gentleman's statement that there was no consultation between the various Departments of State. Of course there was consultation, and it included the Welsh Office.

Mr. Carlile: I accept the hon. Gentleman's word for that. Nevertheless, there should surely have been consultation between the Welsh Office and the statutory bodies in Wales, and with interested parties such as the unions in the farming industry before those proposals were introduced, particularly given the way in which they were introduced.

The Government's prescription lacks shape. It is time that the Welsh economy was given an integrated approach. We should not put agriculture in one compartment, industry in another compartment and tourism in yet another. We should look at the economy as a whole. I suggest to the Secretary of State that a new integrated shape should be devised with some — preferably all — of the following features. First, there should be substantial public sector assistance for alternative farm use, with grants for the renovation and adaptation of farm buildings for manufacturing and service industries. Secondly, to assist farming in Wales there should be positive public sector assistance in the establishment of food processing plants in strategic locations. The Secretary of State knows only too well what happened to Welsh Quality Lamb. There is now a gap in the market. I suggest that an integrated meat and dairy processing plant, built to EEC and United States import standards, ideally in Newtown, would be a great success and would give farming the boost that it so sadly needs.

In tourism, the success of the advance factories built by the Welsh Development Agency and Mid Wales Development should be applied to hotels. As a pilot project, two advance hotels could be built at strategic locations. We cannot have them all in my constituency, so on this occasion I suggest the Ffestiniog valley and Builth Wells as examples. There should be a clear commitment that the Montgomery canal scheme, which will benefit not only Montgomeryshire but Shropshire, will go ahead by the Government ensuring that the financial package is not hamstrung by regulations about the use of rate support grant. I hope that I shall be given a sympathetic hearing on that score at least. In forestry, we should have not only the planting of broad-leaved woodlands but the establishment of tourist sites too with chalets and shooting, canoeing and fishing areas in the woodlands.

As part of the integrated package in manufacturing, there should be an increase in the current speculative

[Mr. Carlile]

factory building in rural Wales, with special attention to the provision of facilities and grant aid for firms wishing to establish their research and development units in rural Wales. I suggest to the Secretary of State that the mid-Wales development grant, which has been such a success, should be not just continued but increased to a maximum of 20 per cent.

On regional strategy, I ask the Secretary of State to reaffirm the conclusions of the Beacham report in 1964 that the problems of the rural areas — depopulation, deprivation, peripherality, and so on—equate with those of unemployment and to endorse and extend the growth towns strategy which has been so successful in Newtown. The Secretary of State should consider the designation of more new towns or new town areas within existing towns, for example, in places such as Aberystwyth, Llandrindod Wells and Brecon. On the housing front, more money should be made available so that the council houses which have been sold can be replaced to provide housing for key workers.

Of course, it is no use asking for factories, hotels and key workers unless we have the necessary roads, so I also ask for an absolute commitment to the improvement of the mid-Wales east-west Shrewsbury-Aberystwyth link.

People in rural Wales are not particularly demanding, but they are entitled to expect a reasonable quality of life for young and old — in education, the Health Service, agriculture, industry and all the other arenas in which they lead their lives. The countryside feels that it is in a state of crisis, particularly because of what has happened in agriculture. There have been some achievements, but much more could have been done. Measures of the kind that I have suggested would generate jobs and income and would become self-financing, as industrial development in mid-Wales has already done. I earnestly urge the Secretary of State not to close his eyes to the possibility of the developments that I have advocated.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. As the House knows, I have no authority to control the length of speeches, but if hon Members who speak between now and 9 pm do so for 15 minutes each, I think that every hon. Member who wishes to speak would be called.

6.34 pm

Mr. Keith Raffan (Delyn): I shall not take up the speech of the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile), but I should like to allude to the remarks of the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones). He got many things wrong but the only one on which I shall correct him is when he said that the speech of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was made to defend vulnerable seats. It was not made to defend vulnerable seats; it was made to win vulnerable seats. As many of us are aware, the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside has a majority of only 100 more than the Labour party had at Greenwich.

The annual debate on Welsh affairs provides an opportunity to review what has happened in Wales during last year, especially in our constituencies. I shall follow the speech of the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan) in that respect and take his points a little further. The debate also provides us with an opportunity to bring out the world of difference, the sharp contrast between the way in which we on this side of the House approach the great issues and crucial problems in the Principality and the approach of the Opposition.

It is, of course, one of the oldest myths in politics, perpetuated by the Labour party, that massive structural unemployment of the kind we have experienced in my constituency in north-east Wales began in 1979. That unemployment did not suddenly emerge in May 1979 when the Conservative party took office. The massive structural unemployment in our two major industries in north-east Wales—in textiles and steel—is not a seven-year phenomenon but a 20-year phenomenon. Let me give the facts to back that up. The rundown of Courtaulds' Deeside works began in 1969. The first major job losses at Courtaulds' Greenfield works occurred in 1976 with the loss of 600 jobs. The closure of Courtaulds' Castle works with the loss of 1,500 jobs — the biggest single redundancy ever in Delyn—happened in 1977.

The attitude of Labour's leadership and of its Welsh Front Bench appears to be, "We have suffered electoral defeat in 1979 and again in 1983. We have done our act of penance. We deserve absolution. Our slate is wiped clean. We can forget our past." Labour cannot forget it. We shall not allow it to forget the past and nor will the electorate. We are entitled, just as the country is, to judge the Labour party not just by what it says but by what happened when it was in office and what it did when it had the power to act. The indisputable fact is that massive structural unemployment had already taken place and was continuing to take place in Delyn throughout the years of Labour's last term of office.

If any independent, non-partisan, objective confirmation of that is needed, let me quote from one of the Labour party's favourite documents—only this time the one that Labour produced during its term of office—the Labour party's European regional development fund report in 1978. What did it say about north-east Wales? Just this:

> "Unemployment over recent years has increased substantially . . . there must be uncertainty about the future of the area with its dependence on a narrow manufacturing base centred on the steel, textile and aircraft industries."

Having established that, let us look at Labour's response to Delyn's mass unemployment, especially the closure of Courtaulds' Castle works in 1977 with the huge loss of 1,500 jobs. Did the Labour Government put together a special package to help the town of Flint, recognising the intense local impact of those redundancies? The answer is no. Was Government pressure exerted on Courtaulds to hand over the Castle works site to the local council for industrial development? Again, the answer is no. Indeed, the site was sold behind the council's back to a private developer from whom the council later had to buy it at the market price.

Contrast that with what happened following the April 1985 announcement of the final closure of Courtaulds' Greenfield works with the loss of 530 jobs the following August. Within a week, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister had met me, then local borough and county councillors and their officers in north Wales. Within a month, the Government had prepared a special package, ultimately worth £1,450,000, to help regenerate Delyn's economy to bring new industry and new jobs to the area. Following Government pressure on Courtaulds, the

company agreed to hand over its No. 1 site, not at market price, but for £1 to Delyn borough council, having spent a significant sum clearing the site of hazardous materials.

Courtaulds also agreed to make a three-year commitment to an expanded Delyn business partnership by seconding staff to help to bring new companies and new jobs to the constituency. That is the sharp contrast between this Government's and our Secretary of State's response to a closure that involved 530 redundancies and the last Labour Government's lack of response to a closure involving three times that number—1,500 redundancies. One could not have a sharper contrast between the way the two sides in this House have approached massive structural unemployment in north-east Wales than the way in which we have approached two similar, though different-sized closures, in eight years.

This Government and this Government alone ensured that Courtaulds could not just up and walk away from a work force and a community that had served the company for so long and so well. There is no point in the Opposition simply dismissing this as exceptional or as one particular case history. The contrast between this Government's response and the last Labour Government's lack of response to Delyn's mass unemployment can be carried further. It was this Government in 1979 who gave Delyn the highest level of development area status. It was we who in 1983 designated the Delyn enterprise zone, backing it with over £5 million.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, the enterprise zone approach has proved how effective an intensive localised approach to unemployment can be. Some 1,155 new jobs have been created since designation, 88 per cent. of them full-time, 63 per cent. of them full-time male jobs and 86 per cent. of them in a wide range of manufacturing activity. I wish that the Opposition would applaud this. They are always asking for more jobs in manufacturing. Why are they so silent? I do not expect you to intervene, Mr. Speaker, because even in the face of this good news you must restrain yourself, but surely the Opposition can applaud good news. — *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell) is always fair about these matters, even if his hon. Friends are not.

The good news does not stop there. A further 530 jobs are projected for the enterprise zone and an additional 640 are to be provided on the Greenfield business park within three to four years. In north-east Wales the Government have begun to reverse the industrial decline of the last 15 to 20 years. As I mentioned at Question Time, they have achieved a significant reduction of 11·5 per cent. in the unemployment figures in the constituency of Delyn. Unemployment is down from 5,894 in January 1986 to 5,215 in January this year. That reduction is all the more dramatic when it is remembered that we had to absorb during that period the major Courtaulds closure at Greenfield.

Mr. D. E. Thomas: Does the hon. Gentleman not appreciate the contribution made by the other local authority, Clwyd county council, to this regeneration project? In that context, why does he seek the removal of the elected chairman of that council?

Mr. Raffan: The hon. Gentleman has thrown a red herring into the debate, but I shall tell him exactly why I seek that. It is completely wrong for the chairman of a county council, a civic head who should be above politics, to enter the party political fray. He has been much criticised, I think today, by people from all political parties for so doing. He demeans the dignity of his high office by doing that. I am critical of Clwyd county council's spending policies because I do not believe in spending money on opera houses and castles when for a much lower cost more industrial jobs could be created in the county.

That is why I am so praiseworthy of Delyn borough council. Its activities are in sharp contrast to those of Clwyd county council, which spends millions of pounds and proposes to spend another £2·3 million on a castle that has serious revenue implications for the county because it costs £350,000 a year to run and maintain. That money should be used to buy more school books, to carry out more school building maintenance, to help further with the introduction of the GCSE and to restore the school library stock. I am sorry that in that context I do not have the support of the hon. Member for Merionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Thomas), but I shall say no more because I do not want to harm the chances of Plaid Cymru in my constituency. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for putting up a candidate and he knows exactly why.

It is no wonder that in this year's report to the European regional development fund we were able to say about north-east Wales:

> "Job gains at new manufacturing plants since 1981 more than offset job opportunities lost as a result of plant closures during the same period."

In its 1978 ERDF report Labour talked about the future of the area being uncertain. We have reversed that uncertainty and have given hope.

In his speech to the Cardiff business club on 3 February my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales said:

> "I offer a new measure of success, and that is how many pounds of private sector investment which would not otherwise have taken place, we can secure for each pound of public money that is spent."

By that measure, the Delyn enterprise zone is an outstanding success. The five latest companies to move into the zone have shown their confidence in its future by buying their own plants. We must build on that success with more public sector pump priming to ensure still more private investment in the zone and in the Greenfield business park.

What, however, is Labour's attitude towards enterprise zones, towards this outstandingly successful instrument for job creation? When the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) had responsibility for these matters he told us:

> "We shall have no more of them."

Of course, I am aware that Labour party policy has a habit of mutating. In my speech in last year's Welsh day debate and in my speech during the debate last October on the Government's regional policy, I asked whether the Labour party had changed its policy of open hostility to enterprise zones. I received no response. If Labour is against the concept of enterprise zones, which are a proven success, what are they for?

The shadow Secretary of State for Wales, the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside, earlier this year announced with a great fanfare that the Labour party would set up a series of council-based regional enterprise boards across Wales—more quangos. That was on Monday 5 January. But wait. On Wednesday 7 January, just two days later, the last Labour Secretary of State for Wales, the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris),

[Mr. Raffan]

announced that local councils in Wales should draw up job-creation plans based upon areas larger than their own boundaries, based on travel-to-work areas. He made no mention of regional enterprise boards. "Shock, horror", we thought. "Does the shadow Secretary of State know what the previous Secretary of State is saying?" We did not have to wait long to find out. All was revealed, as it often is to the Opposition's great distress, in the next day's *Western Mail*.

"Views differ on Labour's plan for jobs",

said the headline.

"The Welsh Labour party was in confusion last night . . ."

ran the opening sentence, as if we did not already know. More, much more, was revealed and I quote:

"The Shadow Secretary of State for Wales was authoritatively said to be exceeding party policy in pledging to set up a series of council-based regional enterprise boards across Wales . . . his ideas are rejected by Welsh party leaders as inoperable in Wales . . . "

The next bit sounds very familiar, one might almost say characteristic of the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside. It reads:

"he is said to have taken his ideas from England and applied them to Wales without fully considering that precisely the same work was being done already by the Welsh Development Agency . . . party leaders have been alarmed by his pledges."

That is not exactly the white heat of industrial policy-making. There seems to be a role here for that hon. Gentleman, the clever looking one in the Opposition, whom the Leader of the Opposition now puts in charge of nearly everything—I mean of course the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould). The shadow Secretary of State for Wales is one of the few jobs in the shadow Cabinet that is not being done by the hon. Gentleman, and look what happens—chaos.

The Observer hit the nail on the head yesterday. It is an unbiased newspaper, as I am sure the Labour party would agree. After all, it is almost one of its newspapers. *The Observer* said that the Labour party had

"fallen victim to the oldest delusion of public relations. Carried away by their belief in images . . . they have entirely forgotten that politics is about substance. The electors of Greenwich looked at Mrs. Deirdre Wood"—

this is still *The Observer*; I do not want hon. Members to think that this is me—

"and saw at best a vacuum and at worst a mass of contradictions."

When the electors of Wales look at the Labour party they see exactly the same—at best a vacuum and at worst a mass of contradictions. Red rose images are not enough or, in the words of the old song:

"Wash me in the water
That you washed the colonel's daughter
And I shall be whiter than
The whitewash on the wall."

That is not enough, because the whitewash is peeling and is revealing the cracks and the rot that has set in beneath. A huge chunk of it peeled away at Greenwich and it is rapidly peeling away in Delyn, too.

Mr. Terlezki: And in the rest of Wales.

Mr. Raffan: Yes, and in the rest of Wales, as my hon. Friend reminds me. He will realise, of course, that I am making a strictly constituency speech.

In the words of one senior Labour councillor in Delyn:

"These 'loony Left people' have been taking over the Delyn constituency Labour party."

In the last few months, one Labour councillor after another has stated in the press that they believe that the local Labour party, especially in Flint, is being infiltrated by Militant Tendency. Last December, five moderate, well-respected Labour councillors, whom I also greatly respect, were booted out as candidates for the district elections in May. The present Labour leader on Delyn borough council and a former mayor of Delyn, Councillor Darrell Evans, was booted out. The present mayor of Flint, Councillor Joe Wedge, was also booted out. A former mayor of Flint, Councillor Jack Johnson, Councillor Joe Roberts of Bagillt and Councillor Vernon Parry of Flint have also been booted out. Another Labour councillor, the present mayoress of Flint, Mrs. Rosa Davies, withdrew from the selection battle because of what she called

"the undemocractic and unconstitutional methods of doing things in favour of Left-wing militants and their followers. I mean"

she added,

"Militant Tendency."

Councillor Darrell Evans, the present leader of the Labour group—though not for long—and, as I said, a former mayor of Delyn, has regaled us with details of the kind of democratic procedures that are favoured at Labour party selection meetings. He said:

"I have been at meetings where people have been insulted and physically threatened."

These are not the first councillors to go. Two other moderate councillors — Councillors Ernie Joyce and David Jones—have gone before them.

And within spitting distance of this bloody Labour party civil war lives whom? Yes, the shadow Secretary of State for Wales himself. He lives in Papermill lane, just outside Flint. Has he spoken out? Of course not. He is like the three monkeys rolled into one: hear no Militant, see no Militant, accuse no Militant. He has not the guts to speak out, but others among his colleagues have. The right hon. Member for Bristol, South (Mr. Cox) and the hon. Members for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) and for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) have had the guts to speak out. They have spelt out what is happening in the Labour party. The people of Delyn, too, will spell it out in large numbers on polling day when it comes.

6.52 pm

Mr. Donald Coleman (Neath): I do not intend to take up what has been said by the hon. Member for Delyn (Mr. Raffan). He seems to have an obsession with 11·5 per cent.

We hear a great deal these days about the decay of the inner cities of Britain. My right hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan) gave a graphic description of the decay in the city of Cardiff. We heard him describe the problems that are caused by the older properties in the city. That decay has been portrayed by the commissions that have studied the inner city problem, most notably by the Archbishop of Canterbury's commission. The main thrust of that examination was the Church's mission to the inner cities, but it was inevitable that it would also demonstrate and highlight the decay in those areas. That decay manifests itself in bad housing, in inadequate health and social provision and in poor educational facilities for our children. The commission also highlighted the hopelessness of the dead hand of unemployment that is felt by those who live in those places.

I am sure that the Government do not thank the Archbishop of Canterbury or the members of his commission for showing up the realities of life in the inner cities. If our newly elected Archbishop of Wales were to set up a commission to look at faith in the south Wales valley communities, I suspect that his report would highlight in an equally dramatic way the dire problems that face the valley communities. The decay there manifests itself in bad housing, in inadequate health and social provision, in poor educational facilities and in the hopelessness of unemployment.

The neglect of the south Wales valleys communities has led to the same decay as is to be found in the inner cities. As happens so often on these occasions, the Secretary of State catalogued his Government's achievements. Although they may satisfy him, they do not satisfy us. We see with our own eyes what is really happening. If we are not deceived, those who live in the neglected valleys communities are not deceived, either.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The hon. Gentleman seems to be putting the responsibility for the condition in the valleys entirely on the Government. Does he feel that the Labour party, which has had political control of the valleys for more than half a century and has run almost everything in the valleys, has no responsibility at all for the conditions there?

Mr. Coleman: Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth, I do not place the entire blame on this Administration, but I suggest that before the Secretary of State comes before the House wearing rose-tinted glasses and trying to make us believe that everything in the valleys is OK——

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: I have not.

Mr. Coleman: The right hon. Gentleman has, and he has tried to do so on more than one occasion. I shall make my own speech and develop my own argument.

Those of my hon. Friends and I who represent the south Wales valleys communities are not immune to the complaints of our people about bad housing, almost non-existent transport facilities, decaying school buildings and inadequate health care facilities. The south Wales valleys communities are saying that they are forgotten up here. The Secretary of State should listen to them.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Each of those authorities is Labour-controlled.

Mr. Coleman: The people in the valleys communities have been as badly hit by unemployment as people anywhere else in Britain. Unemployment hurts just as much in the valleys of south Wales as it does in the cities, and in many cases the bitter experience of unemployment has hit the people of south Wales for a much longer period. Therefore, I ask the Secretary of State to humble himself a little and to remember that he has had responsibility for Wales for nearly eight years. It is just not good enough for him to come to the House or to go to the Welsh Grand Committee and read off this, that and the other. We know that things are not happening in the valleys communities, as he appears to think they are.

The right hon. Gentleman refers time and time again to his valleys initiative, but I receive cynical complaints about it. He should go and find out for himself. Money ought to have been allocated for urban aid. This afternoon the right hon. Gentleman told us that the Welsh Office targets specific areas for assistance. However, I have received complaints about insufficient money being provided to carry out remedial work on the dereliction in south Wales valleys areas. The only place in west Glamorgan that has benefited is in my own constituency. I refer to Pontardawe. My hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell) and I do not believe that real value will come from this initiative. In Neath money was refused for housing renewal and for the clearance of tips.

The money that has been spent does not create revenue expenditure for the maintenance of projects. Neither does it cover the decaying schools, sewers, highways or footpaths. The Secretary of State should understand that that is the reality in the valleys of south Wales, not the catalogue thumbed through from time to time whenever he appears at the Dispatch Box or in the Grand Committee.

I shall now deal with another matter of concern to the valleys communities, opencast mining. I raise that matter not as a result of the promptings of any protest or action group, but as a means of highlighting the feelings of the communities that I know, about how opencast mining affects life in those communities. Every one of us in the Chamber should understand that the people in those communities have a considerable dilemma to deal with. They recognise that they live in places where valuable coal is found. They recognise the importance of that coal to the nation's energy needs and to the economy of Britain. They are only too aware that opencast sites are the means of employment in places where employment is not in abundance. That is one side of the dilemma. The other side is the disruption to their lives that opencast operations bring—the dirt, noise and ugliness.

In several parts of my constituency opencast mining has gone on for over 40 years and for most of that time such operations have been embarked upon with not too much concern about how they affect the lives of the people. The National Coal Board has not been the most considerate of neighbours. I shall recount one instance of its lack of consideration.

Some years ago the Coal Board wanted to undertake opencast mining behind the village of Pant-y-ffordd in the Dulais valley. The proposal was to bring the site right to the boundary fences of houses in that small village. We had a public inquiry which resulted in the Coal Board being deterred from doing that. During that inquiry I was challenged by counsel for the Coal Board with the taunt that it was inconsistant of me to complain about unemployment in the valleys and to oppose the board's application for opencast mining. That was rich, coming from the Coal Board at that time, since it was NCB policy, before the early 1960s, to oppose the introduction of any form of industrial activity in valleys such as the Dulais valley lest it attracted labour away from the mining industry.

It is that sort of arrogance that lingers on in the minds of many in the valleys, which fuels opposition to opencast mining operations, even though, in many cases, it is clear that the improvements in the environment after the extraction has taken place have been beneficial.

During a recent Welsh Question Time, we asked how decisions for planning applications for opencast mining were to be proceeded with and dealt with. Opposition Members demand that the Secretary of State uses the same

[Mr. Coleman]

criteria in respect of applications for planning permission for opencast mining in the valleys communities as he does in his own constituency.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: I will.

Mr. Coleman: I am glad to hear the Secretary of State say that, and I hope that all the communities will recognise that and keep the authorities to that point of view because we believe that there must be an end to the ringing of villages by opencast sites, which have been a curse in the past. We demand that there is the closest examination of planning applications by planning authorities. What is more, we believe that the environmental work should begin before mining operations start so that those sites do not become the dirty, noisy eyesores that they have been in the past. There must be a new approach to opencast mining operations. If it is, as it is, a means of securing the nation's energy and economic needs, there must be a recognition that there is a debt to the communities affected which must be paid to them. The rest of the country, which is not affected by those activities, has a responsibility to pay that community charge because the country is benefiting from opencast mining.

The time has come for councils in the communities affected to take a more positive role in those matters. They are statutory bodies. They should be making demands of the National Coal Board and expecting to receive every support in their demands from the other authorities involved, including Her Majesty's Government.

I hope that before the end of the debate we shall have spelt out for us that the Government support those objectives and it will be stated that we shall have a level of opencast mining which is compatible with life in those communities so that there is not simply extraction for the sake of it. There should be a level to which the National Coal Board will be allowed to go, and no further.

The mining valleys of south Wales were the foundation upon which past prosperity was founded. In most cases, the means of producing that prosperity has gone. However, let no one forget that the people who produced that prosperity are still in the valleys communities and it is the job of the Government—soon, I hope, a Labour Government — to protect them and preserve those communities properly.

7.6 pm

Mr. Stefan Terlezki (Cardiff, West): I shall not follow the remarks of the hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Coleman) except to say that, having listened to Labour Members who have spoken, it is evident that the Greenwich by-election has made them nervous and that they do not know whether they are coming or going. They realise that the Labour party in Wales is crumbling. As for the SDP—semi-desperate people—it has not got a cat in hell's chance of winning that seat again when the general election comes.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Terlezki: No, I will not.

I make no apology for speaking about the achievements in Wales that have been brought about by the Welsh Office and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

The Cardiff bay development scheme is likely to attract features such as speciality shopping, sport and restaurant complexes, hotels, an arts centre and an aquarium. That would blend in with existing developments such as the industrial and maritime museum, the South Glamorgan county council headquarters and the Penarth marina. The development corporation has been allocated £45 million in addition to the substantial capital expenditure on urban development grant and through the urban programme. The Government are looking to substantial private sector investment in a development which, over the decade ahead, is likely to produce a total investment of well over £1 billion.

The estimated income from tourists visiting Wales in 1985 was about £600 million. That is proof of the significance of the industry to the Principality. It is calculated that between 80,000 and 90,000 people—8 per cent. of the working population — work in the tourist industry in Wales. We are very proud of that and I, as a former hotelier and caterer, am proud of that. I am closely involved with that section of employment.

The Welsh tourist industry has undoubtedly benefited from the Government's ambitious road programme, which has made the Principality much more accessible. Tourism is also a central part of the rural enterprise initiative and is prominent in many urban renewal projects, such as the proposed Cardiff dockland development, which is designed to make Cardiff one of the most attractive cities in Europe, and the 1992 garden festival in Ebbw Vale.

Since 1970 the Government have invested more than £450 million in renovating old housing in the private sector through grants and housing association rehabilitation schemes. There has also been a capital investment of £270 million in repairing and modernising council houses. The Labour Government spent only £57 million on renovating private sector houses and only £86 million on the public sector housing stock. That shows that Labour's constant allegation that the Government have neglected the housing stock in Wales is without foundation and is a deliberate falsification of the truth.

Mr. D. E. Thomas: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Terlezki: No, I will not.

Houses in Ely and Caurau in my constituency are not 100 years old, as was alleged by the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan). They were built under the Labour Government and under a Labour-controlled city council. They are in disrepair and need urgent repairs. The right hon. Member, who has left the Chamber, should not say that all houses in Cardiff are 100 years old. Why did the Labour Government not provide the necessary capital to repair and renovate houses in my constituency?

There are many examples of successful enveloping schemes, involving the repair and replacement of whole streets of homes in housing action areas, at no cost to occupiers. Block repair grants are paid for single projects, with a financial contribution being made by each householder. By the end of 1986-87 a total of 35 enveloping schemes, covering 3,684 dwellings, should have been started in Wales. That is a highly cost-effective form of repair. Supplementary allocations of £20 million have been made available for such schemes in 1987 and 1988. That will allow for the completion of the present programme and the start of a further 27 schemes under the block repair scheme by the end of 1986-87.

The Government's record of support for housing associations in Wales is equally impressive. Between 1979 and early 1986 the Government had committed £269 million to the movement in Wales, which has led to the building or renovation of 11,700 homes. That record compares favourably with that of the Labour Government under whom only 2,200 homes were built or renovated by housing associations, at a cost of £58 million.

In 1986-87 the net provision for housing associations in Wales has been increased by almost 15 per cent. to £44·7 million. Why did not the Labour Government do likewise? Labour Members tell us how badly the Government are doing, but we have done 100 times better than they did.

The Government's policy on the sale of council houses has been an unqualified success in Wales. More than 55,000 public sector tenants in Wales have bought their own homes since 1979 and about 66 per cent. of homes in the Principality are owner-occupied. I am proud of that. In my constituency, people in Ely, Caurau, Canton, Riverside and Fairwater have bought their houses and turned them into little palaces. I am pleased for them. I hope that more people will buy their own houses. As a former Cardiff city councillor, I remember that when the council was Labour-controlled people were not allowed to buy their own homes. Councillors who owned their own would not let tenants buy their homes. That was hypocrisy.

The Conservative-controlled Cardiff city council has spent, in the last three years, £25 million on housing improvements and £3 million on enveloping schemes. Those are great achievements. I am convinced that at the May elections the ratepayers and taxpayers in Cardiff will remember the good deeds of the council and the care that it takes of its people.

However, I am sorry that more money has not been made available to Smith houses in my constituency which need to be repaired and made habitable. I urge the Secretary of State to ensure that more money is made available so that the occupants of those houses can live in a proper and decent environment.

An article in the *South Wales Echo* a few days ago reported a boom in private house building, which led to starts being made on more than 7,000 homes in Wales last year—the highest level since the Labour Government were voted out of power. Builders said that the 10 per cent. increase on the 1985 level meant an extra 2,000 jobs and firms say that they are optimistic about the new housing market during 1987. Barratts, which opened five new developments in 1986, has plans for another seven this year, including pioneering schemes in Rhondda.

Last year also saw a growth in retirement housing schemes, with local companies such as the Bailey group in Cardiff leading the way. The New Homes Marketing Board said that 9,000 jobs had been created and maintained since 1980, when housing starts were just 4,000 a year. Its chairman, Mr. Don Lewis, said:

"History will recall that time and time again the house building industry has been the barometer of future economic trends, and that is why these figures should be seen as extremely encouraging for the whole Welsh economy."

Like other hon. Members, I am concerned about a second Severn crossing. Approval for a second bridge has been given by the Government and it is estimated that the crossing will cost about £200 million at 1986 prices. The bridge will carry a dual two-lane motorway with much-needed hard shoulders. It will be the largest estuarial crossing in Britain, spanning three miles between the shores.

A second crossing is imperative. It must be provided as soon as possible, because south Wales is an industrialised and expanding area. A second crossing will be used extensively and will encourage more industries and industrialists into the area.

We are no longer at the mercy of the International Monetary Fund in Wales or in the United Kingdom as a whole. We are no longer riddled with political strikes and we are no longer the sick country of Europe. We are now in the first division and we intend to stay there. My message to the people in Wales is loud and clear. They should watch out for the loony Left, the militants, CND, the disarmers, the Labour party and its policy for Wales.

What is the Labour party's policy for Wales? It involves scrapping the Government's trade union reforms, sweeping nationalisation and the re-nationalisation of everything that is now privatised. It involves the total dismantling of Britain's nuclear defences, the nationalisation of Britain's armed services, and the control of the police by local councillors on salaries of £30,000 per councillor. The Labour party will outlaw jury vetting. The Labour party policy involves legalising homosexual acts for 16-year-olds and a vigorous drive to promote homosexual, lesbian and gay rights policies. That is the Labour party's policy for Wales. The Labour party will penalise private firms that have won contracts for providing services formerly carried out by the public sector. Under the Labour party, pensions and life insurance fund money will be directed towards the national investment bank. That is the Labour party's policy for Wales.

I would say further to the people of Wales, if they want higher taxes, do not vote Tory. If they want higher inflation, do not vote Tory. If they want horrendous nationalisation and renationalisation, do not vote Tory. If they want to give power to the trade unions and to the militant barons, do not vote Tory. If they want a defenceless Britain, do not vote Tory. If they want Britain to become another socialist state like the Ukraine, Poland or Czechoslovakia, do not vote Tory. Voting for the Labour party is not tactical voting; it is national suicide.

7.22 pm

Mr. Leo Abse (Torfaen): My right hon. Friend the Member for Cardif, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan) made a valedictory speech. It is not my intention to follow his example. It is true that he will be leaving the House, and so shall I, at the end of this Parliament. Indeed, so will many Tory Members. We shall be leaving voluntarily and they will be leaving involuntarily. I will not follow my right hon. Friend, because I am only too well aware, as he would be if he was in the Chamber and I could prompt his memory, that Prime Ministers have a strange habit, in times of difficulties, of postponing elections. Therefore, he will understand if I do not say my farewells just yet. Rather, I will follow the example of the Secretary of State for Wales who has been his usual polemical, acerbic self. Although I cannot match him in those qualities, perhaps I will be able to match him in his insouciance that I noticed a few weeks ago when he allowed us to discover that a review existed—which he distributed to us—praising the work of the Welsh Development Agency.

[Mr. Leo Abse]

Apparently there had been a detailed scrutiny of the Welsh Development Agency. Of course, as the Secretary of State explained, all that he gave us was a summary. Bowdlerised versions of documents is something for which the right hon. Gentleman has a particular penchant. Usually, however, he is able at least to give some reason, either commercial or judicial, why a whole report cannot be published. On this occasion he was completely brazen and more, gave no reason, and said that the report was just part of the Government's programme for improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the WDA.

No suggestion was made that the catalyst or the report——

Mr. Nicholas Edwards *rose*——

Mr. Abse: The Secretary of State need not bother to interpose because I do not intend to give way. I will make my speech and the Minister will give a reply.

The Secretary of State presented the report as if it was some general review. We would be ingenuous if we did not realise that the real catalyst for much of the content of the review was the appalling, miserable scandal of the Parrot Corporation. That matter still remains completely unresolved and is still in the air.

The report states quite clearly in its synoptic account, despite the headline, that the review praises the WDA's work, and that it recommends:

"Ways in which the WDA could achieve improvements in the planning and execution of its function."

However, the officials concluded:

"there is scope for further efficiency and economy and have made appropriate recommendations."

There is little sign of those recommendations in the report.

Towards the end of the report some of the consequences of the Parrot scandal are revealed. It becomes clear how seriously the matter has developed. The report states:

"The Welsh Office is the sponsor department for the WDA. Its role is to ensure maintenance of high standards of management and financial control."

It must be said that for more than a year the Secretary of State has been trying to distance himself from his firm responsibilities for the Welsh Development Agency. The report continues:

"It is recommended that the Welsh Office and the Agency agree—"

in words that are worthy of the Secretary to the Cabinet—

"a taut profile of anticipated monthly spend at the beginning of each financial year and that the WDA provide explanations of any in-year variations with its monthly expenditure returns. Those returns ought also to include information on the commitments entered into by the Agency in the previous month. The Agency's reporting of its investment expenditure should be improved and it is recommended that funds for investment are not released by the Welsh Office until the required information is provided."

That "taut profile" means that the Welsh Office in future does not release a penny until it is sure into whose pocket that money is going. As the report states, there is a need to intensify monitoring. That report gives us only the creaking of the stable door long after the horses have bolted.

The blunt fact is that the Secretary of State failed in the role that the report rightly says falls upon him. For years he permitted the WDA to carry on with a reckless disregard of the commercial and financial disciplines which any large company would insist were essential. The inheritance of the shambles has fallen upon the new executives who are evidently making valiant and considerable efforts to create a discipline now where none previously existed.

If disciplines had been imposed and if genuine monitoring had taken place, it would never have been possible for more than £2·5 million, given as a soft loan from the European Community and intended to be used as working capital in the Parrot factory in my constituency, to have ended up effectively frozen in an American bank earning money for that bank and doubtless, by way of backhanders, for all who had conspired and colluded in that mafia-like transaction. The House must consider what the Secretary of State's culpable negligence and subsequent efforts to obfuscate the scandal has cost and is costing the taxpayer.

Recently, I asked the Secretary of State about the total cost to public funds of each current job at the Parrot factory in Cwmbran new town. He replied blandly that it was about £6,900 per person. Such a reply is as impudent as it is misleading. It is based upon the direct financial assistance from the Welsh Office and rent concessions made for the factory. It completely excludes the £1·7 million which the Secretary of State supposed would be a so-called commercial investment, but from which, unhappily, there has been not a single penny of return. It excludes the millions that came from Europe. It fails to make a contingency provision for a £13 million claim being made against the agency in the American courts by the former managing director of Parrot, Frank Peters, even as it does not take into account a substantial claim, against the corporation, as part of the backwash of the murky events, by the German sales manager at Munich. It makes no provision for a separate action in this country by Mr. Peters, which is due to start in June.

The reply totally ignores the cost to public funds of the massive police trawl, which has led the police to spend weeks in Chicago. It totally ignores the cost of the lawyers in the office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, not to mention the heavy legal costs incurred in defending the American action. It does not include the loss to the taxpayer caused by the approval of a tax-reducing element whereby the huge salaries given to Peters and other directors and employees were paid into a United States-based corporation as fees for consultancy services to Parrot.

With a few more than 100 jobs created in my constituency, we have witnessed a first for the Secretary of State for Wales, for this is the most expensive job-creation scheme in Europe. One of the most disagreeable aspects of the affair is the Secretary of State's attempt to evade his personal responsibility by throwing a cloak of secrecy over the squalid bungling. When the project was mooted, the Secretary of State was ready to claim all the praise for what has proved to be an ill—considered initiative. As the *Financial Times* said bluntly, recalling the occasion when the factory was opened:

"As champagne corks popped and hundreds of guests enjoyed a fine lunch in a sun-baked marquee, the royal opening appeared to put a final seal of approval on the harnessing of US technological know-how and management, and a partnership between UK public and private sector finance."

I did not attend that opening, but I believe the Secretary of State did——

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: No.

Mr. Abse: Perhaps he did not, but I have no doubt that he was well represented. I did not attend, even though it was in my constituency, because the alarm bells were ringing for me. Within two months, the director who had proudly shown the Duke of Kent round the new facility found the hospitality being returned by Her Majesty's Government in a cell at Chelsea police station.

It is especially disagreeable that we had to force an explanation out of the Secretary of State. The Opposition had to force him to mount an inquiry, but what a limited inquiry it was. He certainly intended that his personal responsibility could not be called into question, and when the report was issued it was a bowdlerised version hiding behind the idea that there were legal and commercial reasons for not publishing the entire report.

Recently, I have been pressing—not for the first time—the Attorney-General to take some action. About a week ago, he replied:

"I am advised by the Director of Public Prosecutions that police inquiries into the affairs of the Parrot Corporation have been completed and a decision has been made regarding the institution of criminal proceedings. It would, however, not be in the interests of justice were I to divulge publicly any further information regarding this matter at this stage." — [*Official Report*, 24 February 1987; Vol. 111, c. 6.]

That is a cabalistic reply. We still do not know whether proceedings will be started, whether the report has been published or whether an attempt will be made to extradite Peters. All that we know from the HTV interview—HTV has probed well into the matter—is that Peters has said that, if his expenses are paid, he will return to Wales. I hope that the Secretary of State is passing that information to the Attorney-General. I hope, too, that he is not being coy, as he appears to have been, about asking the Director of Public Prosecutions to expedite matters. Is the Secretary of State playing for touch? Does he not want the scandal revealed before the general election?

The attempts to enforce silence continue. In recent days, the WDA, no doubt with the approval of the Secretary of State, sought an injunction against the BBC to prevent the broadcasting of Peters' allegations against the corporation. It is attempting to suppress his claim that the WDA was guilty of fraudulent misrepresentation in the prospectus that it issued to induce investors in the City to put money into the Parrot Corporation. He claims that the true conditions imposed by the Community soft loan were deliberately concealed and misrepresented. I have met Peters only once—in the autumn of 1985—and I would not accept his bare word for such a grave allegation. I left him with a far different assessment of him from that of the Secretary of State, who was foolish enough to put millions of pounds of public money in his care. Without presuming to judge whether Peters is guilty of criminal conduct, I can say that I would not have entered into a partnership with him to run an ice cream stall.

My experience as a solicitor who has prosecuted and defended criminals is that when thieves fall out they make allegations against each other that are often true. The relevant question that I put is this: if Peters' allegation is false, why, when the unavailability of the European millions became apparent and when the threat of writs from the institutions claiming that at the very least they had been misled was descending, did the Secretary of State tumble over himself to beg yet more public money from the Treasury for the Parrot Corporation? Was it because of his concern for some jobs in my constituency or was it because he and his officials were afraid of the consequences — certainly civil and perhaps criminal — that could arise if the threatening City institutions took action?

Many other questions must be asked which remain unanswered. What was the sinister role of Mr. Neil Taylor, one moment a member of the Welsh Development Agency's investment staff while the Parrot deal was being stitched together, and the next moment a so-called independent financial consultant working for Parrot? Who approved of that in the WDA and why? Did the Secretary of State inform himself of the clogs in the service contracts of his staff? Did he approve of such ambiguous mobility? What did Neil Taylor's superior at the Welsh Development Agency, Allan Sutton, know of that extraordinary transaction? What was the real role of Mr. Faulkner of the Development Capital Group? Why was he used by the WDA, and did he obtain £35,000 for becoming involved in what the report described blandly as an "unusual transaction"? Was the transaction well rehearsed at a Parrot board meeting in February 1984, when, among others, Mr. Shakespeare of the WDA was present?

Those involved in this murky transaction—I do not believe that only one person is responsible—almost got away with their scheme. But the financial projections prepared in late 1983 were absurdly over-optimistic. The fall in the world market price for flexible diskettes, the poor performance of the pound against the dollar, the increasing costs of capital equipment, the delay in the completion of the Cwmbran factory by the WDA and the late funding by the WDA of £300,000 of its equity meant that the company ran out of working capital by the summer of 1985, and the conspiracy was exposed. The conspiracy that had been hatched fell apart, and it was revealed that the equivalent of the European Community funds were frozen in the American bank. None of that could have come about if the Secretary of State had insisted long before now, as was his duty, upon proper financial controls at the WDA.

With more than 6,000 unemployed people in my constituency, the overriding concern must be that the past fiasco is not followed by collapse but at least by some success. That must be the concern. Are the new directors, acting as accountants, lacking the imaginative, technological skills that are needed to expand the company operating in the highly competitive high-tech field? Will they act to build up a credibility that has been damaged? Certainly, I have misgivings when I hear the treatment now being meted out to Dr. Langler, the man recruited by the original directors to promote German and Austrian sales. I gained the firm impression that he has been made a victim of the deviousness that informed the former board at Cwmbran. If confidence is to be restored in Parrot's integrity, I hope that Mr. Gareth Luke, the present financial director, will have the wisdom to handle the Langler matter in a way that will not inflict further litigation costs upon Parrot and, hence, indirectly upon the taxpayer.

We have heard speeches from my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth. Their speeches indicted the Government because of their lack of concern. My speech is an indictment of their lack of efficiency. The conjuction between their lack of concern and their inefficiency has led to the present situation in Wales where there are 200,000 unemployed, our housing

[Mr. Abse]

is in a disgraceful state and our hospitals are run-down. It will not be long before the Government get their due reward from the electorate.

7.41 pm

Sir Anthony Meyer (Clwyd, North-West): The speech of the hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Abse) reminded me of "Finnegan's Wake". Had it not been so obscure, I am sure that it would have been obscene. The best commentary that I can make on it relates to the chap who threatened to publish a key to "Finnegan's Wake" and was told that that book wanted not so much a key as a lock.

I wish to make two specific points and then a general comment about the Government's policies. First, I wish to say a word about the Bodelwyddan castle project, against which my hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (Mr. Raffan) has argued often and passionately. I make no complaint about the matter, although Bodelwyddan castle is wholly within my constituency. It will do Clwyd county council no harm to have my hon. Friend snapping at its heels and urging it to be more cost conscious than it sometimes is. The project is valuable to the economy and to job prospects in north Clwyd and could serve as a major tourist attraction all the year round, bringing in the kind of tourists whom we need to attract and raising the tone of the tourist industry in the area. Private and public money spent on supporting the arts is money well spent, even in comparison with other such deserving causes as industry or social welfare. The arts is one field in which we are still world leaders. Money spent on the arts is money spent on backing success. That success has a spin-off effect which benefits many other activities both locally and nationally. By all means let my hon. Friend carry on with his campaign, for I am by no means satisfied that Clwyd's management of the project is as economic as it could be, but I shall continue to give it my backing.

My second point, which will perhaps be more controversial for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, concerns the all-Wales strategy for mental handicap and illness. I can understand the thinking behind the new policy of getting everyone possible out of institutions and into the community, but a niggling suspicion is beginning to form in my mind that we are all going along just a little too unquestioningly with a policy that is fashionable among psychiatrists but may not have been fully thought through and could turn out to be as dangerously mistaken as the wholesale clearance of so-called slum areas and the construction of residential tower blocks in their place. The visible fruits of the policy at present are that the magnificently sited and well-built North Wales hospital at Denbigh may be closed, with dramatic consequences for employment in Denbigh. I apologise to my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Harvey) for straying over his border, but many of my constituents also work there.

Of more direct concern to me is the fact that all too many former patients will land up in less than ideal accommodation in Rhyl—very probably in the west end of Rhyl — which already faces a crisis from the uncontrolled spread of multi-occupation and where the local authority's powers of inspection, even for such vital purposes as fire precautions, are simply not adequate. I am bound to say that my experience of visiting even some of the better equipped and supervised private homes into which mentally handicapped patients have been discharged from institutions has sometimes been less than cheery. I shudder to think of what the arrival of dozens of ex-Denbigh patients in the so-called flatlets of west Rhyl will do. A great deal more thought needs to be given to the availability of suitable and appropriately supervised accommodation for the supposed beneficiaries of the policy of dispersal.

On a more general theme, Labour Members — clutching at straws like the drowning men that they are — would have us believe that there has been steady economic decline in Wales and that social services are in ruins. It is true that there is a worrying situation in our schools, due to the form of industrial action taken by the teachers' unions to press their pay claims and enthusiastically supported by the Labour party. I am delighted that my party intends to press on further and faster with restrictions on the power of trade union bosses to bully their own members and the rest of us.

In the social services generally, however, there has been steady progress, as promised by the Government when they first came to power in 1979, although progress in this field always falls short of expectations. I have before me the health and social security services statistics for Wales. One may open the document at random and find on every page and in every column statistical evidence of steady, sometimes dramatic expansion of the health and social services in Wales under the present Government.

What of the Government's general economic policies in Wales over the past seven years? In Wales, as in the rest of the United Kingdom, health and social services policies have been harsh and, sometimes, unfeeling. When the Conservatives came to power in 1979, British industry, despite the all too short lived efforts of my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) to get it to modernise, was still heavily over-manned and riddled with restrictive working practices that were enthusiastically maintained by workers and management alike. Much has been done during the past seven years to put this right, although much still remains to be done.

Even bearing in mind what has been done so far, however, which has led to Llanwern Steel, for example, being competitive with just about any steelworks in the world, the cost in terms of unemployment, loss of hope and social division has been terrible. If one has a gangrenous limb, it has to be amputated. That is the only way to save life, but it is no use pretending that the cost is not appalling. One must make the best of it. In Wales, the cost of the ruthless process of modernisation has been exceptionally high because Wales was exceptionally dependent on coal and steel, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State pointed out in his superb opening speech. Both were public sector industries and both were riddled with restrictive practices and overmanning, largely because they were public sector industries. Inevitably, old jobs were lost a great deal faster than new jobs could come in.

The social consequences for Wales have been grave. That they were not catastrophic is due in no small measure to the efficacy, determination and adaptability of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. As this may well be his last appearance at a Welsh affairs debate, it is right that public tribute should be paid to his immense achievement. I do not think that I do him any wrong if I say that he took

office as a pretty convinced free market man, but that he was swift to perceive the need to temper the wind to the shorn lamb and to fight for Wales to have far more than its fair share of help to bring in the jobs to replace those lost by modernisation and to ensure that the social services in Wales were sufficiently supported to stand the shock thrown on them by the huge upheaval of modernisation.

The loss of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be a blow to the Government, to the Conservative party and to Wales. At the risk of rushing in where angels fear to tread, I believe that the next Secretary of State must be a Welsh Member elected for a Welsh constituency and that on both counts my hon. Friend the Member for Conwy (Mr. Roberts) fully fills the Bill. I hope that he will get the job. I hope still more that my saying so will not spoil his chances. It could be said that he and I belong to opposite wings of the Conservative party, but like any well-constructed bird it needs two wings if it is to fly straight. If my hon. Friend gets the job, as I hope that he will, he will need to learn, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was so quick to do, that a Conservative Government dare not concern themselves solely with enabling the successful to get ahead and create wealth without hindrance, but that something must be done to help those who get left behind. That was a lesson of which the old-fashioned Conservative party was ever mindful — perhaps excessively mindful — and, whatever the economic imperatives, we dare not forget it now.

7.51 pm

Mr. D. E. Thomas (Merionnydd Nant Conwy): The hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer) has been a consistent critic of the Government's policies. He has repeated those criticisms today, although, like all critics, now that a general election is coming, he has tempered his comments with some praise. Nevertheless, his political antecedents show clearly that his support lies with the more humane type of Conservatism—of which there are still some representatives on the Conservative Back Benches, if not on the Front Bench. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman's endorsement of my colleague the hon. Member for Conwy (Mr. Roberts) as the next Secretary of State will do harm or good, but when I say that I remember the hon. Member for Conwy in the days before he was a Right-wing Conservative his chances may be irreparably damaged.

Whatever may be the outcome of the next general election—I do not wish to talk about the Greenwich factor or any other factor—we have heard two major speeches today. One came from the retiring Secretary of State, the other from the retiring former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan), and both speeches matched the occasion. In their different ways, both were speeches about the state of the nation. I shall try to follow their example, although I do not hope to emulate the quality of the speech made by the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth.

The right hon. Gentleman, in a constituency speech, gave us a vision of what the representative work of any Member of Parliament must be about. He conveyed graphically the plight of his constituents and their housing problems. I should like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to him for his work in the House as a representative, for his stance and for the way in which he kept his word to those of us who supported the Labour Government in 1978-79. Many of my constituents are to this day grateful to the right hon. Gentleman, just as they are grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, who as Minister of State, Department of Employment, in the last Labour Government played a leading role in ensuring compensation for people who suffered from industrial disease. That example demonstrates the compassion with which we have come to associate the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth, although I may disagree with what he says about defence policy.

I have said privately, so I may as well say it publicly, that I recognise the Secretary of State as the longest and in many ways the most effective and interventionist holder of his office. That is not necessarily a tribute to him as I do not agree with the form of his intervention. He has tried to present his vision of the modernisation of Wales, and he will not be surprised to hear that I disagree with many aspects of that vision. He has stressed the gains that have been made during that modernisation. I want to stress the costs in human and community terms, as did the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West. I have in mind the cost to the community of the long and bitter struggle in the coal mining industry to which many Opposition Members, leaders in the mining industry and community leaders devoted themselves. It was a struggle which showed the courage of the Welsh people in the face of oppression from the Coal Board, its management and the Government. That was the unacceptable face of the Secretary of State's tenure of office.

The Secretary of State has stressed the gains of modernisation in terms of new jobs, but he has failed to remind us of the losses. We experienced a 17 per cent. job loss from June 1979 to June 1986, we suffered 36 per cent. job losses in manufacturing, and gross domestic product per head in Wales has remained at 88 per cent. of the United Kingdom average. He might argue that that level is increasing, but it is increasing from an extremely low base. Public sector spending on research and development, especially scientific research, has remained abysmally low. The figures that have emerged from parliamentary questions that I have tabled show that only 2·5 per cent. of United Kingdom scientific research is attributable to Wales. Whether it be employment, income per head or scientific spending, there is a lack of strategy for revitalising the Welsh economy. Such a strategy must take into account the key industrial sectors, including agriculture, which has suffered from a lack of representation under the Conservatives.

The Secretary of State told us about crucial decisions on agriculture policy that are being made in the European Community this week. Not once has he seen fit to represent Wales as its agriculture Minister at that key decision making. If we have the disadvantage of another Tory Government, and the hon. Member for Conwy succeeds the right hon. Gentleman as Secretary of State, I hope that he agrees that there must be Welsh representation in the Community if we are to ensure that our agriculture is adequately represented. I know that my colleagues in the Liberal party agree that there should be an immediate and substantial increase in the suckler cow premium. We also need increased headage payments in less-favoured areas and the Government should give their likely reaction to the continuing effect of Chernobyl on Welsh sheep. I have the misfortune to represent more irradiated sheep than any other hon. Member, and the farmers whose livelihoods are directly affected. There ought to have been much quicker action. The Government

[Mr. D. E. Thomas]

must now respond to what a radiation expert at University College Wales, Bangor has said about the possible need to shift soil in the hills. That would seem an impossible task. It would be the most massive derelict land clearance scheme in Wales if it happened. The Government must inform farmers of their prognostications for the worst incidence of caesium radiation on the hills.

Agriculture is not the only industry in which we need a strategy. We need an energy policy and strategies for steel, fabrication industries and engineering related to steel and coal. We look to the new sectors of high technology and micro-electronics and to the data storage industry, which is a major growth area in Wales, and also to the service industries that bring in income, particularly tourism. I hope that the Select Committee, when it comes to report on the subject, will initiate a new debate because it is high time that in this sector Wales was able to project itself directly overseas.

What is needed is an integrated approach to the Welsh economy, where growth in the various sectors is planned. The planning of development centres and of the so-called third sector of the economy, which includes new industries is missing. I endorse what the Secretary of State said about the Rank Hovis McDougall bid for Avana. We do not want to lose decision-making and investment centres, and in particular we do not want to lose from Wales control of capital. The Avana argument is a sign of what has happened so often in the Welsh economy, when centres of capital and decision making are outside Wales and we have suffered from job losses.

There is also the problem of lack of research and development in new projects. A recent constituency example is ICI bringing about redundancies. A major reason for not putting in reinvestment has been a lack of new products, because there has been no research and development or scientific innovation on that site. That is clearly part of the economic failing in Wales.

We look to the growth of the third sector of these indigenous industries, of small businesses, of the self-employed sector and of co-operative enterprises. I agree with the Government's rhetoric — although not with their way of practising it—about the need to encourage an enterprise culture. Any culture that is not enterprising cannot survive. It gives me much pleasure to see, in north Wales and the Gwynedd area in particular, the way in which there is enterprise, both culturally and progressively in terms of development of the media. The Government's investment in S4C has brought about not only far more Welsh programming, and an internationally recognised film industry, but real jobs in culture in Wales.

There are reasons for a lack of coherent economic strategy. One is that the government of Wales is not organised in a way that lends itself to the future model of democracy. We are labouring with institutions that were created in the early 1960s for executive decision making in Wales, but have not caught up with the situation in the 1980s. I know that the hon. Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Grist) will say that I am raising the spectre of devolution, and I am. The issue of the national government of Wales and its democratic and bureaucratic nature is one to which we must continually return, because it is the essence of the problem of how one organises the modern economy. Does one do it by diktat from a Cabinet Minister operating through quangos or through democratically elected representatives coming together and agreeing on a strategy?

I ask the people of Wales, through the House, how long the present system of governing Wales can continue. We have had a Welsh Office since 1964. The Secretary of State has to handle spending of £3 billion, there is a staff of over 3,000 civil servants and more than 1,200 people are selected and nominated for various quangos and bodies. This is the nature of Welsh government. We have elected government for communities, districts, boroughs and at county level, but we have a massive structure of non-elected government at the Cardiff or Welsh level.

It is not enough for hon. Members to say that we have a Welsh affairs debate once a year, we have a Welsh Grand Committee and a Welsh Select Committee. The scale of the Welsh Office is such that accountability cannot be possible through the traditional channels of the Westminster Parliament. Many of the criticisms of housing policy, the economy and aspects of the WDA are about accountability and how people can scrutinise what Government are doing and how policy is devised. The present system of administration by the Welsh Office with three Tory Ministers, which includes the hon. Member for Conwy, is hardly an effective way to control a £3 billion budget and 3,000 civil servants.

Mr. Grist: Does the hon. Gentleman remember the St. David's day vote in 1979 when the Welsh people overwhelmingly rejected devolution? Does he agree with those who nevertheless have said that devolution should be foisted on the Welsh people next time round without asking their opinion?

Mr. Thomas: I have a dim recollection of 1979 and of the devolution vote. I do not believe in foisting anything on anyone. Any changes in the government of Wales should be subject to ratification by the Welsh people. One way would be through the opportunity for people to vote at a general election for the parties that have this as part of their programme.

Mr. Roy Hughes: Does the hon. Gentleman recall how the Government supported by the hon. Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Grist) voted for taking Britain into the Common Market without the consent of the British people?

Mr. Thomas: I have a dimmer recollection of that event. Democracy cuts both ways. I want to stress the argument for elected democracy as part of the modernisation of Wales—the vision of the Secretary of State.

It is not acceptable for "quangocracy" to continue. Wales can be summarised as a country with a bureaucracy run by a quangocracy, with little or no direct democracy. That has to change and it will in the coming years, because whatever one may think of opinion polls—we are all subject to the Greenwich factor during political campaigns —recent opinion polls have shown majority support for some form of elected body for Wales. Public bodies that are accountable to the Welsh Office range from the Welsh Development Agency to the national museum. Those for which the Secretary of State has responsibility for making appointments range alphabetically from the agricultural dwelling house advisory committees through the place names advisory committee to the Welsh water authority. Those bodies to which the Secretary of State makes

minority appointments range from the Audit Commission to the independent scientific committee on smoking and health, to the veterinary products committee. There are nominated bodies that take action in Wales but to which the Secretary of State has no responsibility for appointing members. All these nominated bodies should become accountable to the people of Wales.

That is the key to the argument. If we are to have a modern economy, it must be operated democratically. If we are to have a tolerant and bi-cultural society in Wales, the opportunity must be given at the all-Wales level for policies to be determined and for tension to be resolved democratically. If we are to have all-Wales strategies in health and personal social services and housing, those strategies should be democratically agreed at the all-Wales level and should not be imposed by nominated persons or by the Secretary of State.

The period of the Welsh Office has been important in the growth of government in Wales. We now have a Welsh state. It is there in existence and visible. Its architecture dominates the centre of Cardiff. It is part of a complex of buildings in the centre of town. However, the Welsh state does not have an elected component. It is a state without an elected Government. I firmly believe that, as we enter the late 1980s, with the deepening crisis in the Welsh economy and in Britain as a whole, the demand for national status for Wales and control over the state of Wales will continue to expand.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. If speeches do not exceed 10 minutes, all those who are seeking to catch my eye will have a chance to take part before the Front Bench spokesmen start to wind up.

8.9 pm

Mr. Gwilym Jones (Cardiff, North): If I may, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall refer initially to a local subject, which I might describe as the relentless march of concrete as our cities expand. Every week hon. Members return to their constituencies. When I arrive home on a Thursday evening or a Friday morning, I reach Cardiff on Eastern avenue and then leave that avenue to go up to my part of my constituency. I join St. Mellons road, which still manages to be something of an old country lane, and a spendid panorama spreads out in front of me. If it is at night, I see the lights in the whole of Cardiff, running down to the Bristol channel and the view that I would have in daytime on a Friday goes right over the Bristol channel to the west of England.

However, I think of the south Glamorgan structure plan and of the North Pentwyn plan which is an amendment to that structure plan. It would cover that point with new housing and a massive shopping development that would go far towards imperilling the whole of the city centre's shopping development, and with new roads, including a motorway link. I regret that not just because of the view but because that wide expanse of pleasant greenery will be concreted over.

A mile or so further on there is a similar situation where the Land Authority for Wales has built up not insignificant land holdings and is now coming forward with proposals for housing development, just like any other property developer, on the pretext of the circular issued by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State about the need for executive homes. However, I wonder whether it is appropriate for the Land Authority for Wales to act as a property developer instead of as a form of catalyst for bringing about more quickly that which is largely wanted by everyone.

However, that is not the example in Cardiff, North where, there is substantial opposition to what the land authority wants to do. I know of three developments that are already taking place on existing housing sites. On one development at Thornhill, the price of £96,000 per house has been quoted. On another development at Lisvane the starting price of houses is £105,000. On a third site we have no idea what the price will be per house, but it would not be unrealistic to estimate that it will be £200,000.

Does that not represent a sufficiency of executive homes in that part of my constituency? Surely there comes a time to say "Enough is enough". After all, Cardiff has physical limitations. We have the mountains to the north and the sea to the south. Therefore, we inevitably have barriers. Are we to make another decision before we concrete over everything between the mountains and the sea?

I was heartened to read that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State had addressed a conference this weekend on the future use of agricultural land. I congratulate him on a particular paragraph in which he referred to the south Cardiff redevelopment and stated:

> "One of my aims in pressing ahead with our major redevelopment in South Cardiff is because I believe that that will help to ease the pressure on green land in the Vale of Glamorgan and around Cardiff."

Despite the statistics that can always be brought out to demonstrate an endless need for housing land, I believe that that answer is preferable, because in the interests of the quality of life there comes a time to call a halt. We should, instead, encourage the investors who wish to build on that green land to consider some of the other housing that is not receiving investment at present, for example, some of the housing to which my neighbour the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan) so rightly referred earlier. I hope that my right hon. Friend can respond in the way in which he spoke at the weekend when he comes to adjudicate on South Glamorgan county council's North Pentwyn plan, and in any involvement that he might have in the proposal by the Land Authority for Wales.

Many of the important features of Wales have been touched upon in the debate and earlier at Question Time. I noted that at Question Time we went through a variety of subjects, including unemployment, new jobs, Government assistance, youth training scheme, the job training scheme, housing spending and enterprise zones. All those subjects were rightly raised. However, I venture to suggest that an impartial observer would judge that there is a sharp difference between the way in which such questions are handled by Conservative Members and the way in which they are handled by the Opposition. A wholly negative approach was shown to each and all of those questions by Opposition Members.

When can any of us remember not having seen identical questions tabled time after time by the hon. Members for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) and for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes)? It is always the same question despite the futility of it because no right hon. or hon. Member needs reminding that unemployment is still too high. Nonetheless, there are some heartening signs in the trends

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in unemployment. As my right hon. Friend said earlier, since we last had the opportunity to debate Welsh affairs there has been a worthwhile reduction of 13,500 in that unemployment figure. Likewise, the seasonally adjusted figure has fallen in nine of the past 10 months. I am sure that we would all straight away say that that was not good enough. However, that is a far better response to make than the one from Opposition Members of "fiddled figures", which is the highest intellectual comment from those who do not care about that matter but merely want higher figures in the vain belief that somehow that will improve their political chances.

It is said that nothing succeeds like success but, in turn, surely nothing fails like failure. We should be doing everything possible to capitalise in every way on our successes. There was an interesting comment on the business page of the *Western Mail* this morning, which stated that Wales is doing better than Scotland at achieving grant money. That came out in a comment made by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar). Of course, it did not come out as a positive comment on Wales, but as another negative, whining and carping comment about Scotland. I congratulate the *Western Mail* on reprinting it so that it could be read in Wales.

The spirit of our country is so important. In his speech, my right hon. Friend contrasted the quality and length of our debate today in relation to the performance of the Welsh National Opera company on Saturday night. However, I shall bask somewhat in the reflected glory of the concert that I attended last night at St. David's hall. That magnificent St. David's day concert from St. David's hall had the first-class BBC Welsh symphony orchestra, the outstanding singing of Stuart Burrows and Eirian James, not to mention the Pendyrus male voice choir and the children of the east Glamorgan schools. The second half of that most excellent concert went out live on S4C and recorded highlights were shown on BBC Wales. All in all, it was a magnificent evening which showed that the best spirits of Welsh culture have never been better. The fact that it was shown on television was surely a wonderful advertisement for the capital city and for Wales.

After the concert was over, as audiences will, we discussed the concert and other aspects. As many people were present whom I might describe as being in public life or in the business community, our conversation turned to our attitudes towards business prospects and the prospects for our Welsh economy. Once again, those conversations confirmed to me that the view held by such people is the same as all the expert forecasts that are now emerging—of the real confidence that we can feel as we look forward.

One of the best comments that I have heard in the last few days came from Mr. Geoffrey Rich, the editor of the *South Wales Echo*—dare I describe him as a cynical source—who, in conversation, said to me, "Cardiff is cocky now, but cocky in the best and nicest possible way."

The way that we approach things is most important. In Cardiff, we are truly a city that is on the move and, as the capital city, we are and can be the flagship for Wales on the move. Such rightness of attitude is necessary.

What is happening in Cardiff and south Wales comes about almost entirely because of the Conservative party's determination. The present changed face of the city centre—St. David's centre, St. David's hall, the Holiday Inn and the ice skating rink—came about because of the determination of Conservative Cardiff city council. Yet another development in the past few weeks has been given the go-ahead—the new world trade centre. That is another tremendous contribution towards Cardiff's growth. Not just the city council in Cardiff is making a contribution. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made a substantial commitment to the redevelopment of south Cardiff. It is amazing that we have a Secretary of State who is so formidable in making sure that that project, like so many others in Wales, goes ahead.

We heard an excellent speech from the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth. He said, while electioneering, that he was making a constituency speech. He was comparatively lukewarm about that major development, which will be almost entirely in his constituency. We should compare his commitment with that of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Wales has never had a stronger Secretary of State or one who has fought harder for all parts of Wales. He has fought hard for the south Cardiff redevelopment. But there is great cause for alarm. If we were to have a Secretary of State from the Labour Benches after an initial approach towards public spending of break the bank, which was exactly the line that the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) put around Wales when he was a junior Minister at the Welsh Office, that approach would soon tail off. At best, the money would be siphoned off to pet projects. I do not think that I am scaremongering in any way if I say that in one way or another the lid would come slamming down. Under a Labour Government there would be no south Cardiff redevelopment, no second crossing to match the present bridge and no Severn barrage. It is clear that the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside will not be the next Secretary of State for Wales. There is substantial room to doubt that he will be even the shadow Secretary of State in the next Parliament. It may be left to the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) to take on that role because at least he seems to have the courage to tackle the extremists in his own party.

There is yet a grim prospect about having a Secretary of State from the Opposition Benches. It comes from the fraudulent concept of a hung or balanced Parliament. It is fraudulent because there is no such thing. It means a minority Labour Government supported by their fellow-travellers in the Liberal party. Already around the watering-holes in the House Labour Members of Parliament are talking about doing a deal with the Liberals. Often they add—provided that they do not have to do any deals with the renegade Social Democratic party. Little wonder. I see that Mr. Neville Sandelson, a former Labour Member and a founder member of the SDP, is currently running a campaign within the SDP describing the Liberal allies as unpredictable, untrustworthy and on the make. However, surely that problem could be overcome, and in a hung Parliament that unholy alliance would hang together.

Mr. Best: My hon. Friend will have seen the news that the former Labour Member of Parliament and then SDP Member of Parliament, Mr. John Horam, recently joined the Conservative party. My hon. Friend may not be aware that my former SDP opponent in my constituency has also joined the Conservative party.

Mr. Jones: I am most pleased to hear that. It shows that there are some men of principle left in the alliance. They now recognise that the only prospect is to join the Conservative party.

The alliance's latest slogan in the attempt to relaunch the party is, "We are going for gold." What better sums up a political grouping of egocentric politicians who are desperately frantic to get their fingers on the levers of power? What would be the result of another Lib-Lab Government? The same old, tired, failed policies. We have the price tag of expenditure—£28 billion. The project is built around artificial jobs, with overmanning in local councils and in nationalised industries. However, I notice that even the plans are not working out because the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside has been warning that local councils are not ready and are not doing what is necessary to create that artificial overmanning. I should imagine that by now the hon. Gentleman is getting fed up with Scottish Labour Members of Parliament interfering in Welsh affairs. The hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) was in Cardiff recently to explain that manufacturing jobs play little part in Labour's programme. That was confirmed by the Wales TUC.

None the less, we know what the cost will be—high taxation and high borrowing, which will push up interest rates, with the obvious consequences for mortgage rates and effects on the family budget. The various Opposition parties also intend to attack mortgage interest relief. The consequence will be an increase in unemployment and a decrease in real jobs. We shall be back to cuts in the National Health Service and the ultimate approach to the International Monetary Fund to be bailed out.

The Government's job still has to be done, with the essential objectives of continuing with the economic regeneration of our country and of maintaining at the top of the agenda the unacceptably high level of unemployment. While there are various forecasts, which are increasingly bullish and are now serving to confirm original forecasts, it is fair to say that there are qualifications in many of those forecasts. One became apparent when Welsh Conservative Back Benchers had a meeting with the Institute of Directors last week. The institute made a point that was repeated by the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Thomas), that Wales does not have enough of an enterprise culture. As the hon. Gentleman so correctly described it, without an enterprise culture, how can a culture progress, develop and reach the desired level?

We keep coming back to the matter of having the right attitude and the right spirit. Deipite the apparent movement in moderation by the hon. Member for Merionnydd Nant Conwy, that necessary attitude and spirit are missing from Opposition Benches. Instead, the Government have the policies of realism and hope that are the best prospects for the future. It is my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's last debate on Welsh affairs. I take the opportunity to record my estimation that he has been the best Secretary of State for Wales. I know that in whatever way he can, he will go on fighting and doing all that he can for Wales, and even perhaps for the Conservatives. However, we can reassure him that with his policies we shall go from strength to strength. Whether it is a case of winning with Wyn or making our Mark, I am confident of the future.

8.28 pm

Dr. Roger Thomas (Carmarthen): It is remarkable what an effect a Gallup poll carried out in Newport, West, giving a Labour majority of 5,500, has upon the morale and some of the tempers of Conservative Members.

The hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) mentioned the cultural facilities of Cardiff. It is not all that long ago, under a Conservative Administration, that symphony orchestras from London refused to come to Cardiff to play because they would not play in that barracks of a place in Sophia gardens. It is not all that long since the Covent Garden opera company, on its tour, refused to come to Cardiff, which was then run by a Conservative county council. The company did not come because there was not a theatre big enough and with enough facilities for first-rate opera. I agree that now people in Cardiff have something new, but people in other parts of the world have had it for far longer. We understand that that is a new toy to people in Cardiff, and we are happy that they have it.

We hear a great deal about a north-south divide. This afternoon, we heard the Secretary of State being congratulated on being able to provide opera facilities in Cardiff. Yet, from the Back Benches, we heard the hon. Member for Delyn (Mr. Raffan) castigate Clwyd county council because it intended to provide opera facilities. What a magnificent example of a north-south divide. This afternoon we had another example of a north-south divide in the opposite direction. We had a wonderful speech from my right hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan), which was a mixture of compassion and caring. What did we have from the hon. Member from the north-east part of Wales? We had a speech which proved that the umbilical cord between the hon. Gentleman, the *Daily Express* and William Hickey has not yet been cut. That is the type of contrast that we have between north and south.

I shall now speak about matters that are important to Wales. Few Select Committee reports have been more relevant to Wales than the report by the Energy Committee on the coal industry. I found the introductory paragraphs to the report quite moving and even emotional. The present and previous Tory Administrations challenged miners, their families and communities head on in a struggle that produced bitterness, dissension and no outright victor. Government Members of that Committee, in supporting a report that challenged the wisdom of grinding those communities into the ground, have to be congratulated on their courage.

Chapter 5 of the report concentrated on the wider costs of coal mining, on the need of meeting the nation's energy demands and on the far wider costs of coal mining. More fairly and comprehensively than I can remember, it recalled the social and topographically disruptive human effects of gleaning our prime indigenous energy source. Those effects are analysed in a most fair and dispassionate manner.

Many of our mining communities have all their eggs in one basket. I shall quote from the coalfields community campaign, which says:

> "Mining areas are small dispersed communities, heavily self-dependent and totally dominated by a single industry, often over several generations."

When, in the 1980s, redundant miners were forced on to the sidelines by the thousands they found that there were no existing manufacturing jobs available and they had to

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compete with others whose jobs were falling by the wayside. Pit closure decisions have, for a long time, been highly suspect, but latterly they are being challenged. British Coal's accounting procedure has been far too secretive, and here the Committee calls for maximum disclosure. Maximum disclosure is common sense if good worker-employer relationships are to be attained.

Jobs that have been created by British Coal Enterprise, while not insignificant, are still small compared with the job losses that have been created. Even the doubling of the money available in 1986 was substantially inadequate. Stated simply, Government financial commitment must match the enormous size of the problem which is created by the most logically argued pit closure. Hitherto, that has not been the case. Nowhere has that been better exemplified than in the valleys of west Wales since the coal strike.

An open-cast site is not in an area for two or four years; it is there for 15 or 20 years. The present planning system is delaying and, frequently, embarrassing to British Coal. The Select Committee agreed that open-cast mining is one of the most environmentally destructive process that is carried out in the United Kingdom. The sites are among the most ugly examples of the ravages of industrial exploitation.

At present, British Coal is not well placed to make judgments about the relative costs and benefits of open-cast developments. Here the Secretary of State has the last say as to whether work at an open-cast site can proceed after he has received the report of the inspector. I can assure him that the overturning of the recommendation of the impartial inquiry on the open-cast site within his own constituency has gone down badly in areas which are now being worked for the third and fourth times. The Secretary of State is aware—not only in the open-cast sector—that he must look after his own patch of territory.

Latterly, the socio-economic pundits have been drawing attention to the presence of, even within Wales, a south-east versus remainder divide. That is a divide even within the United Kingdom. It is little wonder that such a deep depression exists within the peripheral parts of an area that, as a total entity, is suffering the disadvantages of the magic centrifugal force of south-east England.

I welcome the highly relevant and lucid first editorial of the *Western Mail* of 17 February, which emphasised the chronic lack of work availability in rural south-west Wales. How would such an area fare under Government proposals to introduce regional differential pay proposals, when in such areas as unfashionable west Wales employers may be more positively attracted if wage costs there were palpably less? We reject that proposal vehemently in my part of Wales.

These are the areas where the Government's wicked agricultural proposals have a most penetrating knock-on effect. Measures to cut back production are not allowing sufficient time for alternative and transitional measurements. The determination to charge £90 for a dairy inspection is interpreted as further Government indifference to farming. Even a sliding scale to protect the small farmer is treated dismissively. Further bankruptcies are the order of the day, with the Welsh grassland sector paying the price for surpluses, to the charge of creating which they plead innocent. Welsh farmers are dead tired of ministerial platitudes and vague promises.

Alternative policies have to be far more definite than just the planting here and there of a few deciduous trees. The lack of long-term policies with regard to diversification and alternative land use may take many years before coming to fruition.

This is the season when health authorities are beginning to balance their books. Our local health authority chairman appealed to the Welsh Office for more sympathy. His Griffiths-style manager talks of dire consequences if such help is not forthcoming. We are not accustomed in west Wales to wards being closed with little notice. These days living within resources means exactly that — bed and ward closures. Money channelled to health education and much-needed surveillance and early diagnostic schemes are much advertised by Ministers. We hear little of the Government attacking that great source of ill health — general misery and suffering in our communities caused by the effects of unemployment. They are not prepared to deliver money into creating what the Prime Minister, when she was in opposition, used to call "real jobs".

The Under-Secretary of State might concentrate in his reply on Professor Catford's findings, which have recently been published, on the major health inequalities between the social classes in Wales. It is many years since the Black report was placed on the shelf to gather dust. Under she with whom the Health Service is apparently safe, these inequalities and diverging standards have grown even wider over the past eight years. The great contributor to that is the widening gap in living standards between those who have and those who have not got work to which to go. I have confidence, however, that the Minister responsible for health in Wales—the Under-Secretary of State—will not trot out strings of irrelevant platitudes such as those that we have been receiving in the House from the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security—the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie). Professor Catford stresses the need to establish policies to reduces these inequalities.

Health is about resources as well as about voluntary lifestyle. The population over 75 has increased since 1979 by between one fifth and one quarter of the population; the number of geriatric beds has been practically static and increasing numbers of patients have been discharged because of the lack of specifically designated geriatric beds. As a result, more and more acute geriatric cases have to be admitted into the ordinary acute beds of a hospital. These beds are being taken up by emergency social admissions. To admit high priority patients from urgent waiting lists, these elderly patients are discharged into the community, the services of which are not comprehensive enough or sophisticated enough to cope with them.

Whatever figures are quoted of Government commitment, patients and their relatives feel distinctly less satisfied as each year of Conservative Government goes by. Early discharges lead inevitably to readmissions because certain complications are not detected early enough in the community. This compares with what happened when a certain period was regarded as a natural and sensible length of convalescence. It is sad to see patients forced out of hospitals to make room for others when they and their relatives at home cannot provide the necessary follow-up care. Under this new, managerial-style regime, consultants and senior hospital staff have been coming under more pressure than ever before. So often the management-consultant relationship is at a low

ebb, and at some hospitals, I assure Ministers, it is non-existent. I assure Ministers that that is the reality. Morale in some district general hospitals is as low as it has ever been.

The management is totally committed to business standards and is not paying sufficient attention to clinical problems. We must face up to the fact that many consultants feel that what is financially justifiable is totally incompatible with medical efficiency, and nothing affects the latter more detrimentally than continual pressure from management, with management breathing down consultants' necks. Consultants are highly trained people who know how to go about their business. Developing Marks and Spencer techniques in running and organising operating theatre sessions will not do for the people of Wales.

The Government's policy has been one of encouraging those in work to forget those who have no work. The south-east prospers when the remainder of the country is betwixt stagnation and impoverishment. Progress towards a less just, less fair, less caring and less socially aware society has been accelerated by the Government, and the people of Wales will finally turn them out.

8.44 pm

Mr. Robert Harvey (Clwyd, South-West): In industrial Wales there can be few St. David's days with more to cheer about than this one. The Welsh CBI quarterly trends survey shows that 13 per cent. of businesses are more optimistic than before, 19 per cent. expect a growing volume of output, 36 per cent. expect an increase in total new orders and 16 per cent. expect a rise in employment. Wales's industrial economy is booming, thanks to the economic policies adopted by the Government and to the stimulus given to the Welsh economy by the pragmatic policies of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. I reiterate what other Conservative Members have said: how lucky we are to have had such a great Secretary of State during the past eight years.

Yet in one part of the Welsh economy there is something approaching despair, and that is in the traditional mainstay of rural Wales, farming. It has become harrowing to observe the most severe farming crisis in post-war history as it strikes, not the rich barley barons ploughing up hedgerows, about whom one reads so much in the media, but Welsh smallholders in my constituency who work their lives out in back-breaking conditions on the worst of land. These are people who think nothing of working a 14-hour day in the most extreme conditions, whose every asset is tied up in the land, who never go on strike, who do not belong to a trade union, whose small businesses are among the most efficient in the land and who do not qualify for dole money. In a bad year, many of them earn considerably less than the national average wage. I have visited farms where the net income last year ranged between £3,000 and £5,000 and others that are only just managing to break even. A whole rural way of life is in danger of disappearing altogether unless action can be taken to stop it.

As we all know, the crisis began when the European Community took action to stop the accumulation of food surpluses in Europe through the imposition of milk quotas. That action started in 1983. However justifiable in principle, it was precipitate and far too sudden, yet Welsh farmers tried somehow to stagger on and survive. They cut their production and borrowed more. By 1985 farm income had declined by nearly half, bank lending was at a record level, and many farmers were teetering on the edge of bankruptcy. Meanwhile, the value of the land began to plunge. Last year some welcome stability returned to the market. However, the imposition of a further milk quota reduction of 9·5 per cent. in December has once again increased the worry and depression facing the industry, although at least this time — this is an important advance — the European Community has accepted the principle of compensation. But the position of many farmers in my constituency is desperate.

I know of one milk producer who can make ends meet only by overproducing and gambling that a super-levy will not be brought in. If it is, and the signs are that it will be, he stands to have to pay several thousand pounds. If that happens, similar farmers will be driven out of business. Producers are so desperate for quota that it is changing hands at the absurdly high price of 30p a litre.

Other farmers are also facing deep uncertainty. Beef producers were hit last year by an overvalued green pound, although they welcomed the retention of a variable premium in the last deal. Welsh sheep farmers fear that as dairy and grain farmers move into sheep production — there were 3,000 new entrants into sheep production last year — the market could be swamped by cheaply produced lowland sheep. Sheep farmers are calling for some kind of restriction on new entrants. It is urgent that the depths of the crisis be understood. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will address that problem in his forthcoming White Paper.

What are the immediate measures needed to restore confidence in Welsh farming? First and foremost, there must be a devaluation of about 20 per cent. of the green pound to ensure that our producers are not unfairly penalised and that our European competitors are not unfairly helped by currency misalignments. The whole problem could be resolved in the long term by British membership of the European monetary system. That is long overdue and would ensure that such differentials never arose again. Secondly, the principles of compensation for lost production and incentives for environment improvement need vastly to be extended beyond the welcome but insufficient package of measures announced last month and beyond the compensation for milk producers announced in the EEC package.

Every other major industry which has been over-producing in Europe has been granted substantial sums in redundancy money for the workers who have suffered. One thinks here of the mining and steel industries. Up to £40,000 has been paid to laid-off miners. Farmers who may be hit by the reduced quotas deserve no different. Thirdly, it is high time that Britain was brought at least to self-sufficiency in milk. It is absolutely wrong that under the original quota deal in 1983 West Germany was allowed 24 million tonnes, France 27 million tonnes, and Britain only 16 million tonnes.

These are the three things that my right hon. Friend and his right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food should consider to restore confidence in an industry which was once the pride of Wales: green pound alignment, compensation and self-sufficiency. It is all too easy to knock the common agricultural policy and the Community surpluses and to forget that Community spending as a whole accounts for less than 1 per cent. of GDP of member states, compared with 51 per cent of GDP

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of member states that goes into national Government spending; or to forget that since Britain joined the Community farm prices have shown unprecedented stability, rising by considerably less than the increase in the general cost of living.

Some people say that farm prices would have risen by still less in a free market, but a free market would have been characterised by disastrous farm failures that would have ensured that over-production and low prices one year were followed by under-production and skyrocketing prices the next year — as used to happen in the past. Farm price stability is in the interest both of consumer and producer. The amount spent on the common agricultural policy is a small price to pay for that.

Critical as I am about some aspects of the Government's record on farming, I am certain that the situation would have been far worse if any other party had been in power. What, for example, is the alliance policy on farming? After all, that all-things-to-all-men party spends a good deal of its time wringing its hands about the plight of Welsh farming. However, the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) has made it absolutely clear that he is committed to slashing EEC food surpluses far faster and far more effectively than the Government have been able to. That would put thousands of farmers out of business.

In addition, the alliance has set out a ludicrous proposal for a two-tier structure of farm quotas which, because someone in the alliance has not done his sums, would penalise three quarters of British grain producers while penalising only a fraction of continental producers. Presumably the same applies to milk. This proposal has been described as disastrous by the president of the National Farmers Union, Mr. Simon Gourlay.

What of the Labour party's policy? It is also committed to slashing surpluses, as has repeatedly been made clear by the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock). Like the alliance, the Labour party is committed to greater planning controls over agricultural land and to a policy of taking control of land usage from farmers and handing it to local councils with all the sensitivity that urban bureaucrats display to the needs of the countryside. The Labour party's policy is nothing less than nationalisation, state control, by the back door, and nationalisation not just without compensation but with farmers having to pay for the privilege. The Labour party's policy document on farming which was approved at their party conference is absolutely clear that there must be rating of agricultural land. If a Labour Government were to come to office, a £5,000 a year earner on the Denbigh moors would not only be clobbered by swingeing quota cuts, or deprived of the right to do what he wants with his own land and lose the ability to hand it on to his children under Labour capital taxation proposals, but would also have all the iniquities of the present domestic rating system thrust upon him.

We all know why Labour has it in for the farmer. That party hates the farmer, with his tradition of independence, hard work, efficiency and private ownership. At least the Opposition should be honest about it and not pretend that the party of urban minorities harbours anything but hostility for farmers. Gumboots do not suit the Opposition. It is time to take urgent action to help some of our most hard-working and deserving people, lest the countryside of Wales as we know it becomes a barren and empty wasteland.

8.55 pm

Mr. Gareth Wardell (Gower): I agree with the last sentence of the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Harvey) — that it is fundamentally important that the family farm in Wales should not be allowed to disappear. The support for agriculture is of paramount importance.

I should like to comment on some of the speeches in the debate. The hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer) was right in what he said about the problems of the mentally ill and about the lack of facilities available for such people when they are discharged into the community. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for saying those things.

The health advisory service report on the mentally ill in Gwynedd appeared in August last year and painted a dismal picture. A private home in Llandudno was shown in a particularly bad light. I hope that the Minister will tell the House when the consultative paper on the mentally ill will be produced by the Welsh Office and whether it will heed the advice contained in the Welsh advisory service report.

The points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Mr. Coleman) about open-cast mining are well taken. It is a pity that the Government did not accept the recommendation in the energy commission's report on coal and the environment, especially that which said that there should be a continuation of the limit on the ceiling of 15 million tonnes a year of open-cast coal with a reduction thereafter. Instead of that, we saw last week the publication of the report by the Select Committee on Energy. It shows quite clearly that the open-cast executive intends to raise production from 15 million tonnes a year in the United Kingdom to 18 million tonnes but it does not accept that ceiling as sacrosanct. It is a great shame that that is so.

The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) referred to cervical cancer. Last Wednesday the Secretary of State for Social Services came to the Dispatch Box and made his statement about additional screening for both breast cancer and cervical cancer. I was delighted by his statement, but I thought that it was rather unsatisfactory, to put it at its mildest, that a press release was issued about what is to happen in Wales and that there was no opportunity to discuss what is to happen in Wales in the House. Again, it is a great pity that the Secretary of State for Wales has not yet come to a decision on a report that has been in his hands since before Christmas regarding the radiotherapy services in Wales, in particular those for cervical cancer at Singleton and Velindre hospitals.

When the Prime Minister addressed the annual convention of the Institute of Directors last week she painted a picture of Britain that is unrecognisable by many communities in Wales. By the careful selection of statistics, the Prime Minister glossed over those sectors of the economy that she has caused to be decimated — the small businesses that have been hit by the recession and high interest rates, resulting in a record number of bankruptcies, the decline in our manufacturing industries, the penalties and the deprivation, and the high levels of unemployment and poverty.

For the last eight years, this Government have overseen a massive multiplication in the number of those who are living in poverty. By the pursuit from 1979 to mid-1986 of monetarist policies, the Government have increased unemployment in Wales from 6·9 per cent. in 1979 to 16·4 per cent. today. To make the point that a 10 per cent. increase in unemployment means that for every 10 people in Wales who are wage earners an extra person is on the dole is in itself a sufficient indictment of the Government's policies. I do not need to elaborate on the thousands of unemployed who no longer are counted, following the Government's retreat into cheap statistical manipulation.

If we look back to 1979 when this Government came to office, we can see the inexorable decline in manufacturing industry. Government figures, released in January, show that there was a net loss of 1·57 million jobs in Britain between June 1979 and June 1986. While there was an increase in the service sector of 861,000 full and part-time jobs, there was a fall in the manufacturing sector of 1,968,000. Every region, except East Anglia, shared in the decline, but Wales, together with north-west Yorkshire and Humberside, has lost most—more than 35 per cent. of our manufacturing jobs. We have also lost service sector jobs.

It is this callous neglect of manufacturing industry in Britain — which, as a trading nation, we shall always need — that has emphasised and encouraged the north-south divide that is now so starkly evident in Britain today. Conservative Members have rightly said that there are areas of prosperity in Wales. For example, before 1960 the Swansea valley was designated the largest area of industrial dereliction in Britain, with 60 per cent. of it covered by slag heaps, ruined buildings and abandoned railways and canals. Much of it was contaminated land. With both public and private investment, Swansea city council and West Glamorgan county council have transformed the area. They have created over 1,000 new jobs in the tourism and service sector in the marina-linked projects. They have created 2,000 new jobs so far in the enterprise park. However, that has been achieved despite the Government. It has been achieved despite the cuts in rate support grant, threats of penalties and ridiculous restrictions on capital spending.

The north-south divide debate is about the Government's abdication of responsibility. It is about cuts in public spending which meant the abandonment of an effective regional policy. It is about a lack of investment in proper training for new skills and a lack of investment in infrastructure.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: I do not understand how the hon. Gentleman can say that that has happened in Swansea despite the Government, when the marina development was made possible largely by the urban development grant scheme initiated by the Government. The enterprise park to which he referred was the creation of the Government and it was opposed by his own party.

Mr. Wardell: As I said earlier, I accept that there was public and private investment. However, the work that has taken place there has been against a background of general economic cuts. That has made the job very much more difficult.

I have to tell the Secretary of State that the north-south divide debate is about the net loss of 1·1 million jobs north of the Wash against the net job creation of 356,000 in the southern belt. It is about all that that implies for increased poverty and increased inequality in all sorts of ways, but especially health.

The Government say little, if anything, about the link between inequality, unemployment and ill health. There has been the Black report "Inequalities in Health", which produced detailed evidence of differences in health and life expectancy between social classes. Sir Dugald Baird, in the *British Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, showed that having a healthy baby was related to the health care and social class of the mother when she was growing up. The Manpower Services Commission paper "The Long Term Unemployed" said that there was evidence that long-term unemployment has indirect effects on the health of long-term claimants and their wives. The report of the House of Lords Select Committee on unemployment found that rates of infant mortality in Northern Ireland, higher there than in the rest of the United Kingdom to start with, became higher still in unemployed families, perhaps because of low nutrition as a result of lower income.

In the World Health Organisation's report "Health Policy Implications of Unemployment", which is a compilation and assessment of various international studies of the links between unemployment and health, the editors say that

> "Experience from many countries indicates that insecurity at work, unemployment and under-employment can seriously affect social functioning, health and well-being".

The editors summarise by saying that the evidence showed that there was a vicious circle of poverty, unemployment, other social and economic symptoms of inequality, discrimination, social vulnerability and chronic illness.

Only last month Professor John Catford of Heartbeat Wales told us:

> "health is not just about making choices concerning the lifestyle we lead. It is also about the opportunities and resources available to carry them out. In Britain, the healthy choices are not the easy choices. The result is that those in a more favourable position because of education and income have a head start."

That is what all the latest research shows and that is why the Government's abdication of responsibility for protecting employment opportunities and for creating employment in Wales and other such areas is so diabolical.

There is no commitment by the Government to alleviate the inequalities in health and opportunities stemming from high levels of unemployment and poverty. The Government's so-called anti-poverty strategy has been mere propaganda. Think, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of how many times the Government have used their majority to change the law when their interpretation of regulations has been illegal. One current such case involves the unemployment benefit for part-time community scheme workers. The Government have built up an industry of masking cuts in entitlement to benefit and reductions in benefits. Instead of defending well-being, they have created increasing poverty among groups such as pensioners, the disabled, single parents and the unemployed and their families.

However, the Government have begun to see the light. The light in this case is election day. Despite the facts that the Prime Minister still has 15 months to go, has a majority of almost 140 and can, as she did on Thursday in the final stages of the Teachers' Pay and Conditions Bill, enshrine in legislation her slightest whim about what she thinks is best for Britain, everyone says that we are in an election

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year. That conjures up one of the Prime Minister's election date dilemmas. She can hardly go to the country after the cuts in pensions and in benefits for the sick and disabled, for single parents and their children and for the unemployed and their families contained in the Social Security Act 1986 which is to be fully implemented in April 1988. Or does the right hon. Lady really think that hammering the poor while they are down is a vote winner? I think not.

I think that the Government know that the Act will be an edict which will condemn yet another generation of parents and their children to the deprivation and health risks associated with poverty and increased inequality. In Wales we have more than our fair share of communities that will, if the Act is implemented, be yet another generation of parents and children condemned to deprivation and health risks associated with unemployment and poverty.

If the Government really believe that their policies are right, let them wait until May 1988 for an election. Let the Secretary of State for Wales fight in the Cabinet and issue a challenge to the Prime Minister, saying that if she is the brave lady that she claims to be she should wait until May 1988, when we will know what the Government's anti-poverty stategy is all about. The problem for the Government is that they would then be sent packing.

9.14 pm

Mr. Keith Best (Ynys Môn): The misery spread by the hon. Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell) is typical of the Labour party, but it does not relate to the facts.

What a contrast we have seen in the debate. We heard first from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State who is, by common consent, the best ever Secretary of State for Wales. That point has been made by Opposition Members during the debate, not only quietly to me in the Lobby outside. Next we heard from the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones), the shadow Secretary of State. What an apt description that is, and what a shadow the hon. Gentleman is. I am pleased that the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside does not have a mirror in front of him on the Dispatch Box. I do not accuse him of narcissism, but if he had been able to see the faces of his hon. Friends behind him when he made his speech he would have been even more miserable than he was.

I thought that it would be appropriate to look up the debate held in the House exactly 10 years ago, in 1977. The Government did not then provide time for a Welsh day debate. In fact, it had to be taken out of Opposition time, and only some two hours and 40 minutes were allowed for the debate. My right hon. Friend the present Secretary of State complained 10 years ago that Wales used to have an annual Welsh day debate, but that the Government put it off until the tail end of the Session and then only late on a Friday evening. That was the action of the Labour party in office, but the Labour Opposition are now asking the people of Wales to put their trust in them after the next election.

Ten years ago, there was an inflation rate of 23 per cent. under the Labour Government. The consequences of the Labour Government's economic policies meant that inflation was double the rate of that of our competitors overseas. Industry was producing less than it had produced in 1971. Indeed, it was producing less under the Labour Government than it produced with the three-day week. What answer did the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) have? He said:

"We begin, rightly so, with the present level of unemployment. It concerns all of us. To listen to the hon. Member for Pembroke one would imagine that only the Opposition were concerned with the economic situation and unemployment. Unemployment cannot be divorced from the economic situation. It flows from it. It is not a peculiarly Welsh problem. It is not even a peculiarly British problem. Not even an Offa's Dyke, the English Channel, or the Atlantic Ocean can shelter us from the world-wide effects of a recession."—[*Official Report*, 28 February 1977; Vol. 927, c. 62.]

How true those words were. One has a sense of déjà vu.

This Government have achieved lower inflation and lower unemployment. It is obvious that the Opposition do not like that. The right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan), a former Prime Minister, said with characteristic frankness that he did not know the answer to unemployment. That was a frank statement and I commend him for that. It is a shame that that was his last speech in a Welsh day debate. However, I know that the right hon. Gentleman will accept that the way forward to future employment can come only through growth. Indeed, he has said it himself on many occasions.

I want to mention an example from my constituency to which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State referred. My right hon. Friend referred to the DRIVE project, in which £200,000 will go from the Welsh Development Agency towards the Pringle scheme of £2 million which will transform Llanfairpwll station and create a manufacturing unit with 100 jobs. That is proof positive of a company set up outside a development area. Opposition Members make great play about the restriction of development area status, but they fail to appreciate the amount of selective assistance for companies outside.

There is now an urban renewal unit in the WDA and I am optimistic that money will be forthcoming to help Holyhead, which needs that money. We have had £220,000 urban development grant to aid the fishing industry in Holyhead with all the capacity for downstream packaging and other industries that will provide employment in the area. A company in Holyhead called MEM is working overtime four days a week. I am surprised that the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside, who every so often trespasses into my constituency, appears not to visit companies of that kind to witness the success being achieved there.

Wales is undergoing a great period of change. I cannot resist responding to the comment by the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside that I will lose my seat at the next election. I know that the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) does not like opinion polls, and he will not like this one either. An accurate opinion poll was taken recently and, for all I know, the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside may have watched the television programme on BBC Wales last Friday which showed that in my constituency at the moment 38 per cent. of people would vote Conservative, 20 per cent. would vote Plaid Cymru and 30 per cent would vote Labour. The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside frequently says that the seat must be taken by the Labour party—indeed, the brother-in-law of the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) is standing as a candidate against me—but it would appear that the Labour party has blown that one as well.

All that the Opposition can say in answer to the good news that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State imparted at the beginning of the debate about the new jobs that have been created in Wales—not by my right hon. Friend but by the private investment that has been stimulated through the pump-priming public funds provided by the Government—is that the Government are fiddling the figures. My advice to Labour Members is to continue accusing the Government of fiddling the unemployment figures. It is their only chance, however disingenuous they may be. I am confident that they will still be talking about fiddling, or even undertaking that activity, when the last unemployed person in Wales has found a job through the Government's restart scheme or other assistance. The Opposition need not be too worried about not getting their act together in time for the election because they will have another four or five years on the Opposition Benches to perfect their act.

9.20 pm

Mr. Roy Hughes (Newport, East): This has been our annual Welsh day debate and it has run true to form. The Secretary of State put his usual gloss on things. My right hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan) said that the Secretary of State had engaged in adjectival ministerial excess. What a marvellous description! He has had nearly eight years as Secretary of State, and I have been unable to discover the Wales in which he lives. Only Opposition Members have portrayed the reality in Wales, and there was a great contrast with the speeches of Conservative Members. The only shaft of light among Conservative Members came from the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer).

Wales has been going through a period of mass unemployment such as it has not known for 50 years, and the Opposition say clearly that the Government bear much of the responsibility for that heavy unemployment. The lack of employment for so many people, with the downgrading of the work ethic, means that young people especially turn elsewhere.

Here I wish to make a constituency point that has relevance for the entire country. On many occasions, local authorities, including mine, have voiced their anxiety about the inadequacy of existing planning and licensing legislation to control amusement arcades and centres and the social effects associated with their use. Local authorities cannot decide what is best for their communities and whether to grant permission for amusement arcades because the Secretary of State for Wales overrides their decisions. As effective licensing powers are not available, the planning system is called upon to exert control, but planners can do little because the moral concerns that motivate the public cannot be taken into account when determining the application.

What worries me most is the absence of powers to restrict young people from entering the arcades unaccompanied. They run great risks. At the very least, they may lose substantial sums of money. They may develop an addiction to gambling and their need for money may lead them into crime or prostitution as a means of earning money, especially at a time of high unemployment among young people in Wales.

The Government must take steps to deal with this growing problem and not bury their heads in the sand. It is time that they took the moral issues into account. Increasing evidence is being gathered by the police, education authorities and social workers as to the detrimental effects of those machines on children. Gamblers Anonymous says that one in five of those who turn to it for help are aged between 12 and 17 years. Twenty per cent. of gamblers who seek help are child fruit machine addicts. The serious consequences of the Government's failure to act cannot be tolerated indefinitely. We need urgent action. The Secretary of State for Wales must appreciate that his inaction is helping to create a casino society in Wales.

I did not impugn the Secretary of State's integrity in any way during my altercation with him. All that I said was that I could not understand how I knew about the intentions of Trafalgar House when the Secretary of State, with all his back-up staff, did not. At least I can say that my information was perfectly reliable. I have taken some interest in the Severn bridge. The Government repeatedly state that the effect of tolls is marginal, but any student of elementary economics will be aware that matters are decided at the margin. If one follows the route of the M4 heading towards Reading, Swindon and the Bristol area, one can see the obvious employment and prosperity. Yet that good fortune does not cross the Severn bridge. As Mario Basini, in his perceptive article in the 19 February edition of the *Western Mail*, said:

". . . Wales's economic future continues to look as bleak as a derelict coal mine or an abandoned steelworks."

Even if we accept the Minister's argument about marginality, there are many exceptions. Many people in the Caldicot and Chepstow areas are employed on the other side of the channel. Some are redundant steel workers from Llangwm. They accepted the advice of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to get on their bikes, but the Government do not give them much incentive to do so. In fact, they penalise them and they have to pay £10 per week net in addition to the normal costs of motoring.

The finances of the Severn bridge are now a complete and utter farce. A short while ago, the Government won their battle to increase tolls by 150 per cent. The Under-Secretary of State for Transport told me that the amount now likely to be collected in tolls in a full year will be about £8 million. On 28 January in answer to a parliamentary question by the hon. Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern), he said that the original cost of construction of the Severn bridge was £9·8 million.

The Avon bridge opened in 1974. After a two-year overrun, it cost £10 million to construct. Yet there is no toll burden on the Avon bridge. Why is there such discrimination? The Severn bridge is only a short stretch of the M4. Let us compare the construction cost of £9·8 million with the debt which, at 31 March 1985, was £55·8 million. Two years have elapsed since then, so there has been a considerable increase. Hon. Members must compare the construction cost of £9·8 million with the amount collected in tolls. Again, the figure is two years out of date. It was £29·7 million and it is now moving towards £40 million in tolls for a bridge which cost £9·8 million to construct, and that burden is being imposed on a battered Welsh economy.

Mr. Grist: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hughes: I have not finished this piece yet.

There is discrimination against the Severn bridge, which serves Wales, as compared with the Avon bridge, which serves Bristol and the west. There are now

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developments which could produce a further anomaly. The Transport Select Committee, after a full inquiry into tolls on estuarial crossings, called last March for their abolition. Durings its investigation, the Committee discovered that 40 per cent. of the debt was in respect of the Humber bridge. The Secretary of State for Transport is worried about that and discussions have been going on for months between the Department and authorities up there to try to rectify the situation.

Mr. Grist: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hughes: No. I have not finished.

If the Government propose to write off the debt on the Humber bridge, that would represent further discrimination against Wales, which has such a chronic unemployment problem. Abolishing tolls would have a significant psychological effect which would bring practical benefit to the Welsh economy.

I know that we all want to do our best for Wales.

Mr. Grist: Has the hon. Gentleman finished now?

Mr. Hughes: No. I appeal to the Secretary of State, in view of the facts and figures that I have presented, to go to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. If the Chancellor has the surplus that the financial columnists tell us he has, he should be able to do something.

Mr. Grist: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. I imagine that he remembers that when the toll was first brought in it was half a crown, which was a great deal more than the toll is worth today. Indeed, it would be 80p if the value had been maintained. That means that the toll has not covered what was originally intended during the past few years.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the Humber bridge, which was built as a result of the 1965 by-election. I am sure that he remembers that. It was a prime example of doing public works for political ends, which is exactly what should be avoided.

Mr. Hughes: The hon. Gentleman is even more naive than I imagined. Is he unaware that 2 million more people are now out of work in Britain than in 1979? More than 100,000 more people are unemployed in Wales. That is why I am calling for the concession.

Unemployment has undoubtedly been the kernel of the debate. It is beyond dispute that 100,000 more people are out of work in Wales than when the Government came to office. The seasonally adjusted figure for January shows an increase from 5·9 per cent. to 13·4 per cent. That is an indictment of the Government, who campaigned and were elected on the slogan, "Labour isn't working." The Government have no major plan to reverse the catastrophe. In their recent evidence to the EEC, as revealed by my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), the Government were clearly reconciled to the fact that mass unemployment in Wales would continue for years. So little has been done to remedy the problems. During the Government's term of office, there has been a 24 per cent. drop in manufacturing investment from £643 million to £486 million.

Another Government move hardly likely to regenerate the Welsh economy was the decision to halve regional development assistance from £137·5 million in 1979 to £85·9 million last year. In fairness, at least the Government seem conscious of the damage that their policies have caused, but instead of tackling those problems they admit to fiddling the unemployment figures. We have had no fewer than 19 changes in the method of calculating the figures. Many thousands have been taken off the register in Wales alone. Perhaps even more difficult to justify is the Government's decision to include the self-employed. That is a novel introduction, as is the inclusion of the armed forces. Will it be the inmates of Her Majesty's prisons next? Part-time jobs are counted as full-time jobs. Two part-time jobs done by the same person are classed as though two jobs are done by different people. All the fiddling is the work of Lord Young's shrink tank. Even locally, in Newport, the employment figures are in constant dispute. The *South Wales Argus* said, on 13 February, under the headline:

"Gwent Job Losses Highest In Wales. Employment in Gwent has suffered the worst setback in Wales according to the latest set of jobless statistics."

It is not only unemployment. There is deprivation in so many sectors. This deprivation simply stunts the life of Wales as a whole, as it does that of so many communities, families and individuals. The Prime Minister has told us that the National Health Service is safe in her hands, but no one in Wales believes that.

"Heartbeat Wales", referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen (Dr. Thomas), in its press report on 19 February said:

"there are large social inequalities in health. Those in manual groups and the unemployed are much worse off."

The breakdown in law and order and the soaring crime statistics were referred to by my right hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth. The Government have invested heavily in law and order, but with puny results. In education, we have had chaos in the classrooms —much of it the direct result of underfunding, when the drop in the number of pupils could have brought real progress with a major reduction in the pupil-teacher ratio. The Government's latest move is to take away negotiating rights from teachers' trade unions. What a travesty that is.

My hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside gave the facts and figures about the housing crisis. My hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Mr. Coleman) referred to the perceptive article by Mary Evans of the *Western Mail* on 26 February, when she spoke of the chief environmental health officer's searing indictment of the failure to provide the people of Wales with adequate homes.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Mark Robinson): What are the Labour party's policies?

Mr. Hughes: The policies of the Labour party have been clearly set out time and again. I am sorry if the Under-Secretary of State is still not fully acquainted with them. I assure him that before the general election Mr. Paul Flynn will make him well acquainted with them as Mr. Flynn will be the next Member for the hon. Gentleman's constituency of Newport, West.

The Government preside over not a united but a divided kingdom. A future Labour Government will take all the necessary steps to remedy that.

9.39 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Wyn Roberts): Believe it or not, St. David was a holy man and it would be appropriate for me to quote a verse from the Book of Ecclesiastes:

"Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with they might".

That injunction has certainly been obeyed by my right hon. Friend in his pursuit of policies for Wales during his entire period as Secretary of State. No one who has worked as closely with him as I have would dissent from that view, and I say the same about the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan), who gave us his swan song this evening, certainly as far as Welsh days are concerned.

We are now seeing the fruits of my right hon. Friend's remarkable vigour and proof that

"the hand of the diligent maketh rich"

because the prospects for Wales are steadily improving, whatever Opposition Members may say. My right hon. Friend's opening speech presented a panorama of achievements in the recent past and a fine prospectus of betterments planned but yet to be fully realised. The foundations of a more prosperous future have been well and truly laid as was made abundantly clear at the start of this debate.

I have heard nothing from the Opposition Benches that leads me to believe that any of the Opposition parties offers Wales a better future. The truth is that they have been too busy criticising the Government to think positively and constructively about their own long-term policies. As my hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (Mr. Raffan) said in his stirring speech, we have heard more about the Opposition's policies outside this Chamber than we have heard of them within it. The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) is very fond of making hole and corner statements that he cannot resist leaking to the press. He made a statement the other day on education, in which he juggled with statistics in a way that must have aroused the envy of that master conjuror, the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher). I had the facts checked and there were three pages of corrections. Of course, I shall not weary the House with them.

However, we have had references to the frequent visits to Wales from members of the Opposition Front Bench. I do not know whether the Shadow Transport Minister, the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes), actually came to Wales, but it was he who perpetrated the idea of doing away with vehicle excise duty and incidentally running down the driver and vehicle licensing centre at Swansea. Of course, the Welsh Labour group reacted smartly, if we are to believe the *Western Mail*, with a letter to the Leader of the Opposition the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) saying:

"We will not win votes for this; 58 per cent. of motorists will lose by it and it will be difficult to convince the other 42 per cent. that they have gained."

So the question is, "Where do the Labour Party stand on this issue now?"

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): The answer is clear. The hon. Gentleman knows that that idea is flirted with by politicians from time to time. It has been flirted with by Mr. William Rodgers, who is now in the Social Democratic party, by the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Fowler) three years ago, and now by my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) — *[Interruption.]* I have not finished. Hon. Members representing constituencies in the west Glamorgan area have seen off the Conservative plan for doing that three years ago, and we shall see it off again.

Mr. Roberts: It is quite clear that disunity continues to prevail in the Labour party, but I shall not add another act to the Deirdre sorrows.

There have been numerous references to housing. We have set gross provision for housing capital expenditure by Welsh local authorities in 1987-88 at £182 million. At £29 million higher than previously planned, it has enabled us to make available to local authorities housing allocations totalling £154 million.

The allocation process reflects our view that the renovation of both the public and private sector stock should again be the major priority investment next year. Accordingly, within the total available for allocation, some £70 million has been earmarked to encourage local authorities to concentrate their resources on renovation, including up to £20 million for the cost-effective programmes of enveloping and block repair.

I remind the House that between 1979-80 and 1980-85, we spent £333 million on renovation grants to the private sector, in comparison with the previous Labour Government's mere £57 million. Between 1979-80 and 1980-85, some £259 million was spent on renovating the local authority stock compared with the Labour Government's £86 million. So I am not happy to be lectured by Opposition Members on housing.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has increased the net provision for the Housing Corporation by £10 million to £55 million. The increased provision will enable housing associations in Wales to maintain a programme of 1,700 new dwellings for rent per year. It also includes new money to stimulate major investment by the private sector in rented housing, following the pioneering scheme to provide up to 600 homes for rent at St. Mellons, Cardiff. Similar projects on a smaller scale have now been approved at Abergavenny, Chepstow and Carmarthen and several further projects are under consideration. We anticipate that we can achieve another 700 homes for rent in Wales next year through such partnership schemes. We have always been in favour of a sound rented sector. We owe many of our housing problems today to the maltreatment of that sector in the past.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said that I would have something to say on education and training. There is a great deal happening as we try to adapt the system to meet future needs. As hon. Members will be aware, both those areas, with the exception of the university, come within my right hon. Friend's sphere of responsibility, and there are distinct advantages in such unity of responsibility.

As to vocational training, I am sure that the House will approve of the progress that is being made at all levels. The success of the technical and vocational education initiative, which has been piloted in secondary schools from 1983 onwards, has been remarkable. Every LEA in Wales is now involved, and we look forward to an extension of the initiative.

The youth training scheme also enjoys a high reputation. There is no doubt that it provides training which is valued by young people and those who later employ them. The extension of the YTS to two years and

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to 17-years-olds, together with the possibility of securing a recognised qualification through the scheme, are significant strides forward, and there is no doubt that we have come a long way since the earliest versions of the scheme.

As from the end of this month, there will be the job training scheme, which is aimed particularly at 18 to 25-year-olds who have been unemployed for six months. It will be based on our experience of running YTS and will provide high quality training. There are training developments at the Polytechnic of Wales, and at the university and, of course, there are adult training schemes.

An important current development is the increasing emphasis on vocational education and training. I am sure that it is a healthy and natural development in response to the demands of advancing technology and the requirements of the labour market. Of course, we are taking steps, through the introduction of advanced secondary courses, for example, to avoid excessive specialisation and to ensure that a reasonably balanced diet of subjects is maintained. A strong influence by parents on how our schools are run is being progressively achieved and there are more developments ahead.

In that context, I should tell my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Grist) that the proposals concerning the Howardian high school, published on 12 February, are now subject to a two-month period for local views to be put to South Glamorgan local education authority. After that, the case will fall to Ministers. Therefore, it would be wrong for me to comment, but my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will take all views into account.

In short, training and retraining are coming to be seen as an essential part of everyone's working life. That is good for the individual, in that it equips him with the skills that are in demand at any given time, and good for the country, because it helps to eliminate skill shortages and ensures that our work force remains adaptable and capable of meeting the ever-changing requirements of modern industry.

I want to comment on the views of the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth about manufacturing and service industries. One cannot look at manufacturing employment or manufacturing investment in a vacuum. When a world recession hits a sector which is suffering from poor competitiveness, a fall in manufacturing investment is almost inevitable. In Wales manufacturing investment fell between 1979 and 1984. Between 1983 and 1984, manufacturing investment in Wales rose by 28 per cent. Industry in Wales is now more competitive and better adapted to the demands of a modern economy. I must point out that about a quarter of the manufacturing firms in Wales have opened since 1979.

Prospects in this country are improving. As Christopher Smallwood said in *The Sunday Times* yesterday, productivity has risen as much in the last five years as in the previous 15 years, and consistently faster than in any other industrial country. Manufacturers are increasing their share of overseas markets. Mr. Smallwood goes on to say that last year's big devaluation of the pound has left British goods 25 per cent. cheaper in relation to our continental competitors, and this huge competitive advantage, on top of the progress which has already been made, means that the opportunities facing manufacturing industry are unparalleled since the war. Everything points to a sustained industrial revival. The picture that Britain is still going down the road to an industrial wasteland becomes less convincing with every day that passes. Those are Mr. Smallwood's words, not mine.

In a nutshell, the Opposition's case is that the Government's policies have failed and that the prime cause of the alleged failure was the Government's expenditure policies. Let us look at the record. Spending on the National Health Service in Wales is up 28 per cent. in real terms since 1978. Recurring revenue provision is up by 33 per cent. in real terms since 1979. The hospital capital building and development programme has cost £490 million since 1979. The number of staff who are directly concerned with patient care has increased by 13·5 per cent. between 1979 and 1985. Throughput of patients in hospitals has increased. In-patient cases are up by 76,000 a year and the number of new out-patients is up by 64,000 a year.

The hon. Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell) referred to the mentally ill, so let me tell him what happened with the mental handicap strategy. It is planned to spend some £10 million in 1987-88 on that strategy, which we originated.

Expenditure on education was 2·5 per cent. more in real terms in 1984-85 than in 1978-79. Pupil numbers have dropped by 10 per cent., so expenditure per head is at a record high. Pupil-teacher ratios have improved to 17·6 pupils per teacher. Sixty-nine per cent. of the under-fives are in nursery classes — a higher percentage than in England and an increase of 40 per cent. from 29,000 to 41,000 since 1979.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Roberts: The number of enrolments in local authority colleges of higher education has increased since 1979 by 50 per cent. from 9,300 to 14,377. Taking all the higher education sectors in Wales together, student numbers increased by 20 per cent. between 1979-80 and 1985-86.

Mr. Wigley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Roberts: The hon. Gentleman has not been here at all. He has missed the one and only Welsh day debate in the year.

I shall now give part of the record on the economy. Last year, 1986, was a record year for factory allocations by Government agencies in Wales—more than 2·5 million sq ft. There were 1,200 offers of job-related regional assistance, promising about 20,000 jobs and safeguarding 4,000 others. This compares with fewer than 10,000 jobs associated with offers of regional selected assistance in 1979. Seasonally adjusted unemployment has fallen in nine of the past 10 months. My hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Sir R. Gower) mentioned the self-employed. In September 1986 there were estimated to be 154,000 self-employed—an increase of 39,000 over June 1981. There is far more of this record, and we shall get down to it.

Government spending in Wales in the coming year will be at record high levels. Planned spending for the following two years will be very high as well. But it will not be wild, indiscriminate and profligate spending of the type about which the Opposition are always talking — the

type that made us paupers at the door of the IMF in 1976. It is all spending that we can afford, spending that is necessary to achieve our political objectives, and spending that we shall watch constantly to ensure that the taxpayer gets full value for his money.

Yes, we shall spend more on strengthening the economy. Yes, we shall spend more on roads and river crossings. They are part of the essential infrastructure of a better future. Yes, we shall spend more on education and training to equip the young people of Wales with the knowledge and skills that they will need in a competitive world. Yes, we shall spend more on the Health Service to enable it to respond to changing needs. All this is clear evidence of our commitment further to improve conditions in Wales and to provide a better life for its people. There is only one certainty for the people of Wales under a Labour Administration. They would face increases in taxation year after year, increased borrowing by the Government and, in due course, a return to high inflation. It happened before and it would happen again.

Faced with the choice that they will have to make at the next election, the people of Wales must reject Socialism if they want a better, brighter future for their children—a future that is already within their grasp. They must reject the purgatory offered by the Liberals and the SDP and their tripe and waffle of policies, fine for a palaver on the doorstep but useless as a basis for conducting government.

They must choose the firm future that the Government proffers, because it is based on the often difficult but sound policies that have secured for the country the advantageous position we occupy today. The people of Wales have a lot to gain if they make the right decision, and I am sure that they will make the right choice when the time comes.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed without Question put.

Milk and Dairy Charges

Mr. Speaker: We now come to the prayer on the Milk and Dairies and Milk (Special Designation) (Charges) Regulations 1987 in the name of the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Steel) and his right hon. and hon. Friends. Before I call upon the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), I should tell the House that there is a great deal of interest in this debate and I appeal for short contributions. The debate must end at 11.30 pm.

10 pm

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): I beg to move,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Milk and Dairies and Milk (Special Designation) (Charges) Regulations 1987 (S.I., 1987, No. 212), dated 15th February 1987, a copy of which was laid before this House on 17th February, be annulled.

As I am sure hon. Members know, these regulations will be brought into effect on 13 March. It is reasonable to say that they have caused a storm in farming circles because of the effects that they will have, especially on small dairy farmers. A cursory study of what has gone on over the past two years will reveal precisely why they have caused such a storm. The effects of the Government's policy, especially in relation to milk quotas, the way in which the regulations have been introduced, their retrospective nature and the way in which they have hit small farmers have been devastating to the dairy sector.

The incomes of dairy farmers fell by 25 per cent. last year compared with the year before and were down by 45 per cent. over previous years. They now stand at the lowest level of all but one year since the war. It has been established that there will be and, indeed, there have been visits to check conditions under which milk is produced. That is done in the interests of public health. In the past the cost of such visits has been borne by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. The Government are now proposing to institute a charge of £90 per visit to a herd of more than 20 cows and £80 per visit to a herd of fewer than 20 cows. That sum is to be levied and raised with the milk cheque through the Milk Marketing Board.

Farmers, the National Farmers Union and the Opposition parties have three basic objections to the Government's proposals. First, why pick on farmers again? No other charges are made for food hygiene purposes under, for example, the Act of 1984. No charge is levied on grocers, butchers or cafés. The principle of inspection in relation to public health matters has always been that since visits are in the public interest the public should pay. That has always been the case in the past and it remains the case in other areas. Why have the Government picked on farmers to break that basic principle? Farmers and hon. Members want to know the answer to that question.

Our second objection is that the charge is levied through the Milk Marketing Board. Therefore, it is required against its wishes to levy a charge for which it has no responsibility. It cannot decently be held accountable for this charge. That breaks the basic principle of good management, let alone good government, which is that those who carry out an act should at least be accountable for it. It is wholly unreasonable to place on the Milk Marketing Board the job of doing the Government's dirty

[Mr. Paddy Ashdown]

work. The Milk Marketing Board has made that quite clear in letters circulated to many hon. Members. In capital letters and in bold type the board says:

"We do not accept that they"—

that is, the Government—

"should be allowed the soft option of forcing the board to deduct these charges from payments due to milk producers for their milk."

That is a fair statement, clearly put.

There is also legitimate concern that this charge will be levied directly from the milk cheque that farmers receive for products that go to the Milk Marketing Board. That is a very bad principle to establish. I have tried to draw some kind of parallel. The only one that I have been able to draw is that hon. Members would find it fundamentally unfair if the Government sought to recover rates charges by reducing mortgage interest relief. That is what farmers are being asked to accept and it is a very unfair and unreasonable way of levying this charge.

The chief anger is not so much about the way in which it is to be levied, or about the fact that farmers have been singled out for special attention, as about the level of the charge. The Government say that there should be a charge of £90 for a visit. It is calculated that each visit will take about one hour, so we are talking about £90 an hour. The Government have explained on a number of occasions that there are overheads and other charges, but that charge of £90 has to be compared with £19 for a visit by a qualified agricultural consultant.

Mr. Andy Stewart (Sherwood) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Ashdown: I see the hon. Gentleman nodding. Clearly, he takes the matter as seriously as we do. The charge that the Milk Marketing Board makes for qualified advisers is £150 per day. That charge includes overheads and a profit element. A qualified adviser could certainly make more than two visits in a day. At £90, two visits alone would be £180, which means a profit of £30. I do not know how the Government can justify raising a reasonable hourly rate from £19 to £90.

The Government are to introduce charges for their Agricultural Development and Advisory Services. The charges are likely to be set at between £20 and £30. In this case, however, the charge is to be £90. A more precise parallel is the inspection of medicated foodstuffs, to be introduced next year. This inspection is in line with EEC regulations and will be conducted by the Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain on behalf of the Government. That is precisely analogous. Farms will be visited and the Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain has calculated a charge that will include overheads and other indirect costs. Pharmacists are much more highly qualified and much more highly paid, but the charge to be levied is only £40, not £90.

It is reasonable for us to question the basis of the charge. If £90 is an effective real cost, we can only draw the conclusion that it stands at that level because of the monstrous inefficiency of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. If that is not so, it means that an indirect and sly tax is being levied on farmers.

Mr. Paul Marland (Gloucestershire, West): The hon. Gentleman has rightly drawn attention to the money that farmers are being asked to pay and has emphasised that this will impose a burden on small farmers. Is he aware that the Liberals who are now in charge of Gloucestershire county council have passed a resolution to rate agricultural land at the soonest opportunity?

Mr. Ashdown: I need to be careful here, because the hon. Gentleman's question is straying a long, long way —[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] My answer is that the public and the farmers know that the only time that the rating of agricultural land has come before this House has been as a proposal from a Conservative Member. When that proposal was defeated it is on the record that it was Liberal Members who led the opposition *[Interruption.]* Oh yes, it was. I can go on for a long time yet. Conservative Members may not like it, but I remind them that it was a Conservative Member who sought to rate agricultural land and it was the Liberal party who led the opposition to defeat that move.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford) *rose*——

Mr. Ashdown: I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman. I have been talking for 10 minutes already.

Mr. Cash *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. I cannot have two hon. Members on their feet at the same time.

Mr. Ashdown: In the interests of getting through this reasonably quickly and without further interruption, I shall continue with what I was saying.

I was talking about the level of the charge and why it has been set at that level. In a letter to my hon. Friend the Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells) on 10 February 1987, the Secretary of State for Wales gave some of his reasons. The House may be interested to know what he had to say. He said:

"All these costs have been carefully calculated."

If that is so, when the Under-Secretary of State replies, if that is so, will he undertake to put those costs—all of them—and the detail behind them in the Library of the House so that they can be properly inspected? I ask him to answer that question in particular. The Secretary of State for Wales went on to give perhaps some of the real intentions behind the cost. He said that there was

"no intention either to operate at a profit or to cross-subsidise other services".

His slip shows later in the letter when he makes the revealing statement:

"The decision to charge producers for this work needs to be seen in the context of overall support for the dairy industry."

Is that exactly how the Government see it?

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Donald Thompson) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Ashdown: The Minister nods. He agrees that the Government see it as part of recovering the overall charges. But those two statements cannot stand together. They are contradictory. It is clear that what the Government have sought to do is recover through the charges, not just as they claim, and by nodding assent the Minister has agreed, the cost of those visits but other costs and the return of other monies related to the general level of support. That is the case that we make.

The Secretary of State for Wales goes on in the letter to say:

"The object of charging . . . is to cover all costs that the Agriculture Departments incur in administering the milk and dairy regulations."

We know that there are other milk and dairy regulations. Is it to recover costs for those too — for instance, in respect of import-export regulations or the checking of hygiene standards for producer-retailers and so on? We need to know because the Government seem to be speaking with two voices. Either the charge is to recover general costs from other areas or it is genuinely, as the Minister has claimed until now, solely calculated on the basis of the cost of the visits.

It is interesting to note that the Milk Marketing Board has taken a different line. It is not one with which I am inclined to agree immediately, but it is necessary to mention it. The board has said that in its view it may not be necessary to make those charges in the first place, bearing in mind that milk producers have their milk tested by the Milk Marketing Board four times a month and that a premium is paid on more than 80 per cent. of the milk produced, which demonstrates its high quality. The board says that poor performance in hygiene matters is already subject to penalties and can result ultimately in the termination of the contract. In present circumstances, the programme of visits, which costs £2·2 million per year, may no longer be necessary. I should be interested to know the Minister's view on that aspect.

The effects of the problem are very grave. I have received a letter from a small tenant farmer in Surrey, and I shall read it out because it shows clearly — *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members may laugh, but a serious burden will be imposed on some small tenant farmers. I hope that the House will listen to what the farmer in Surrey wrote to me:

> "I am a small tenant farmer and have been greatly encouraged by a letter, from the NFU, stating your intentions to fight for us re. the proposal to charge for inspection of dairy premises. Thank you very much. Mr. Jopling states it is only 50p per cow as a charge. May be, taking cows as one huge national herd. How many farmers milk 180 cows anyway? In my case with 50 cows and as a producer-retailer, often having two visits a year, my costs are"

about £255 per year or £5 per cow. He cannot charge that to his customers and he says that the proposal will have a bad effect on him.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Is the hon. Member aware that a recent survey in west Wales showed that between 25 and 30 per cent. of dairy farmers are teetering on the brink of bankruptcy and that any additional charge could push them over? Whatever the merits or otherwise of the charges in a general context, this is not the time to introduce them.

Mr. Ashdown: The hon. Gentleman makes a powerful point. What is happening in west Wales is also happening in Somerset, where the burden of farm debt is rising and many people are close to bankruptcy. I agree with their views that in some instances these charges will push them beyond the limit.

I note that several brave Conservative Members have signed early-day motions on the matter. They include the hon. Members for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop), for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) and for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton), who are all present, and the hon. Member for Wansdyke (Mr. Aspinwall). As those hon. Members have signed early-day motions we shall watch carefully, as will people outside, to see whether they have the courage of their convictions and vote against the regulations. If they do not, we shall conclude that the power of the Whips is more important to them than their consciences or the representation of their constituents. I hope that they will vote in line with the motions that they have signed.

The regulations are the unkindest cut of all for farmers. Dairy producers have suffered terribly from badly thought out and bungled Government policies. The regulations will add an extra and, for some, intolerable burden, especially for small dairy producers. The regulations single out farmers to pay a charge for a public health service which in every other area is paid for from the public purse. The regulations are unfairly levied and force the Milk Marketing Board to do the Government's dirty work for them. The level of charges is exorbitant and insupportable, either because the Government are asking farmers to pay for the inefficiency of the Ministry of Agriculture or because they are deliberately finding ways to levy an extra tax on farmers at a most desperate moment. In short, the regulations are damaging and unfair. They should go, and I ask the House to ensure that they do.

10.19 pm

Sir Peter Mills (Torridge and Devon, West): I go along with the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) on charges, but I was amazed to hear him talk about the burdens on farmers. He has a nerve to show such concern when Liberal policies are so anti-farming and agriculture in many ways. I think particularly of the land tax that Liberals would introduce and the two-tier system of support which even the president of the NFU says is utterly ridiculous.

I do not really think that we can take too much notice of the comments made by the hon. Member. There is no question about agricultural rating. Although Liberals may deny it in the House, they support agricultural rating in many areas. Whether Liberal hon. Members like it or not, Liberal policy varies from constituency to constituency, and that has always been the case. It is no good some of those younger Liberal Members who have been Members of this House for only two or three years complaining about such statements. I have watched Liberal agriculture policies in action for longer than I care to remember. I can asssure them that their policies do not help British agriculture.

Having said that, I am very unhappy about some aspects of the regulations. However, the principle of charging does not worry me. Rather I am greatly concerned about the level. It is necessary for the inspections to be carried out. The hon. Member has forgotten the whole problem about the importation of liquid milk from the Community. The regulations are an aid to implement the heat treatment milk directives to ensure that our standards are not undermined by the imports of liquid milk. All farmers support a policy of seeking to keep out imports of liquid milk. I accept the Government's view on that.

There is also the question of exports of dairy products. High quality is essential if we are to export to other countries and it requires an independent body such as the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to make these checks. I favour these checks being made by the Milk Marketing Board. The board has the routine, it can carry out the checks cheaper and it has more experience in these matters. However, that would not satisfy the Community and others. It is a great pity that the MMB cannot do the checking. Very little fuss would have been generated if it could.

[Sir Peter Mills]

So far so good on the question of the necessity for inspections. However, the charges concern me and many other farmers. If we consider the charges, there is no doubt that they will be an extra burden on farmers just at a time when they can do without them. The MMB has had considerable experience in visiting and checking. I could quote from the MMB brief which has been sent to hon. Members. However, it is true that the MMB is carrying out these inspections considerably cheaper than the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

It is also important that we hear from the Minister about the responsibility for collecting these inspection charges and whether it is perfectly legal for this collection to be imposed on the Milk Marketing Board. The Minister will recall that I mentioned to him the point about a possible reduction in the inspection charges in future. I hope that he will make every effort to reduce the cost in the light of experience of testing and visiting farms. There is no point in making the charges if, after six months or possibly a year, the Ministry finds that inspections can be carried out more cheaply. I hope that the Minister will not wait for a year, because of the difficulties facing dairy farmers at the moment. If, after six months, he finds that the Ministry can reduce charges substantially, I hope that he will act.

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): Does my hon. Friend agree that it may not be entirely satisfactory to leave it to the Ministry to decide on its own efficiency and whether it is collecting the charges by the most economical method? Would it not be good idea to bring in someone independent to judge how efficient the Ministry is?

Sir Peter Mills: I do not agree with my hon. Friend. As a former Agriculture Minister, I have every faith in the Ministry. I believe that if the Minister gives instructions that the methods are to be costed carefully and, after six months, if it is proved that the work can be done more cheaply, it will be so carried out.

I am sorry to have to say that I cannot accept the level of the charges and I shall continue to do all that I can to see that they are reduced.

10.25 pm

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): There are some raw nerves in the House this evening. I suspect that some of our colleagues may be considering what has been put in the milk at Greenwich.

The hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) was right to highlight the background against which we debate the regulations. It is a background of quotas being introduced in 1984 with almost no warning and the subsequent cuts in production, a continuing co-responsibility levy and charges for the advice and assistance of the Agricultural Development and Advisory Service. Many people in the industry must regard this measure as adding insult to injury.

Unlike the hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Sir P. Mills), the Labour party opposes the measure not simply on the practicalities but on the principle. As a member of the public who drinks milk, I am more than willing to pay through my taxes for measures to ensure that the milk is not a hazard to my health. Indeed, I would prefer to pay for that service, because the payment emphasises the fact that the inspectors are working for the public and in the public interest. If the service was wholly funded by the industry, it would have a perfect right to influence the way in which the work was done. Hon. Members have already said that the Milk Marketing Board is implying that it is possible to reduce the cost of the inspection programme. It may be possible to reduce the cost, but such reductions should be based on sound scientific advice, not on purely commercial grounds.

Almost every citizen of these islands will consume milk in some form every day, so the inspections are in the public interest, in every sense of those words. A lapse in standards at any dairy premises could lead to nasty outbreaks of food poisoning. Inspections are not carried out for the benefit of the industry. They are carried out for the benefit of the public, and it is reasonable that the public should control and pay for the operation.

The inspection of every food manufacturing processing and retail premises is paid for by the public, and the Government should tell us whether this proposal is a one-off exception or whether they intend to use it as a precedent for charging for the supervision of health and hygiene standards in bakeries, food shops, restaurants and cafes.

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire North-West): Has the hon. Gentleman considered the fact that health inspection is paid for out of rates and that farmers are not rated?

Mr. Home Robertson: The hon. Gentleman had better make up his mind about what is going on. The service is carried out through the budget of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and I suggest that that is how it should remain.

If the Government intend to set this principle, it will have implications for other parts of the United Kingdom. The Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mr. MacKay), who is responsible for agriculture in Scotland, told me in a recent debate in the Scottish Grand Committee that the regulations would affect only England and Wales, and that is obviously true. Nevertheless, if it is national Government policy that there should be such charges, we should be told in what general direction the Government wish to go in covering the cost.

On 4 December the Government initially proposed that the charge was to be £90 per visit or £22 for sampling milk and water, but administrators were considering whether the proposed £90 charge might be reduced to £80 for herds of fewer than 20 cows. In other words, they recognised that they would have to make some concessions, so they decided that they would save themselves some trouble by telegraphing the concession in advance. Looking around the House, I suspect that it would perhaps be wise for them to make some further concessions during the debate.

In the press statement that was issued following the announcement, the Government suggested that the actual cost to individual dairy farmers would be about £30 per year on average. We received a fascinating consultation document stating that the object of charging for milk and dairy inspections was to cover the whole cost of the service. It went on:

"All these costs have been carefully calculated and there is no intention either to operate at a profit to the Ministry or to cross subsidise other Ministry services."

It went on to say that there was a prospect of a concession for smaller dairy farmers. Presumably, that very

concession must show some kind of cross-subsidisation between different sectors of the industry — smaller farmers and larger farmers. That may well be right, but the Minister cannot have it both ways. This measure will either cover costs for every farmer or it will not. That point needs to be cleared up.

There then followed a consultation period when the principle of charging was resoundingly rejected from all quarters, from the National Farmers Union, the Dairy Trade Federation, the Milk Marketing Board to practically everybody else. The Government then followed the time-honoured tradition of pressing on with their original proposals, regardless of the result of the consultation period. As we know, the National Farmers Union rejected the principle of the charges out of hand. The Milk Marketing Board has said that it does not want the job of collecting the new tax from hard-pressed producers. It went on to say that the charges may have been set too high. It suggested that £19 per visit might be more appropriate than £90 per visit. It went on to warn that the Ministry could make a profit out of the mechanism. Perhaps it will do so. The Minister should come clean on that point.

The Dairy Trade Federation has made it clear that it also rejects the principle of charges. It went on to challenge the Minister's suggestion that inspections every three years can be sufficient in any circumstances. Indeed, it emphasised the need for the closest possible scrutiny of standards in food that is particularly vulnerable to any reduction in health and hygiene standards.

The proposed charges might earn the Minister some brownie points with his colleagues in the Treasury. We suggest that they are ill-considered, inappropriate and an unjustifiable imposition on a hard-pressed sector of the agriculture industry. They undermine an important principle and could cause serious difficulties in the future. They undermine the principle of an independently funded and totally independent food hygiene service. I suggest that my hon. Friends would do well to oppose the regulations in the Division. I suspect that many Conservative hon. Members would do well to do likewise.

10.34 pm

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Wealden): I object most strongly to the regulations. I do not know what world we are living in. I cannot imagine why we should pay this ludicrous charge. I do not object to the charge in principle, but I object to the level of it.

In the real world, it would be recognised that we have overtrained inspectors with BA degrees solemnly doing inspections which take about five or at most 20 minutes. We are told that they cannot go around with the Milk Marketing Board. The MMB must not have anything to do with it because of the EEC. I understand that, but why can they not go around when the milk is collected? We do not need a BA man to do that. That would help to reduce the charge.

The regulations come at a time when farmers are fed up with the way in which they think that they are treated by the EEC. I know that my right hon. Friend has fought manfully for them, but dairy people are getting a clobbering. On top of that comes this charge. I wish my right hon. Friend could take the regulations away and get them right so that people feel that they have a fair deal. Privatise the service, perhaps, but for heaven's sake take the regulations away and do something about them!

I have met nobody who knows anything about this business who believes that this is a fair charge. I have heard that criticism from people who do not object to the charge in principle. One suggestion is that, if all is well, no charge should be made. Why should there not be a charge only if a further inspection is required to give the farmer a going over to make sure that everything is fine? One of my farmers suggests that the high hygiene standards set by the MMB for farmers who regularly produce milk in payment band A make visits by Ministry inspectors pointless. Only when the producers are consistently in band B or are downgraded to band C are visits from the Ministry necessary, and then only if it proposes to offer constructive and helpful advice should the producer be charged.

I am not a legal man, but I do not like the idea of the Government making a charge and asking the MMB to collect it by making a deduction from the milk cheque. Quite a lot of farmers will simply not pay. I know some who will go the European Court of Justice. For those reasons, and a host more which my right hon. and hon. Friends will be able to produce, I hope that my right hon. Friend will think again.

I have no doubt that this was hatched in the Treasury. The Treasury must have said, "Farmers are getting a lot of money from the EEC and it is about time we showed a little public expenditure restraint, so see what you can do in MAFF to make things right by the Treasury and to show that you are making life a little uncomfortable for farmers." Farmers have had a rough enough time without these miserable regulations.

10.37 pm

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I disagree with the regulations from start to finish. I disagree with the principle of levying a charge. It is grotesquely unfair on farmers.

I did not think that the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) presented his case in a way which will be acceptable to the House as he concentrated too much on the level of the charge. The charge itself is outrageous and cannot be justified. I have received petitions and delegations from farmers and met them at the local market at Chelford. Not one believes that the charge, whether the principle or the level, can be justified.

My right hon. Friend and his colleagues have to give a reason why farmers have been singled out for such a charge. Some other businesses, which are making a lot more money than dairy farmers, are subjected to no such levy. I do not want any lessons from the hon. Member for Yeovil on how I should vote in this place. Right or wrong, good or bad, I have put my head on the block ever since I came to this place almost 16 years ago. I intend to vote against the regulations. Strangely enough, I shall be in the Division Lobby with the hon. Member for Yeovil and his colleagues.

Since 1 April 1984, the dairy farmers have suffered the most grotesque burden and injustice in the form of the quotas that were placed upon them retrospectively. With reluctance, and with great difficulty, they have manged to take on board the reduction in output that has been imposed upon them. They are now to face another cut in quota, when we as a nation are not self-sufficient in liquid milk. Is it understood that Britain is facing in reality a greater cut than any of our continental colleagues in the EEC? Is my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food saying that we are self-sufficient in liquid milk? The answer is that we are not. Our population is roughly that of West Germany and of France, but what were the tonnages of quota for the two countries? The answer is considerably greater than ours. I understand that France was given a quota of 26 million tonnes and Germany 25 million tonnes. We were given a quota of 16 million tonnes. In other words, we were at a grave disadvantage from the beginning.

Why are we imposing upon the hard-pressed dairy farmer yet another burden, however modest my right hon. Friend the Minister may seek to make it appear to be? In overall terms it might be fairly modest, but it may be the straw that breaks the camel's back. I represent an area where dairying is of great importance. In my constituency the dairy farmer is the backbone of the rural economy and of the villages. I am not prepared to represent Macclesfield and have a Government, whether they think that it is for the right reason or not, undermine the basis of our rural stability and economy.

I have spoken out against and voted against quotas, and I intend this evening to cast my vote against the regulations. First, the charge cannot be justified. Secondly, it is wrong for the Milk Marketing Board to act as a tax gatherer for the Government. If the Government believe that the charge is justified, the Ministry should collect the fees and charges itself and not expect the MMB to do so by deducting sums from the milk cheque to be received by dairy farmers throughout the country.

This is a sad day. We are knocking another nail in the coffin of the dairy farmer, and I am not prepared to be party to it.

10.44 pm

Mr. Richard Livsey (Brecon and Radnor): We are considering a matter of principle and the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) is right to argue in those terms. There is no point in going half way, as the hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Sir P. Mills) has proposed, by saying that the charges are too high. The

hon. Gentleman mentioned that exports are a factor, but with an 8·5 per cent. cut in milk quotas in April, there will be nothing to export, anyway.

In what other sector of the economy would such a thing happen? Are we soon to be walking into restaurants to be faced with a VAT bill and statutory charges for health inspections?

The Government are seeking to clobber one of the poorest sections of agriculture, and many small dairy farmers are suffering grievously. There are many in the west and in Wales who average only 80 acres. They have 30 or 40 cows and many are earning only £90 a week. The statutory charge of £90 is equal in some instances to a weekly income of £90. Careful account should be taken of that.

Dairy farmers have been hit hard and it should be understood that some of them are receiving family income supplement. The Milk Marketing Board is a farmers' organisation and it is being given the responsibility of becoming a tax collector. That is absolutely scandalous. The MMB should resist that role.

The Treasury is leading the Minister by the nose on this issue. Monetarism is creeping into the management of agriculture, which is unacceptable. It is a whiff of what is to come when the Treasury will have even greater control of agricultural policy, to the detriment of British farmers. The answer to these statutory charges will be delivered in one mighty blow to the Conservative party in the by-election in Truro, where it will be given a big shock about the feelings of those living in the countryside. ADAS charges were unacceptable to the industry, and have been a grievous imposition at a time when the industry can least afford it. The Conservative party and the Government have abandoned agriculture and the dairy sector. They will reap a bitter harvest for what they have done.

10.45 pm

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): The principle of these proposed charges is wrong. That being the case, the quantum of them is of secondary importance. On a trivial point of secondary importance, I would be interested to hear from whichever Minister is winding up what assumptions the Ministry is making about the number of inspections per day that will be carried out by an inspector. In arriving at the figures of £90 and £80, it has to be assuming a certain number of inspections per day. How many inspections is it assuming?

The reason why the principle is wrong is this. Despite what an hon. Friend of quite astonishing ignorance, who intervened, determined to display his ignorance, said, the Ministry is paid for not out of rates but out of national taxation, which farmers pay.

Mr. Ashby: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: No, I will not. Farmers pay national taxation——

Mr. Ashby: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: No. My hon. Friend chose to put the cap on himself. I did not name him.

Farmers pay national taxation and have no better reason to pay for an unwanted inspection of this kind than do companies that own factories and pay national taxation but do not pay for factory inspectors' visits, when factory inspectors are paid for by national taxation and not by the ratepayer. When wages inspectors come, the firm that they visit does not have a charge imposed on it, but wages inspectors are paid out of national taxation, and not out of the rates. Do not let us have that foolish and ignorant argument raised again.

The truth of the matter is that the Ministry has no case for imposing this charge. The total revenue from it is trivial in the context of Government revenue, but it is extremely onerous in terms of the incomes of small milk producers. to say, as I do not doubt that some Minister will be foolish enough to say, that farmers can claim tax back for these charges is true only if they pay tax. However, it is not true, if, under the pressure of quotas and co-responsibility levies and the falling price for their culled cows and barreners, or they are making a loss because they cannot cover the interest rates on their loans out of the reduced throughput of milk because of quotas. If they are not paying tax because they do not have the net income left it is foolish to say that they can recover part of the costs of those charges. That is the sort of false argument that only foolish people advance.

The thing to do with this order is to take it away and burn it. When something is obviously wrong a Minister with guts and a brain takes it away and burns it. Only a Minister who lacks either or both persists with it.—*[Interruption.]* That is so. It is so obviously a wrong and ill-conceived measure that the only possible thing to do with it is not to offer to reduce the imposition which has been shown to be grossly excessive: the only thing to do with a measure that is wrong in principle is to withdraw it.

10.51 pm

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham): I met my farmers on Friday and they told me about these regulations and exactly what I should do. They did not suggest it in quite the vehement terms that my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop) used. Nevertheless, it was clear to me they had had a rough time and that milk was likely to have an even rougher time as time went on.

I hope that we shall have a major debate on agriculture before long because it has gone through a change every bit as serious as those in the steel and shipbuilding industries. Yet we do not spend anything like the same proportion of the time on this great industry as we do on those others.

Not only has the fortune of dairy farmers been adversely affected, but there is a striking disparity of treatment between dairy farmers — especially tenant dairy farmers—and cereal farmers. It is hard to explain to the dairy farmers why they appear to have been singled out for this special treatment when the cereal farmers were not even touched in the whole course of the negotiations when my right hon. Friend the Minister was president of the Council of Agriculture Ministers and still have a comfortable existence, amassing vast surpluses for which the consumer has to pay. I should have thought that some change in the common agricultural policy could have been achieved to allow some extra help because far more dairy farmers than cereal farmers stand in need of such help.

Perhaps my right hon. Friend could advise us of the total sum that will be raised by these charges. In any part of public expenditure, it is necessary to consider the savings that could be made in the Department concerned. Before the principle of charges is accepted, the Department must be confident that no savings are necessary. As I said, and as the House will know, the position for agriculture has greatly changed. We are not

[Sir Peter Hordern]

now, as we were just a few years ago, anxious to increase production—in fact, very much the reverse. That being so, it is difficult to see why it is necessary for the Department to spend £217 million on research and development. I cannot but believe that some of that total, which has increased from £140 million in the space of five years, could have been made available to help to cover the cost of the charges. The same goes for departmental running costs, which have increased from £147 million to £220 million in five years. When an industry is under great pressure and in decline, I find it hard to see that no savings whatever could have been made in the departmental budget. I urge my right hon. Friend the Minister to look carefully at the savings in his own Department because they are more easily to be found there than in most other Government Departments. His Department's role has changed greatly in recent times. A more modest role would accurately reflect the changed circumstances, and greater support for the dairy farmer would not come amiss.

I am not opposed to the principle of the charges. I merely say to my right hon. Friend that if he thinks that they are a light burden and easily to be borne by the dairy farmers, particularly the tenant farmers, he is greatly mistaken.

10.56 pm

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (Derbyshire, West): I shall not detain the House for long.

I had the opportunity of hearing my hon. Friend the Minister of State speak in my constituency at an open meeting of the Derbyshire National Farmers Union a few weeks ago. He made a passionate defence of the regulations. However, they were not particularly well received at that meeting, as anybody would expect.

Nobody could deny that the dairy industry faces a great challenge and serious problems, along with the whole of agriculture industry. There are two main objections to the regulations. The first is that the charge in no way relates to the size of the herd, unless one has under 20 cows, and then there is an £80 charge. That is ludicrous. If one has 20 cows, there is a £10 reduction, and the standard rate applies to anything over that. That is not fair, certainly not to the smaller farmer. I do not class someone with 30 or 35 cows as a large dairy farmer. That distinction is not wide enough.

The second main objection, with which I agree, is that the charge is being taken direct from the milk cheque. That point has been covered by other hon. Members. The dairy farmers are almost not being trusted to pay the charge. There would be great problems in getting them to pay it, and understandably so. The money is docked automatically out of their pay packet, the milk cheque. I thought that that could be done only by increasing taxation, not by passing legislation in the House. That has definately upset many small farmers.

My constituency contains several small family farms, where the farmers have done so much to preserve the British countryside, yet they feel that this is one more measure that stabs them in the back and gives them more problems. I hope that even at this late stage the Minister will tell us that he will reconsider the regulations. They are not acceptable to the dairy industry and to many of my colleagues on Conservative Benches. I hope very much that the Minister will reconsider them before the night is out.

10.58 pm

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West): I shall speak briefly.

I am not terribly happy about the regulations, but I am not unhappy about the principle, having been attacked by the hon. Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop)——

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): I thought that he was the hon. Gentleman's hon. Friend.

Mr. Ashby: Yes, I think that he is, or at least should be my hon. Friend.

Let me say this. At any café or on premises where health is involved, health inspectors are paid for out of local rates. Those buildings pay their rates; factories pay their rates, and so on. That is dealt with by the health inspector. If the exception is to be the factory inspector, I remind the hon. Member for Tiverton that farms are also factories, and factory inspectors go to farms as well and that is paid for nationally.

Having dealt with that point and with the principle, I should say that the amount involved is very high. I am not happy with £90 for farms with over 20 cows. I am not happy with £80 for farms with under 20 cows. I should like to see some sort of auditing and some figures to justify that amount. Many of us who have dairy farmers in our constituency are concerned that this may be an example of the Government getting a lot of money from dairy farmers, and that money being used to pay for other services that are being given.

We must not forget that dairy farming is a contracting industry. The dairy farmers are, for that reason, in considerable difficulties. I believe that the nation would be happy to say, in the case of dairy farmers, "You are a contracting industry; your are not responsible for the contraction of your industry. It has occurred due to factors outside your control, as a result of Common Market negotiations and as a result of European negotiations." The nation would further be prepared to say, "In your exceptional circumstances, we think that we would be happy to pay the charges for your health inspection."

The principle is not wrong but—I say this again—this is a contracting industry, and because of that, perhaps, the burden of the cost of these inspections should be borne by the country.

11.1 pm

Mr. Tony Speller (Devon, North): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made many brave attempts to help agriculture and too often has been vilified for the good things that he has done. Uniquely, he has lost his touch when it comes to dairy farmers. The sheer sense of injustice that is reverberating throughout the dairy industry at present is truly well-founded. It is the feeling of inequity. It is a point that hon. Members of both sides of the House have made about the fairness of a charge when no other sector of the nation, nor, indeed, of agriculture, has had to bear such burden. It is not a greatly expensive burden, and it may not even be the last straw. None the less, it is a burden that no one else has had to bear. I do not enter the argument about who inspects what. I have spent much of my life in the catering industry, where milk is stored in vast quantity, and in the factories

where milk is processed, and it is only our farms that are seen to be picked on as a specific charge on a specific farmer. In sheer terms of equity the Government are being unreasonable in this case.

I accept, as I started by saying, that my right hon. Friend has made bold proposals on such things as afforestation, alternative use of land and on many matters which we all know have to change. The dairy farmer, if he was efficient and at the optimum level before quotas must, by definition, not be there now, since his optimum production has been cut back. That must mean that he is at a greater disadvantage than those in any other industry, where people have the opportunity to plan forward on price and production.

There was some controversy tonight about the question of who would rate agricultural land. It is fair to say to the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), with whom I frequently agree—perhaps to his surprise—that there was a Bill on rates laid before this Parliament. At the Committee stage the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) introduced a new clause requiring that, should the Bill be passed, measures relating to the rating of agricultural land should be brought forward within six months. Every Labour Member of the Committee voted for the clause. A Social Democrat voted for it, as did a Liberal, the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Meadowcroft). I think it was clause 6. I only mention this to show that all of us, from time to time, may vary in intent, and probably no side has a monopoly of purity. It is fair to say that it was in this Parliament that this vote for rating was taken. Equally it is fair to say that when someone has actually voted, that has rather more power than his words on later hustings.

Mr. Stephen Ross (Isle of Wight): I happen to be a member of the NFU and my constituents have suffered badly, because the one and only slaughterhouse has just been shut. That just means that it will cost god knows what to enable barren cows to be slaughtered. The point about rating must be cleared up. I am surprised at the hon. Member for Devon, North (Mr. Speller), because he is a very honest and genuine man. We fought the last election saying that there would be no rating of agricultural land. It was in our manifesto. It was the hon. Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) who introduced a private Member's Bill and my hon. Friend the Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells) who opposed it. Alliance Members all went into the Division Lobby to vote against it. Ever since, we have made it absolutely clear that we do not support rating agricultural land.

Mr. Speller: If the hon. Gentleman, who is also an honest man, says that, of course I accept it. Tomorrow morning, I shall put on the board the extract from *Hansard* to which I referred.

We are being unfair to and discriminating against what is today the weakest of all our agriculture sectors. It is a a matter not just of milk quotas and inspection charges, but of the knock-on effect on the beef market. I beg my right hon. Friend the Minister to think again and withdraw this unfair impost enabling a number of his hon. Friends to remain his hon. Friends in the Lobby.

11.5 pm

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): I join with some of my hon. Friends in their misgivings. There is something wrong. First, there are only two Labour Members here. It is extraordinary that, on an issue of such importance to the agriculture sector and this particularly sensitive part of it, only two Labour Front Benchers are present. We shall note with interest how many Labour Members will be in the Division Lobby.

I was inclined to vote against the regulations, but, having heard the invective in the speech of the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), I must tell him that he makes a great error of political judgment in inviting us to demonstrate some political machismo just to please him. We do not do it that way. If the hon. Gentleman had used his speech with a little more sensitivity and persuasion, he might have gained the——

Mr. Ashdown: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Nelson: The hon. Gentleman spoke for far too long. I am not going to give him another chance.

I have the honour to represent a constituency next door to the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern). Many of the members of the NFU who met him last Friday must have hot-footed it over to Midhurst to see me as well. They left me in no doubt about their feelings. I shall not reiterate many of the important and compelling technical points which have been made by my hon. Friends against the regulations. Instead I shall ask a few brief, basic, and I hope not naive, political questions.

Why did my right hon. Friend the Minister bring forward these regulations? Until now, they were not necessary. What has made them necessary now? Why bring them forward now? Is there some nuance of political sensitivity—I readily defer to my right hon. Friend's ability to determine that—which has made him strike upon this time? Is it really worth the candle? As I understand it, the measures will raise about £2 million. The cost of administration, whether through the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, or indirectly through the Milk Marketing Board, will be considerable and will be an offset against any gain.

On a day when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science announced, to great Conservative glee and applause, hundreds of millions of pounds of extra expenditure on teachers' pay, which he was able to wrest from the Treasury, was it really the politically right judgment to come to the Conservative party and the House and push for an extra £2 million gross? Was it worth it, especially when the sector from which it is to be taken is as beleaguered as the dairy sector?

I can see in simplistic terms that there is a case for levying a charge. I do not think that any Conservative Member should question the ideological case for people paying a charge. In various sectors—local government, for example—we evangelise the case for that. In this instance we should ask ourselves who is deriving benefit from what is imposed. The answer is that it is not the dairy farmer but the public at large. Therefore, if there is a case for charging, should it not fall, if not in whole certainly in part, upon the health budget rather than the agricultural budget? Perhaps that should not be the case, but there is a case for saying that the cost, even the inflated, bureaucratic, inefficient cost, should not bear so heavily on the dairy sector at a time when it is being asked to make another 2 per cent. cut in quota this year and 1 per cent. next year and when problems of reallocation through the outgoers scheme are very serious for the dairy sector.

[Mr. Nelson]

While I share some of the misgivings on the technical front, I still feel that my right hon. Friend, who is undoubtedly a great champion of agriculture and who returned from Europe in November with an outstanding deal for the beef and dairy sectors and on the green pound and elsewhere, owes it to the House to address these fundamental political questions. I know that my right hon. Friend's heart is in the right place.

11.13 pm

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Michael Jopling): The main point at issue is the simple one of whether the cost of our milk and dairies regime — about £2 million a year — should be borne by the Government or by the milk producer. Many of my hon. Friends have asked that question. I shall begin by trying to put right some of the comments that were made.

The hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) set out the background to the incomes of dairy farmers and outlined the situation in which dairy farmers find themselves. My hon. Friends the Members for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith), for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) and for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern) and others also referred to this and it is important that I should set the record straight about the background.

Nobody recognises better than I the difficulties that the dairy industry has been through in the past few years. It is important to set out the background figures. Average enterprise net income this year, 1986-87, for dairy farmers in England and Wales is forecast to be just over £16,000. That compares with just under £14,000 last year, 1985-86, and about £10,300 for 1984-85 and £8,900 in 1983-84. To put it another way, in real terms as opposed to cash terms, enterprise net income for dairy farms in England and Wales for 1986 is forecast to be at the highest level for the 1980s.

I now wish to deal with a different matter — the suggestion that we should abandon the work altogether and rely on the Milk Marketing Board testing for total bacteria count. I remind the House that the board's total bacterial count test is a relatively crude measure of the hygienic quality of the milk. It also tells us very little about the conditions of cleanliness under which milk is produced — conditions to which consumers surely attach great importance. All these matters are covered by the milk and dairies regulations, but none of them can be reliably assessed by measuring the total bacteria count levels in a laboratory. It is technically possible to ignore all the requirements contained in the milk and dairies regulations, yet still to produce milk that has a low total bacteria count. It is for that reason that a system of farm visits is necessary.

In the light of that explanation, I hope that my hon. Friends, especially my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden, who raised this point, will accept, as the Milk Marketing Board and the National Farmers Union appear to accept, that this work should be done, quite apart from the MMB's work on the total bacteria count.

On the more contentious question of who should pay, it may help if I remind the House of the context in which we are now operating. In July 1985 I announced that the Government planned to reduce the net cost of ADAS's advisory and statutory services by about £16·5 million in the financial year 1987-88. That decision was well discussed in its wider context, in accordance with the Government's overall policy of reducing public expenditure. Therefore, it must be seen in the broader context of overall public support to agriculture. I make no apology for repeating the figure that I have given to the House on other occasions. We should remember that public support for the dairy sector in 1985, the last year for which we have figures, was equivalent to £90 per cow. That is a huge amount of public support, which I do not begrudge, for this sector. I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson) raised that point.

The £16·5 million that we decided must be found had to be raised from various sources, including advisory work, economies in ADAS's operations, and also by charging for statutory work. In considering what statutory work should become chargeable, we took th view that it was reasonable to concentrate on those areas in which the work benefits the industry. We agreed to the very strong request of the NFU that——

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Jopling: Not in mid-sentence, if my hon. Friend does not mind. I must finish the point with which I am dealing, and then I shall give way. It is a very important point.

We agreed to the strong request of the NFU not to charge for the statutory duties with regard to tuberculosis and brucellosis testing. The NFU was extremely keen that we should not do so. However, in the case of milk and dairies work we concluded that the existence of strict and detailed regulations helps to maintain the market for liquid milk in England and Wales.

Mrs. Winterton: A few moments ago my right hon. Friend gave a statistic that caught my attention — that the amount of support per cow in the United Kingdom is £90. Will he inform the House of the amount of support per cow in the Federal Republic of Germany and in France so that we can make a comparison?

Mr. Jopling: My hon. Friend will have to put down a parliamentary question about that. I am afraid that I do not have the answer now, but I will gladly give it later. With respect, however, I do not think that it is relevant when we are referring to charges for the British herd and every cow is supported to the extent of £90 of public money.

I remind my hon. Friends that the home market for liquid milk is very large, accounting for about 50 per cent. of production. The liquid milk market is extremely lucrative for farmers. The 1p per pint increase in the retail price that took effect in January will add about £40 million a year to producers' returns, and that the increase in the retail price is sufficient to pay the charging bill under discussion today about 20 times over. I am strongly of the view that that situation owes a great deal to our milk and dairies regulations. I agree with hon. Members who say that the board's arrangements have contributed to that position, but I am convinced that my Department's milk and dairies regime has also played an important role.

The work benefits producers in another most important way. My hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Sir P. Mills) raised this point. It has enabled us to negotiate strict provisions in the Community's heat-treated milk directive which the House, including

Opposition Members approved in November 1985 and it will enable us to implement the directive so as to ensure that our high standards are not undermined by imports of inferior quality milk. That is a crucial point and will obviously benefit our own industry but it is possible thanks only to a domestic regime which enables us to demonstrate to our community partners that our standards are so high.

Mr. Cash *rose*——

Mr. Jopling: I should go on, but I will give way if my hon. Friend insists.

Mr. Cash: Would my right hon. Friend agree to veto the proposals coming up in the Council tomorrow regarding the French desire to ensure that they receive a national subsidy in relation to their small milk producers?

Mr. Jopling: That is a separate point. I shall be at the meeting of the Council of Ministers tomorrow and we have already expressed grave disquiet about some of the proposals that have been made by the French Government.

The producer benefits significantly from the work and it is not unreasonable, in the context of total support for the dairy industry, that he should meet the modest costs involved. My hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield asked a question on that and I believe that there are precedents for such arrangements. For example, there is a fee for Ministry of Transport testing on motor vehicles and fees for planning applications and building regulations consents. Some of my hon. Friends have drawn attention to inspection by the Health and Safety Executive. I can tell them that although the Health and Safety Executive does not charge for factory inspections, it does charge when it issues licences such as petroleum licences.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby) made the point that establishments such as restaurants and cafés pay business rates which help to offset the costs that local authorities incur in carrying out inspections. The House might not have liked that, but it might just remember that no such mechanism operates in the case of milk and dairies charges and, in any event, neither factories, shops nor restaurants enjoy the same level of public support as the dairy industry enjoys in this country today.

Some hon. Members have indicated that they are ready in principle to accept charging but that the proposed charge of £90 is much too high. I wish to make two points in reply to that. First, it is important to understand that it is not the ADAS visit alone which costs £90. We have assessed the cost of the whole system including, for example, administrative support at headquarters and in the Ministry's regional and divisional offices. I remind the House, particularly the hon. Member for Yeovil who raised this matter, that where the penalty for transgression of the arrangements is to put a farmer out of business, it is absolutely essential to have adequate controls over the uniformity and accuracy of the inspection provisions. Hence, it is essential to have a good deal of overlying management control.

Mr. Keith Best (Ynys Môn) *rose*——

Mr. Jopling: Please let me finish this phrase.

We have divided the resulting global total by the number of routine visits, which gives us the figure of £90. I have been through the figures thoroughly and I am satisfied that they correctly reflect the cost of the service, no more and no less.

Mr. Colin Shepherd (Hereford): Can my right hon. Friend explain why the charge arrived at by that method is so much higher than the figure arrived at by the animal health division in assessing the charge necessary for its veterinary inspections on visits as part of the Ministry's preventive animal health scheme? Indeed, the vets now feel that they are being undercut by the Government.

Mr. Jopling: I have explained that it is necessary to have a heavy, overlying management control. I should also point out that 25 per cent. of visits have to be followed up by letters or further visits because unsatisfactory conditions are found. The figure of £90 must be kept in proportion. It is levied only when a visit is made. That means that on average it will be paid once every two years, and farmers with high standards of compliance with the regulations will pay it once every three years or even less frequently. In other words, it is open to all wholesale producers to reduce the impact of the Government's proposal to £30 per year, or less if they have fewer than 20 cows. To sum up, for an average size herd of 60 cows the charge for a visit once every three years is 50p per cow. Set against current annual public support of £90 per cow, that is not an unfair imposition.

A number of my hon. Friends have asked whether the Milk Marketing Board should collect the sum. The House wants lower charges and the way to get them is for the board to collect the money, because that is much the cheapest way. I was also asked whether the proposal is legal, and I am assured that it is legal, under the powers in section 118 of the Food Act 1984.

My hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West asked me to ensure that the search for economies continues and to review the scheme at the end of the year. I can give him assurances on both counts. We shall certainly continue to examine closely the operation of the system, with a view to achieving further economies. If, in the light of that, we can reduce the charge, I shall lay the necessary amending regulations before the House. In the light of that undertaking, I invite the House to reject the motion.

11.28 pm

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): It took the Minister about 16 minutes to reply to the debate and I do not believe that he has answered the points put by his nine hon. Friends, never mind the case made by my hon. Friends the Members for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) and for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Livsey). The proposed charge is wrong in principle, its mode of collection is devious and inappropriate and the proposal is burdensome on a sector of the farming community which has been hard pressed by the present Administration since they took office.

The alliance parties prayed against the regulations to give the Government the opportunity to deploy their case and the House the opportunity to throw out the regulations, which have been universally opposed within the industry. The NFU has received and presented petitions from county branches all over the country and the Milk Marketing Board has spelt out in trenchant and unmistakable language the case that it should not be made to act as a tax collector for the Government to finance

[Mr. Robert Maclennan]

regulations which are for the hygiene of the industry and the benefit of the public and should be paid for out of general taxation.

It is no part of the alliance's view that these inspections or tests are not necessary. It is clear, however, that they should not be borne by the 37,000 producers in the industry for whom this is the last straw on the camel's back. The Minister must take the regulations away. We will divide the House on the regulations. I invite hon. Members on both sides of the House, and particularly those hon. Members who spoke out so trenchantly from the Conservative Benches, to join us in opposing the regulations.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 42, Noes 286.

Division No. 104] **[11.30 pm**

AYES

Alton, David
Ashdown, Paddy
Best, Keith
Boyes, Roland
Bruce, Malcolm
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Cartwright, John
Cormack, Patrick
Gower, Sir Raymond
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harvey, Robert
Hicks, Robert
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
John, Brynmor
Johnston, Sir Russell
Kennedy, Charles
Kirkwood, Archy
Knox, David
Livsey, Richard
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
Maclennan, Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
McWilliam, John
Marek, Dr John
Marland, Paul
Maxton, John
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Meadowcroft, Michael
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Skinner, Dennis
Speller, Tony
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ian Wrigglesworth and
Mrs. Elizabeth Shields.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, William
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Buck, Sir Antony
Bulmer, Esmond
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Rt Hon Sir Adam
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carttiss, Michael
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Hon A. *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
du Cann, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(N'folk SW)*
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hickmet, Richard
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hirst, Michael
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jackson, Robert
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lester, Jim
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
McCurley, Mrs Anna
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McNair-Wilson, M. *(N'bury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
McQuarrie, Albert
Madel, David
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Mather, Sir Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Roger
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Murphy, Christopher
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Osborn, Sir John
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patten, J. *(Oxf W & Abgdn)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Prior, Rt Hon James
Proctor, K. Harvey
Pym, Rt Hon Francis
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Renton, Tim
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rippon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy

St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertf'dshire N)*
Stokes, John
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M.
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'lch N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wilkinson, John
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Robert Boscawen and
Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones.

Question accordingly negatived.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS &c.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

Town and Country Planning (Scotland)

That the Town and Country Planning (Compensation for Restrictions on Mineral Workings) (Scotland) Regulations, dated 21st January 1987, a copy of which was laid before this House on 6th February, be approved.—*[Mr. Malone.]*

Representation of the People

That the draft Parliamentary Constituencies (Scotland) (Miscellaneous Changes) Order 1987, which was laid before this House on 10th February, be approved. — *[Mr. Malone.]*

Question agreed to.

PRIVATE BILL PROCEDURE

Ordered,

That the Select Committee appointed to join with a Committee of the House of Lords as the Joint Committee on Private Bill Procedure have power to appoint specialist advisers either to supply information which is not readily available or to elucidate matters of complexity within the Committee's order of reference.—*[Mr. Malone.]*

Leeds Market

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Malone.]*

11.43 pm

Mr. Michael Meadowcroft (Leeds, West): I am delighted to have the opportunity of speaking in the Adjournment debate this evening. I am aware of the privilege that is accorded to hon. Members in being able to raise a matter in the Adjournment debate. I am particularly grateful to be able to raise the matter of Leeds market. Although, in Adjournment debates, hon. Members quite properly and legitimately raise small matters that are important to many people within a constituency, Leeds market — hon. Members who are not from the north might not realise this — is of considerable importance to the region. It is fair to say that, in my 19 years or so as a representative in various guises in the city of Leeds — the city council, the county council, and now as a Member for one of its constituencies — nothing in recent years has distressed me quite as much as the prospect of the city council being able to do what it proposes to do to the site and to the market. Its proposals will destroy the character and atmosphere of the city. They impose upon Leeds yet another superstore of the kind that dots about our cities. Such superstores are perfectly proper and acceptable in many places, but they will not be proper or of benefit to us in place of the Leeds market. I am glad that the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, the hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Chope), is to reply. He has not had the easiest of times as a Minister and he has today a chance to redeem himself by demonstrating his sensitivity to local government matters by responding positively and sensitively.

The site covers virtually 15 acres. It contains a listed building of 1904 which houses a substantial informal market. One of its great beauties is its higgledy-piggledy nature, the bustle and the way in which traders shout their wares. It is proposed to demolish the entire inside, to leave only the facade and to have a five-storey development including two of modern shops and one for car parking. Market traders would find themselves in a very different market.

This is a classical example of Labour and Conservative paternalism. They maintain that, as the elected representatives, they know best what the people of Leeds and the region want, and they say that they will sort out everything from the planning to the finance. I do not believe that the history of our country or of our great cities such as Leeds since the war leads us to believe that planning has been a great triumph, that prestige projects have always been beneficial or that we should approve this deal.

The Minister will know that the site is tied in with a nearby but not contiguous site called Quarry hill, which was once the home of a remarkable housing development. The 1938 development, now alas gone, housed people in substantial flats which, contrary to today's antipathy to flats, were popular. The site has now been cleared. My party in the area stands alone in believing that the site should have housing on it and that there should be some means of bringing housing back to the city centre.

I should like to consider what makes a market and what gives it character. The first factor is its evolution. It is not

[Mr. Michael Meadowcroft]

possible to create a market such as this by design, planning or development by the diktat of public authorities. The second factor is location. Being in the centre of the city, it provides a focal point. Many people appreciate that and believe that that is part of its attraction. Perhaps, most important, however, is the relationship that it develops and fosters. There is a balance between the formal and the informal market, and between the open and the covered market. Such matters are very important.

As with all old markets, buildings and developments, it is possible to make a case for sensitive improvement. There could be a case for spending some money on it, but there is none for destroying the whole interior. We require the rapier, not the bludgeon.

It might be valuable to provide a short history of the market to demonstrate its importance to the city of Leeds and the region. As far back as the 17th century, the people of Leeds bought the market rights, which were not conveyed in the charter of 1626. They realised that the prosperity of a city such as ours is not to be built artificially but as a market centre. Marketing and the ability to sell wares and goods is the way to achieve prosperity.

In those days the market was held in Briggate, and that lasted until 1822, when the present site was purchased in Vicar lane. A central market was built in 1824. Under the Municipal Corporations Act 1835, the market came under council control but not ownership. Under the Leeds Act 1842, a committee took over the management of the market. In 1853, there was a significant incident. The proprietors of the covered market applied to Parliament for an Act to incorporate the company and to permit them to enlarge the market. The council successfully opposed the Bill, and when it was reported back to the House in 1853 it was said that the case on behalf of the company had not been made. The Bill, therefore, failed. As a consequence, the council developed a new covered market in 1855 in a rather Crystal Palace style. There was a large glass palace and an open square behind that. In 1875, 90 shops and a fish market were added.

Shortly after that we saw the birth of Marks and Spencer at the market, when Mr. Michael Marks opened his penny bazaar on the very site that I am talking about. In other words, it has a treasured history with which many will have great sympathy.

In 1893, the building was damaged by fire, which led eventually to its demolition in 1902. The present structure, which was opened in 1904, was almost entirely a covered structure, which has survived until the present day, despite being severely damaged by fire in 1975.

It is worth saying that, although the demands and the legitimate needs of the people of any city and region are paramount, regard must be paid to the traders, who have suffered many blows at the Leeds market, including the fire of 1975. However, they have managed to transcend them and to continue trading profitably. It is interesting to note that in opposition to the proposals there has been a substantial petition, which bears about 250,000 names. Despite the fact that I have the privilege of an Adjournment debate on this issue, it should be said that no other Member for Leeds is in his place this evening. I thought that other Leeds Members would wish to participate in it given the deep interest in the subject. It is possible to discount petitions by saying that the public will sign anything, but it is not possible to discount a petition bearing 250,000 signatures. Those who have signed are not confined to Leeds or Yorkshire. There are signatures from throughout the northern region. These include those who come regularly from Newcastle and Nottingham, for example, because they like the character of the market.

Having set out the importance of the market to the city, the county and the region, I turn to the responsibilities of the Minister and the Secretary of State. I think that the Secretary of State should have excercised his powers to call in the original planning application. I wrote inviting him to do so on 1 July 1986, and, unfortunately, he declined so to do. If the permission already granted were to remain unscathed and unamended by any of the many constraints currently being pressed upon him, it would be difficult for the Secretary of State to rectify his original error of omission.

I do not believe that the developers will be able to sustain their original plans and I think that there will be a further opportunity for the Secretary of State to act. Two matters may well impinge upon him. There is the possibility that those who oppose the project will be able to obtain judicial review of the procedures. Whether or not they will succeed in that I know not, but that is a possibility. Secondly, there is the issue of the development company's finances. It is not an especially large company with particularly large resources. I would not wish to dwell on the fact that it is located in Holland.

Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock (Batley and Spen): Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that there is some worry among the local people in the market that the tenure of the market will change and that the Dutch company, which is peripheral to his argument, is a little suspect when we come to consider the way in which it might proceed?

Mr. Meadowcroft: The hon. Lady has rightly said that the resources of the company are peripheral to the argument, in the sense that if it were not that company, another might raise the funds. We are talking about £90 million, which is a substantial sum. The entire staff of MAB in November 1986 stood at eight office clerks, two managers and two directors. Its total authorised capital is 5 million Dutch guilders, with only 1 million—£300,000—paid up. There is some doubt about the company, and in January, the city council gave it three months to come up with the resources. That period has yet to finish, and we wait with interet to see whether the company can raise that sum.

As far as I am aware, there has not yet been a response from the Minister or the Secretary of State about the application for listed building consent. The proposals have earned the united oppositionof the Leeds Civic Trust, the Victorian Society and the organisation Save Britain's Heritage. It would be in full accord with Leeds' affection for the market if the Secretary of State said that simply to keep the facade of the building would be unacceptable, and would involve official vandalism of a high order. To do so would leave us in a position akin to that of Bradford, which suffered similar destruction and demolition some years ago, leaving that part of Yorkshire with only half a market and the equivalent of a small superstore, which has nothing like the same atmosphere.

In its central business area development plan, the city council had some excellent words. It said:

"new building should take place within the street framework and the closure of the streets, alleys and arcades in the city centre will generally not be acceptable."

Such a principle cannot be contained in a plan that destroys the intimate relationship between trade and the city centre environment in Leeds.

It is interesting that the city council's failure to listen to, or consult local people has led to a unique instance. The student union, at a general meeting, has passed a motion in favour of the alliance in Leeds. This makes the point that, in common with other people who are in need, the students find the market a source of cheap food, and a shopping area that is different from an expensive development. The council has sought to minimise the opposition, but of the 1,276 representations from traders, 1,206 have been opposed to the scheme, and at an exhibition about the development, those opposed outnumbered those in favour by two to one.

If the plan were to go ahead in the form proposed, it would do considerable damage to a whole host of other developments that serve the region. For instance, it would mean a 25 per cent. increase in shop units, when the St. John's centre in Leeds is only half full. The Schofields site is being developed, and there are objections to the project from Lewis's and from Burton's, which occupies an important site on the corner of Briggate. Other shopping centres around the city are likely to suffer, and we are likely to have a polarisation within the regional centre between the developed and undeveloped parts of the city.

We should look at the finances of the market. The profits on the city's market operation, of which the central market is 80 per cent., have been as follows: in 1985-86, just under £2 million, in 1986-87, over £2 million, and the estimated profit for 1987-88 is again around £2 million. Despite the council's claim that the market needs redeveloping, it is making money year by year for the city. Surely, no sensible person would put £2 million in jeopardy without an absolute assurance that more money will come without risk, and there is no possibility of that. The prospect is that we shall reach saturation point, and those who are saying that they will move into the centre with the modern shopping that is being proposed are giving no assurance that they will maintain other outlets in the city. Therefore, it is likely that they will move into this and leave others empty, so there will be no gain whatever for the city.

If we are to go ahead with such a development, it will not only have an effect within the confines of Leeds but will go way beyond it. It is counter to all the trends that we are trying to see now by looking towards a sensitive and smaller development than that which is proposed here. I do not believe that we would want to maintain this proposal in the light of all the evidence against it. I hope that the Minister can offer some words of comfort to us in the city and in the region and suggest that there is some way in which he can act and consider the listed building consent and the prospects of a future planning application and what might happen to it to see whether there is some way of preventing this from going ahead in its present form. I believe that the proposal will have serious effects and that the people of Leeds and the region will be the ones to suffer, not the likes of the Minister or me.

12.1 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Christopher Chope): I have listened carefully to the views expressed by the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Meadowcroft) about the proposals for the redevelopment of the Kirkgate market in Leeds. I understand that the market traders association is applying for a judicial review of Leeds city council's handling of the proposals. I am sure that the House will bear with me, therefore, if I exercise caution in commenting on the details of the case.

However, I should like to take this opportunity of making absolutely clear a general point about such cases. Decisions on local planning matters are the responsibility of local planning authorities. That is not a new concept: it is only right that local authorities are left to get on with the job which has been given to them by Parliament, and which they were elected to do. That responsibility should be taken away only very exceptionally, when there are issues involved which are clearly of more than local significance.

Mr. Meadowcroft: I am glad that the Minister has made this important point, that although the application was made by the Dutch development company, it has nevertheless put together the project with the full agreement of the city council. Therefore, in a very real sense the city council is asking itself for planning permission in this case. I wonder whether the Minister has appreciated the point that the whole case is within a closed circle, which hardly helps anybody to believe that it is a fair process.

Mr. Chope: I know that the city council took exception to a comment that the hon. Gentleman made, in which he suggested that it was giving planning permission to itself. In fact, this is a joint venture scheme and I do not think that it is unique, in shopping centre development in this country. What is interesting is that the hon. Gentleman has so often criticised my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and other members of the Government for wanting to interfere in the way in which local authorities manage their affairs. However, as soon as he finds himself confronted by a decision by his own local council with which he passionately disagrees, he is the first person to come along and say that my right hon. Friend should intervene on his behalf.

There are, of course, some circumstances in which particular proposals may have a wider impact, regionally or indeed nationally. In those instances, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be prepared to consider whether he should call in the application and decide it himself. That does not presuppose, of course, that all such cases will be called in. Against the general background that I have described, it is desirable that he should intervene only when it is really necessary that he should do so.

Circular 2 of 1981 and an associated direction requires the local planning authority to inform the Secretary of State of proposals which would, in the authority's opinion materially conflict with or prejudice the implementation of the policies and general proposals of a development plan which he has approved. I condense a little for the sake of simplicity and brevity. The purpose, is of course, to give the Secretary of State a chance to decide the matter himself if he wishes, since he approved the proposals in the plan.

Call in by the Secretary of State is relatively rare—normally fewer than 100 times a year. In 1984 there were, in fact, only 42 cases out of a total of 427,000 applications; of those 42, only three related to superstore proposals.

[Mr. Chope]

That brings me to the present arrangements for shopping. The Department's Circular 21/86 of December 1986 "Policy on Major Retail Developments", informed local authorities of a new direction to the effect that, before granting planning permission, the local authority should consult the Secretary of State regarding any retail proposals with gross shopping floor space of not less than 250,000 sq. ft.

The direction reflects our concern that we should have the opportunity to consider calling such cases in. It does not mean that we shall necessarily call in all the cases referred to us. Nor does it mean that a shopping proposal has to exceed 250,000 sq. ft. before we will call it in. We shall continue to consider each case—as we have always done—in the light of its individual merits.

In this context, it may be helpful if I say a little about our general policy on retail development, which is sometimes misunderstood. Annex A to Circular 21/86, which reproduces a parliamentary answer given in July 1986 when my right hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Jenkin) was Secretary of State, sets out our approach. It makes it clear that the planning system is not concerned with matters of commercial competition between retailers or methods of retailing; it must take into account the benefits to the public that flow from new developments in the distributive and retailing trades. But our policy also recognises that in exceptional circumstances it is necessary to take account of the cumulative effects of other recent and proposed large-scale retail developments in the locality, and to consider whether they are of such a scale and of a type that they could seriously affect the vitality and viability of a nearby town centre as a whole. Here, we are concerned with the second order effects of trade diversion, not with the mere fact that trade may be diverted—for example, in the possibility of a significant increase in vacant properties, or a marked reduction in the range of services that a town centre provides, which might lead to its general physical deterioration and to the detriment of its future place in the economic and social life of the community. Town centres need to maintain their diversity and activity if they are to retain their vitality, but that does not mean that the range and variety of shops and services should not be allowed to change in response to changing circumstances. Nor does it imply that it is always necessary to call cases in to ensure that the policy that I have outlined is applied properly. It is for local authorities to consider factors themselves in any case in which they are relevant.

In the case that the hon. Gentleman mentioned, there have been requests that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State should exercise his discretion in favour of calling in the application for the redevelopment of the market by the Dutch development company MAB. The main issues raised in those requests were: the effect on shopping provision in the city centre; the character of the market itself; and conformity with the central business area district plan. The market traders association expressed its view that the proposal would result in an insensitive over-development of the few remaining traditional markets. Individual market traders have written to the Department about their fears that they will be located in less advantageous positions and that their livelihood will thereby be threatened. I believe it to be significant, however, that very few local people have written to the Department to voice any objection to the scheme. In fact, only five letters have been received from members of the general public.

The hon. Gentleman referred to a petition comprising some 250,000 signatures, but I am told that that petition was started in September 1985, some nine months before the first application by MAB. It was then referred to in the press and in a letter to the Secretary of State from Last Suddards, agents for the market traders association, in July 1986, when the petition was said to contain over 200,000 signatures, but it was not presented to the planning department of Leeds city council apparently until 20 October 1986, one week before the application for the redevelopment of the market went to committee. That is some of the background to the petition. I am told that many of the signatures on it are not of people from the locality of Leeds, but from far outside.

Mr. Meadowcroft: That is an important point. The Minister is making the case for me when he says that many of the people who signed the petition are not from the locality of Leeds. The market is a regional facility, and I have tried to emphasise that. Does the Minister accept that there have been many letters to me and to members of the council from people round about, and few issues have excited as much interest from the public? Whether they believed that by writing to their representatives or by signing a petition they were taking sufficient action to register their objection, I know not, but I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that there has been widespread opposition from people in the city.

Mr. Chope: It is for the local authority to assess the views of the local people. If the local authority gets it wrong, I am sure that the people will react accordingly. Conservative Members trust the people. The hon. Member for Leeds, West is in an odd position of arguing against local democracy and in favour of intervention from the centre.

This particular proposal does not fall within the categories of development outlined in the circular that I have just mentioned. It is not an out-of-town proposal. Furthermore, the scheme cannot be regarded as a departure from the provisions of the development plan. The site is in the area covered by the Leeds central business area district plan, which was approved by the council as recently as 1982. In that plan, Kirkgate market is in a prime shopping centre, and redevelopment of the market area is envisaged, albeit on a smaller scale than that now to be undertaken.

An application for listed building consent was made by MAB to Leeds. The council consulted various amenity bodies, including the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission and the application was revised in the light of their comments. An application for the demolition of unlisted buildings in a conservation area was withdrawn after the buildings were spot listed. The HBMC was content for the listed building application to be left for the local authority to decide.

All these aspects were carefully considered by my right hon. Friend in reaching his conclusion that the application should not be called in for his own decision. It would be wrong for me to comment further pending the outcome of the application for judicial review.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eleven minutes past Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 3 March 1987

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

COUNTY OF CLEVELAND BILL *[Lords]*

Order for Third Reading read.
Queen's consent, on behalf of the Crown, signified.
Read the Third time and passed.

WEST GLAMORGAN BILL *[Lords]*

Order for Third Reading read.
Queen's consent, on behalf of the Crown, signified.
Read the Third time and passed.

Oral Answers to Questions

EMPLOYMENT

Employment Creation Programmes

1. **Mr. Ray Powell** asked the Paymaster General what funds he proposes to allocate to each of the Government's employment creation programmes in 1987-88; and if he will make a statement.

The Paymaster General and Minister for Employment (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): The public expenditure White Paper provides for total expenditure in 1987-88 of over £3,000 million on employment, enterprise and training measures. Details of the expenditure proposed for each of the measures will be published shortly in the Supply Estimates.

Mr. Powell: Will the Paymaster General admit that the funding for the new job training scheme which he suggests has been transferred from existing adult training programmes? Is it not true that a number of the major trade unions have expressed reservations regarding the safeguarding of quality training and that the quality training has been abandoned?

Mr. Clarke: The new job training scheme, to which the hon. Gentleman refers, will cost £216 million, and of that £102 million will be in addition to the adult training budget. There will be some switching from other parts of the programme to the extent that the new scheme provides a better option for some of the people being trained. However, we are still greatly increasing the number being trained and we will certainly be giving them quality training. The Trades Union Congress is not expressing reservations generally of the sort that the hon. Gentleman has described, despite the attempts of some Opposition spokesmen to persuade the TUC to oppose it.

Mr. Gregory: Did not the Labour Government propose a youth training scheme, but disregard it as being too expensive and beyond their capabilities?

Mr. Clarke: I believe that to be the case. The present youth training scheme, which now costs £1 billion, is a high quality scheme that was devised, introduced and improved by the Government in the face of constant carping by most of the official Opposition spokesmen.

Mr. Foot: If the right hon. and learned Gentleman will examine the matter again, he will discover that what he has just said is false. There was no scrapping of such a scheme by the previous Labour Government, so would he get the facts right about that? Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman tell us how much of the extra burden for the new programme is to fall on local authorities? Some of it is being paid for by the local authorities and we would like to know how much.

Mr. Clarke: There is absolutely no extra cost to fall on local authorities. It is up to local authorities to decide whether they are going to be managing agents in the ordinary way.

Inner Cities

2. **Mr. Spencer** asked the Paymaster General what recent initiatives he has taken to promote employment in the inner cities.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: So far I have approved some 75 projects committing around £4 million in our eight inner city task force areas, which will encourage enterprise training and job creation. We have also concentrated the efforts and programmes of the Manpower Services Commission and other Government Departments on the eight areas and their residents. We are also making progress on the greater use of local labour on inner city building work and targeted training schemes which link training with specific job opportunities for local people.

Mr. Spencer: When we welcomed my right hon. and learned Friend to Leicester recently in the inner area, did he notice the increase in the number of small businesses and the amount of training available, which has given rise to a large increase in jobs? Does he not think that the time has come for the city council to put its opposition to the Highfields task force on one side and show where its compassion really lies?

Mr. Clarke: I agree that the hostility of the extreme council in Leicester has slowed up progress in the early stages in that city. I have been told that the latest example of that is that the city council is refusing to co-operate with the Industrial Society in introducing the head start programme for training for young people, so its officers, in effect, cannot discuss the matter with the Industrial Society's officers. However, we are getting on without them and finding the sponsors we require. On my recent visit to Leicester, I was extremely grateful to my hon. Friends for introducing me to those who wish to take advantage of the scheme. I was also delighted to announce grants to the textile arts centre to increase the training of many more young people in the skills which are in desperately short supply in Leicester in the textile industry.

Mr. Mason: With regard to promoting employment, is the right hon. and learned Gentleman aware that since the Government changed the assisted area status map more

than two years ago, there have been massive job losses, especially in coal mining areas due to pit closure programmes? If he wants to promote employment will he now consider changing the assisted area status map once again and——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The question is about inner cities.

Mr. Mason: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman consider areas, such as Barnsley, which have suffered drastically from job losses and give them development area status so that they can benefit from the new investment that goes with it?

Mr. Clarke: Development area status is, of course, a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. The job losses that have been caused in south Yorkshire have been largely the consequence of the closure of uneconomic coal mines taking place in a short space of time. Certainly my Department will consider the problems being created in some of those south Yorkshire towns, and, if any of them could benefit from the inner city initiative, I will certainly consider that.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: My right hon. and learned Friend has often acknowledged that the promotion of employment, particularly in our inner cities, is a most complex matter which is not often helped by the actions and words of Opposition Members. Does he agree that one area of action is in real estate and land development? My right hon. and learned Friend has been most kind in meeting business men and others from the city of Nottingham. Will he comment on the degree of interdepartmental co-operation in that area?

Mr. Clarke: I made a special visit to the part of Nottingham represented by my hon. Friend. Indeed, my right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State for Employment and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment have recently paid visits to the city. We have seen the vast extent of unoccupied land and the need for more work experience and training of people living in the centre of Nottingham. I assure my hon. Friend that we are all working closely together to consider how to take further forward the present encouraging signs of a desire to take an initiative within the city.

Labour Statistics

3. **Mr. Ron Brown** asked the Paymaster General how many people under the age of 25 years are currently unemployed in the United Kingdom.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. John Lee): On 8 January 1987 the number of unemployed claimants in the United Kingdom aged under 25 years was 1,133,000.

Mr. Brown: Judging from the figures obviously the Minister must realise that many youngsters these days leave school with no job, hope or future. Does he realise —I am sure he does—that in Leith 40 per cent. of the long-term unemployed are under the age of 25? Will he therefore use YTS funds to create real jobs, for example, by investing in engineering apprenticeships? Will he follow that constructive line, which has been taken in Germany?

Mr. Lee: The Government are spending overall about £3·5 billion a year on employment and training measures. We now have in place probably the most comprehensive range of training measures almost anywhere in the western world.

With regard to Leith and the Edinburgh travel-to-work area, I am pleased to note that, since January 1984, there has been a reduction of 9·4 per cent. among those aged under 25 who have been unemployed.

Mr. Marlow: Has my hon. Friend read the Audit Commission report, which says that in parts of inner London 45 per cent. of young people are unemployed and 60 per cent. of young blacks are unemployed? My hon. Friend will know that London is awash with work opportunities. He will also know that the Inner London education authority spends twice as much per head in educating the young people in London. They are therefore obviously properly educated. Why do they not get some work? What will my hon. Friend do to ensure that they take jobs when they are available?

Mr. Lee: Certainly in the past, across the political divide, we have failed to educate and train our people properly. There are job opportunities in inner city London. Indeed, I noticed in the *Manchester Evening News* last Thursday that there were no fewer than 28 pages of jobs available in that inner city.

Mr. Leighton: Can the Minister explain why the Government are cutting, economising on and thereby damaging, the community programme? Is it so that he can steer the 18 to 25-year-olds away from the community programme and on to the new job training scheme which is an even cheaper way of taking people off the register? Has not the Manpower Services Commission been told to make cuts of 10 per cent. across the board in the community programme? Is he aware that I have been told by local MSC staff that even people now on the programme could be made redundant? Would not that be an appalling experience for them?

Mr. Lee: We are not reducing the funding for the community programme, although it is true that overall the programme has plateaued and there is a slight reduction in places. Nevertheless, the job training scheme that is coming through will present new opportunities.

Mr. Lawler: Has not unemployment among those under 25 actually fallen by 80,000 over the last year, and as a percentage of total unemployment has it not also fallen? Is this not a reflection of the success of YTS as an employment-creating scheme?

Mr. Lee: My hon. Friend is right. Unemployment for the under-25s fell from about 20 per cent. in 1983 to 18 per cent. in 1986, and we are now below the EC average of 22 per cent.

Skill Shortage

4. **Mr. Eastham** asked the Paymaster General if he has any plans to improve programmes to tackle skill shortages in the economy.

12. **Mr. Corbett** asked the Paymaster General what steps he has taken to alleviate skill shortages in British industry.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. David Trippier): The Government continually review their training programmes to ensure

that they are relevant to the needs of the economy. We have increased spending by the taxpayer on training and retraining from £460 million in 1979 to some £1·5 billion and reduced the proportion of employers' expected output to be constrained by skill shortages from over 25 per cent. to 9 per cent. in January this year. A major new job training scheme has just been introduced which will provide further help for unemployed people to gain the skills required by industry.

Mr. Eastham: Has the Minister yet had an opportunity to examine the Audit Commission report which was published at the end of last month? That report is highly critical. It says that the MSC is not keeping adequate records about the kind of skills that are required. This is at a time when 20 per cent. of employers say that they could create more jobs if the right kind of skills, such as new technologies, professional engineers and computer engineers were available. Are not the Government failing to find the right skills for the people that are needed by industry?

Mr. Trippier: It is important to tell the hon. Gentleman that the Audit Commission report about which he spoke covers the period from 1981 to April 1986. Since that time we have introduced three measures which have helped to relieve the problem that he has identified. First, we have introduced a computer-assisted local labour market information system; secondly we have introduced a skills unit which has been set up by the MSC to provide a clear focus for work on skills, including specific changes in skill needs; and, thirdly, local employer networks which specifically deal with the problem that the hon. Gentleman mentioned.

Mr. Corbett: How can the Minister be so complacent about this? In their eight years in office the Government have closed most of the training boards and skill centres and sat idly by and seen the virtual disappearance of apprenticeships. When will he get on his feet and help employers in the west midlands and elsewhere who regularly report to his Department that their output is being affected by the lack of suitably skilled people?

Mr. Trippier: I do not think that it is in any way complacent to have increased substantially the amount of money that the Government are spending on training, now reaching the record figure of £1·5 billion, compared with the paltry sum that the Labour Government spent on training. The hon. Gentleman cannot have it both ways. He and his colleagues are quick to criticise the introduction of a new job training scheme to deal with the problems that his hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Eastham) has identified. As soon as we bring out such a scheme, the Opposition try to rubbish it, even though it is devised to meet the skill shortages that we all too clearly see.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Can my hon. Friend explain what efforts are made to identify skill shortages in each jobcentre area and to feed the information to the local training initiatives? In Wells there seems to be a mismatch between some skill shortages and the training places available, even in quite basic skills such as those in some construction trades.

Mr. Trippier: My hon. Friend is right to identify the fact that we obviously have those skill shortages. As I said at the last Question Time, there are undoubtedly skill shortages, but I suggest that the percentage of skill shortages is now much lower than it was during the last few years of the Labour Government.

On the precise question that my hon. Friend has raised, we are developing training access points, set up by the MSC, to provide better access to information on the education and training opportunities available locally, together with the local employer networks which are growing and have already been set up in a number of pilot areas. Those will be replicated elsewhere—I hope in my hon. Friend's constituency.

Mr. Watts: Does my hon. Friend agree that the existence of skill shortages is a symptom of the rapid economic growth in the British economy? Does he also agree that, contrary to the experience of the Labour Government, this Government have invested large amounts of taxpayers' money to help to meet those skill shortages? Will my hon. Friend remind the House of the range of Government funded schemes available to help meet the skill shortages now and compare that to 1978-79?

Mr. Trippier: In fact, as my hon. Friend has suggested, they bear favourable comparison. One of the problems that we have identified is that the apprenticeships, which all hon. Members have come to know over a number of years, are perhaps outmoded and not as appropriate in the 1980s as they were in the 1960s—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) may pour scorn on that, but he should listen to what Mr. Eric Hammond the general secretary of the Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunication and Plumbing Union, said when he was talking about the success that the union had achieved because its contribution has been to scale down wage rates to bring them into line with YTS allowances. He said:

> "Of course, we had considerable criticisms from other trade unions . . . But at the end of four years, with thousands under training, thousands becoming skilled, we can feel justly proud to have provided hope for so many."

Mr. Sheerman: Does the Minister agree that the truth of the matter is that the present skill shortages demonstrate what has happened during eight wasted years? In those eight wasted years, we have seen the Government concentrate on schemes for 1 million people, which give them a thin layer of training, whereas in fact real training for people in work, on which our productivity is based, has been allowed to go to the wall. Less than 7 per cent. of people in work receive any training. How do we compete on that basis in skills?

Mr. Trippier: That is an amazing allegation. The hon. Gentleman could not have heard what I said in reply to the substantive question from his hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Eastham). There is a contract now of a shortage of skilled places of about 9 per cent., which contrasts with a shortage of 25 per cent. during the last three years of the Labour Administration. His hon. Friend the Member for Blackley summed it up remarkably well in a speech in this House on 12 February, when he made the lunatic suggestion:

> "We have got training schemes coming out of our ears."
> —*[Official Report, 12 February 1987; Vol. 110, c. 526.]*

So we have and we are proud of it.

Labour Statistics

5. **Mr. Nicholls** asked the Paymaster General, during the last monthly period for which figures are available, how many listed as unemployed were unemployed for less than a week.

Mr. Lee: On 8 January 1987, the number of claimants in the United Kingdom who had been unemployed for one week or less was 113,600.

Mr. Nicholls: Does my hon. Friend agree that there are several anomalies behind even those figures? Does he agree that if a man worked for two days every week, but not for the same two days every week, he would have worked for 40 per cent. of that week, but be recorded as 100 per cent. unemployed? If the unemployment figures are to be a record of all those who are unemployed should they not be adjusted to take account of anomalies like that?

Mr. Lee: If a person is working on a regular part-time basis, the full extent normal rule applies; in other words, he is excluded from unemployment benefit. If the part-time work is not regular, unemployment benefit is payable for the unworked days. Therefore, he is on the count. But I have to say that we do not statistically calculate parts of people.

Mr. Winnick: Should not that answer be compared with the reply that the Minister recently gave to me in which I was informed that 158,000 people in the west midlands have been unemployed for 12 months or more, compared with 34,000 in April 1979? Does that not show the devastation and misery that has taken place in the west midlands?

Mr. Lee: Eight per cent. of the new claimants leave the count within a week, a quarter of those becoming unemployed leave the count within a month, one half within three months and two thirds within six months. Each day 30,000 people start new jobs.

Local Enterprise Agencies

6. **Mr. Couchman** asked the Paymaster General if he will give the latest figures for the number of local enterprise agencies.

Mr. Trippier: There are currently 368 local enterprise agencies throughout the United Kingdom, of which 294 are approved under the terms of the Finance Act 1982 which allows business sector sponsors tax relief on their contributions to such bodies.

Mr. Couchman: Does my hon. Friend have plans to extend the local enterprise agency grants scheme, operating during the past year — [HON. MEMBERS: "Reading."] Does my hon. Friend propose to extend the LEAG scheme to embrace larger and perhaps more successful local enterprise agencies, such as the Medway enterprise agency? *[Interruption.]* Does my hon. Friend not think that those larger agencies may also benefit by being taken into the LEAG scheme and that that may catalyse the creation of even more new jobs?

Mr. Trippier: The local enterprise agency grants scheme was not introduced to help and support the more successful enterprise agencies, such as the one in the Medway, which has an excellent reputation and to which I am happy to pay tribute. If we had done that, we might have been in danger of supporting the London enterprise agency, which has a vast number of sponsors. We had to draw the line somewhere. Although I am happy to pay tribute to the enterprise agency and its director, we cannot help in the immediate future. However, we shall continue to monitor the position.

Mr. Bruce: Does the Minister accept that the development of enterprise agencies and similar organisations is a crucial way to develop small businesses further? I know that he is to visit Aberdeen on Monday to open the new offices of the Aberdeen enterprise trust. Will he acknowledge that these agencies have identified the need for finance to be pulled in behind them in a way which caters for the needs of small businesses, particularly for venture capital?

Mr. Trippier: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, and I am glad that the enterprise agency movement is playing a part in this. I am impressed at the way in which some enterprise agencies are joining together to form local business expansion scheme funds. Some enterprise agencies are acting as marriage brokers, trying to indentify investors and target companies. I hope to see that develop, particularly in Aberdeen.

Mr. Bellingham: Is my hon. Friend aware that since the west Norfolk enterprise agency was set up it has overseen more than 600 individual clients, and that of those more than 70 have set up businesses of their own creating more than 100 new jobs? Is that not a perfect example of the way in which local enterprise agencies can inject new vigour into a community?

Mr. Trippier: I am bound to say that Question Time would not be the same if my hon. Friend did not have the opportunity to pay tribute to his local enterprise agency, which he played a significant part in forming in the first place. I am impressed with the success of that enterprise, particularly as it has been formed for only a relatively short time.

Wages Act (Deregulation)

7. **Mr. Torney** asked the Paymaster General how many new jobs he estimates have been created by the deregulation contained in the Wages Act.

Mr. Trippier: Attempts to estimate the job creation effects of these particular reforms are not likely to be fruitful. However, in my opinion the adverse effects of over-regulation on business enterprise are such that the provisions of the Act can only increase employment beyond what it would otherwise have been.

Mr. Torney: In view of that answer, is the Minister prepared to tell the Chancellor of the Exchequer to eat his words, introducing the last Budget, when he said that "lower wages mean more jobs"? Does he agree that the real reason for the Wages Act was to cut the wages of the lowest paid workers in order to increase the profits of friends of the Tory party who contribute huge sums to Tory party funds?

Mr. Trippier: I am certainly not in a position to ask my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to eat his own words, nor would I ever dare to do so. But the hon. Gentleman has given the House the incorrect impression that the legislation which we introduced took everyone out of the purview of the wages councils orders. That is not the case. We took only those under 21 out of that purview. The

purpose of introducing that legislation was to give those young people a chance to get on the first rung of the employment ladder, a chance that we do not think that they would have had without that sort of legislation.

Mr. Gryllis: Does my hon. Friend not agree that, if the partial deregulation of the Wages Act has been successful in creating new jobs, that is an argument for deregulating the entire Act?

Mr. Trippier: My hon. Friend's question shows the dilemma that the Government were in when they were reviewing this position not that long ago. On the one hand some Labour Members wanted to keep the wages council orders in their old form and on the other hand some Conservative Members wished to scrap them altogether. As a responsible Government, we listened to the representations made by industry during the consultation process. We decided to retain the purview to which I referred earlier for those over 21. We believe that we have got the balance right.

Mr. John Browne: Does my hon. Friend accept that over-regulation is far more of a disincentive to new enterprise and to new employment than are either access to capital or high interest rates? Will he reaffirm that the Government will continue their drive towards deregulation and the encouragement of enterprise and creating even more new employment than is contained in their fine record to date?

Mr. Trippier: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I am happy to confirm that our latest White Paper, "Building Businesses . . .Not Barriers", was simply the second chapter of what will be a long-running novel.

Ms. Richardson: Will the Minister answer a simple question? Why, through deregulation under the Wages Act and under the Sex Discrimination Act 1986, is he dragging more people, especially women, into low pay?

Mr. Trippier: As I have already told the House, women over the age of 21 are not affected by the legislation to which we have referred. We are talking about those who are aged 21 and under.

Mr. Marland: Does not my hon. Friend agree with me that it was trade union negotiators who, in the 1970s, took youth wages to such an unrealistically high level that denied young people the opportunity of work then and even now?

Mr. Trippier: The result of that, as my hon. Friend implies, is that those young people could not price themselves into jobs. With this legislation we are giving those young people an opportunity that they otherwise would not get.

Job Training Scheme

9. **Mr. Madden** asked the Paymaster General what reduction in registered unemployment he expects as a result of job training scheme by summer 1987.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Our new JTS aims to provide quality training for the long-term unemployed and its impact on unemployment will depend on its rate of expansion, its take-up and its success in providing the skills necessary to help participants back into jobs.

Mr. Madden: Is the Paymaster General concerned about people recruited under the job training scheme replacing people already in employment and, if he is, what safeguards has he adopted to ensure that job displacement does not take place? The right hon. and learned Gentleman mentioned quality in his reply. What, in practical terms, does that mean?

Mr. Clarke: Work experience is provided by one or more employer. The training will also include quite a bit of training off the job. Therefore there is little risk of the new trainees displacing existing jobs, as the hon. Gentleman fears. We are certainly making sure that the MSC and all concerned work towards good quality schemes, because we are aiming to raise skill levels in this country. That means that we need good quality training.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the one thing that unemployed people want, on the road to a proper job, is good training and that a job training scheme is an essential step in this direction in that it provides training for the unemployed if they so wish it? Will he give an account to the House of how this new scheme is progressing?

Mr. Clarke: Certainly. So far almost 2,000 people have been entered into the scheme—1,992 in fact. However, it is expanding steadily and it is well on course to get up to over 200,000 trainees a year if it continues to expand at the present rate. We should like to maintain that rate of expansion, so long as we can ensure that the quality of training being given will indeed steer unemployed people back towards jobs.

Dr. Godman: Are there not structural weaknesses in the scheme which allow disreputable employers to exploit it and, by so doing, harm the interests of their employees?

Mr. Clarke: As far as I am aware, the answer is no. If the hon. Gentleman knows of any example of a disreputable employer being taken on to the scheme, I should be anxious to hear about it. We hope that as soon as possible we shall move to a situation whereby all the managing agents will be approved training agencies.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Are not the problems of the unemployed so often compounded by the Labour party's cynical and negative attitude? Would not the Labour party be better advised to follow the example of its brothers and sisters in the TUC whose representatives, I understand, endorse the MSC's job training scheme?

Mr. Clarke: I entirely agree. We could probably offer a year's free supply of beer to all the unemployed and the Opposition would oppose it. Their reaction to every positive idea which we put forward is one of carping criticism and negative attitudes.

Ms. Clare Short: Will the Paymaster General admit that the funding for the job training scheme at YTS equivalent costs provides for only three weeks' training in six months? That reveals the cynicism behind the scheme. It is not real training. It requires the unemployed to work for supplementary benefits. And to pay for the scheme — because there is no new money — TOPS, which provides real training, has been cut.

Mr. Clarke: I am afraid that the hon. Lady has chosen an incorrect route to guide her towards an assessment of the amount of off-the-job training. In practice, for most individuals it will be substantially more than that. Of

course, the length of the scheme will vary from individual to individual according to the needs of the individual and of the local labour market.

Mr. Patrick Thompson: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that Opposition attempts to rubbish the Government's initiatives on training schemes, such as the attempt which will be made tonight by Labour-controlled Norwich city council, will completely fail to conceal the success of the Government's measures in helping our young people and the long-term unemployed?

Mr. Clarke: Some Labour-controlled councils turn away job experience, training opportunities and cash from the Government which would assist the inhabitants of their areas. No doubt they are encouraged in that by the totally negative attitude of the Labour Front Bench to whatever we propose.

Disabled People

10. **Mr. Ashley** asked the Paymaster General what percentage of disabled people are unemployed compared with the national average rate of unemployment.

Mr. Lee: Figures on unemployment among handicapped or disabled persons are not available from the unemployment count. However, the 1985 labour force survey showed an unemployment rate of 23·4 per cent. among those whose work would be limited by health problems or disabilities, compared with a rate for all persons of 10·6 per cent.

Mr. Ashley: Will the Minister acknowledge that the rate of 23·4 per cent. is shocking and disturbing and is a clear sign that the Government's reliance on purely voluntary policies is grossly mistaken? Does he recognise that Western Germany has a tough, realistic and statutory provision which is enforced and which works? Why can there not be the same kind of legislation for disabled workers in Britain?

Mr. Lee: The problem with the labour force survey is that, essentially, it is a self-assessment of health problems and disabilities and is not very satisfactory. We do not favour a legislative approach. We much prefer a code of good practice and specific help. Government are spending about £118 million a year on specific programmes for the disabled.

Mr. Thurnham: Does my hon. Friend agree that far too many employers are unaware of many of the excellent schemes available—for instance, the £6,000 in grants to adapt premises and the £45 a week for the job introduction trial scheme?

Mr. Lee: I agree with my hon. Friend that many employers are not aware of what is available. The MSC is conducting major research into the numbers, characteristics and attitudes of the disabled work force and will also take into account the attitude of employers to the quota.

Mr. Haynes *rose*——

Hon. Members: Speak up.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I want to hear too.

Mr. Haynes: Is the Minister aware that so many disabled people are unemployed simply because big business will not take them on? Is the Minister further aware that there is a firm called Metal Box in my constituency that does very well in employing disabled people? I suggest to the Minister that he gets off his backside in his Office and goes into the Paymaster General's Office and does something about employing the disabled, instead of sitting around a table with the Paymaster General organising the unemployment figures to be announced in here.

Mr. Lee: Although that question may well have been in character, it really was unworthy of the hon. Gentleman. I could not comment on Metal Box and its approach, although I will look into that case. I repeat that the Government are spending something like £118 million on specific measures to help the disabled into employment.

Labour Statistics

11. **Mr. Andrew MacKay** asked the Paymaster General if he will make a statement on the current level of unemployment.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Unemployment is lower now than a year ago, and has fallen 100,000 over the last six months.

Mr. MacKay: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that in the last quarter of 1986 unemployment fell faster in this country than in any other country in the western world? Would he care to speculate on why the now silent hon. Member for Kingston-upon-Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) cared to mock this good news for those seeking jobs?

Mr. Clarke: I cannot answer the last part of my hon. Friend's question. The fall in unemployment over the last six months is the best we have known since 1973 and it seems to have reduced the official spokesman for the Opposition to total silence.

Mr. Duffy: Is the Paymaster General aware that, although unemployment has fallen a little in the Sheffield travel-to-work area, that is accounted for almost entirely by the expansion of special job schemes and there is scant evidence of any relief of unemployment arising from economic activity?

Mr. Clarke: I share what I have no doubt is the hon. Gentleman's pleasure that unemployment has been falling in Sheffield. I would expect schemes in Sheffield to help people get back into regular employment, as they are doing elsewhere. I would be very surprised if there was not an increase in the total number of jobs in Sheffield, as is now happening across the country.

Mr. Yeo: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that one very helpful measure which would cut unemployment even further would be to reduce the amount of taxation paid by lower paid employees? In this context, will he urge his right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to introduce tax cuts—which we are all looking forward to in two weeks' time—directed to reducing the burden of tax on low-paid workers?

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I agree with my hon. Friend that the burden of tax on low-paid workers is still too high. I will commend my hon. Friend's remarks to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who, I am sure, will have regard to the job-creating potential that tax reductions could have.

Mr. Prescott: I think the country accepts that all the claims based on the unemployment figures are part of a

mass fiddle of the statistics. Does the Paymaster General accept that the claim of a million new jobs since 1983 is equally fraudulent? The recent Oxford study has shown that those jobs are made up of a quarter of a million second jobs, a quarter of a million through schemes, and half a million based on a dubious statistical survey of the self-employed and other equally fraudulent figures?

Mr. Clarke: Firstly, the Oxford study that appeared in *New Society* is not very good research and its figures are wrong. There are over a million more people in work currently than in March 1983. On the question of figures, during the hon. Gentleman's unexpected absence from our exchanges on unemployment matters in this House, I have been studying what he has been saying in print. In the 27 February edition of *Tribune*, he is reported as saying, in answer to the question:

"Would Labour put the unemployment figures back on their old basis?"

"No. They are becoming increasingly meaningless."

Industrial Relations Legislation

13. **Mr. Tony Lloyd** asked the Paymaster General when he next proposes to meet trades union leaders to discuss industrial relations legislation.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I meet trade union leaders from time to time to discuss a variety of subjects. I have invited the trade unions to let me have their comments on our Green Paper "Trade Unions and their Members", but I do not yet have any specific meetings arranged on the subject.

Mr. Lloyd: When the Paymaster General meets the trade union leadership, will he take the time to explain to them what principle underlies the decision to make the leader of the National Union of Public Employees, for example, seek election when that same principle is clearly not being put into practice in the case of the non-elected Secretary of State for Employment?

Mr. Clarke: The principle that is being applied is that of democracy and accountability to the membership of the trade unions. It is probable that the present leadership of the National Union of Public Employees will be re-elected. Mr. Rodney Bickerstaffe has a reasonably safe seat. When hon. Members are returned by their constituents it is, nevertheless, the case that their relationship with them is affected by the need to get their support. The relationship of trade union leaders with their members will be improved by the need for periodic re-election.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Lilley** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 3 March 1987.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House I shall be having further meetings today. This evening I hope to have an audience of Her Majesty the Queen.

Mr. Lilley: Does my right hon. Friend welcome the constructive disarmament proposals that were put forward by Mr. Gorbachev? Does she accept that it is only because of the stalwart refusal of her own and other Western Governments to remove the weapons that defend us that the USSR is now prepared to offer to remove those that threaten us?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments. An agreement on intermediate range nuclear weapons was singled out for progress when I met President Reagan last November. It is a useful step——*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

The Prime Minister: It is a useful step forward that Mr. Gorbachov has now accepted this without making any link with SDI, but a great deal of work remains to be done. I agree with my hon. Friend absolutely in the view that Western strength and resolve have been crucial in bringing the matter to this point.

Mr. Kinnock: Is the Prime Minister aware that her latter point is somewhat difficult to sustain, given the 3:1 superiority in intermediate nuclear forces of the Soviet Union in Europe? Given that she welcomes Mr. Gorbachev's proposals and the positive response of the United States to such proposals, does she agree that it would be wrong now to make the elimination of intermediate nuclear forces conditional upon an agreement to reduce short-range and tactical nuclear forces? Does she agree that the best route now to the reduction of tactical and shorter range forces is through the elimination of intermediate forces?

The Prime Minister: First, the right hon. Gentleman would abolish all our nuclear weapons and leave the Soviet Union with all of theirs, and then he actually complains —*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. This noise is unseemly.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman then complains that we looked at the small print of a proposal that has been put to us. I shall quote from the communiqué that was issued after my meeting with President Reagan at Camp David. It states:

"We agreed that priority should be given to:—an INF agreement, with restraints on shorter range systems,"

We were not so foolish as to say that it could all be sorted out with intermediate range systems when we knew that the Soviet Union had a total preponderance of shorter range systems. They have to be dealt with at the same time. We also said that

"effective verification would be an essential element.

We also agreed on the need to press ahead with the SDI research programme . . . At the same time, reductions in nuclear weapons would increase the importance of eliminating conventional disparities. Nuclear weapons cannot be dealt with in isolation, given the need for stable overall balance at all times."

The complete matter was reviewed carefully at Camp David. That was the stance that we took and the stance that we shall continue to take.

Mr. Kinnock: Obviously when such important matters are concerned it is worth looking, as the Prime Minister suggests, at the small print, but knowing that Mr. Gorbachev's various initiatives stem almost entirely from the pressures on his economy and the need for alternative technological development, will the Prime Minister now say whether she is to turn her back on the current opportunity or encourage its use, bearing in mind the fact that she once said, quite rightly, that no weapons would be better than some but few are better than more?

The Prime Minister: I believe that the proposals that have come from Moscow stem from the resolve of the West to stand firm and that they would never have come from any of the right hon. Gentleman's policies. It is, nevertheless, absolutely vital that we have strict verification arrangements and negotiations to correct the huge imbalance in the Soviet Union's favour in shorter range systems. The right hon. Gentleman would throw away the security of our defence system too easily. We look at it very carefully, and we shall consider it extremely carefully where it should be considered — in the negotiations in Geneva.

Mr. Kinnock: Yes, but—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinnock: Are those matters relating to other force reductions a precondition, as far as as the Prime Minister is concerned, of intermediate force elimination, or are they not? Yes or no.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman would have heard, had he listened—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Prime Minister must be given an opportunity to answer.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman would have heard, had he listened to what I said earlier, that the Soviet Union has total superiority in shorter range systems. We in this country are within range of those shorter range nuclear systems. He would throw away our own security and defence. I would consider those shorter range systems, as well as the intermediate ones.

Sir Frederic Bennett: Quite contrary to what the Leader of the Opposition has suggested, does my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister recall what she said last November on her return from Washington? In her own words she said——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman must paraphrase, please.

Sir Frederic Bennett: My right hon. Friend said that a reduction in short range missiles would have to be negotiated at the same time as those on INF. Has the Government's position changed since then?

The Prime Minister: Unless we deal with shorter range systems at the same time, we are left with a total preponderance of shorter range systems in the hands of the Soviet Union and very, very few in the hands of Western Europe. That would not be enhancing our security. It would be taking certain risks.

Dr. Owen: Could anything be more absurd than lessons in arms control and nuclear negotiations from the leader of the Labour party? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. We often hear things in this Chamber that we do not agree with. *[Interruption.]* Order. Dr. David Owen.

Dr. Owen *rose—[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Dr. David Owen.

Dr. Owen: Does the Prime Minister not agree that it would be extremely foolish to link the INF negotiations either with conventional force reductions, desirable though they are, or with a chemical weapons ban, desirable though that is? Will she make it clear to other European countries that the INF negotiation stands on its own as part of the zero-zero option?

The Prime Minister: I believe that to keep the security of the West and NATO, we must look at all of them together. In particular, I believe that we can go ahead as a matter of priority with intermediate range nuclear weapons, but at the same time we must also look at the shorter range ones. The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that if we succeed in getting an agreement upon that matter there is an enhanced importance for our own nuclear deterrent. I shall be delighted, therefore, when he agrees to update Polaris with Trident.

Sir Peter Blaker: Is it not clear, from Mr. Gorbachev's proposals, that he sees no prospect of one-sided western nuclear disarmament, and that, therefore, he must have written off any prospect of a Labour general election victory?

The Prime Minister: As my right hon. Friend says, there would have been no point in coming to negotiate had we, like the Labour party, unilaterally given up own powers, with the result that Russia would have kept all of hers.

Q2. **Mr. Terry Fields** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 3 March 1987.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Fields: In the course of a busy day, will the Prime Minister reflect on news items in the United States media to the effect that Colonel Oliver North had drawn up plans for shipping Blowpipe missiles and launchers to the Nicaraguan Contra terrorists, from Short Brothers in Belfast——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Is that a Prime Ministerial responsibility?

Mr. Fields: It was a fact that was denied last July by Baroness Young, the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Is it not a fact that the only way in which we will break this sinister and undemocratic link between this Government and the—*[Interruption.]*—warmongering of Reagan is the calling of an early general election?

The Prime Minister: I could not hear all of the question, but I got the gist of the early part, which referred to a report in the United States media that we had given approval to the supply of Blowpipe to the Contras. Those allegations are totally unfounded. We have clearly demonstrated our support for political and not military solutions to the problems of central America.

Sir George Young: Will my right hon. Friend find time today to tell the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much we in Ealing are looking forward to his Budget on 17 March, and how we hope it will help us to pay for the Labour budget on Thursday when our rates are forecast to go up by 80 per cent? Can she think of any better way of underlining the difference between the two major parties in this House than by giving the widest possible publicity to these two contrasting budgets?

The Prime Minister: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for having done just that. The difference is that we

trust the people to spend the greatest share of their earnings, whereas the Labour party wants to maximise the amount which it takes out of people's pockets.

Q3. **Mr. Nellist** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 3 March 1987.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Nellist: Will the Prime Minister take time today to explain why her Government are so reluctant to grant asylum to the Tamil refugees, despite the evidence that they have fled the bombing of their homes and the torture and murder of their families and neighbours, while six ex-Nazi war criminals are allowed to live here freely as she waits for sufficient evidence to be collected against them? What is that? Racism or hypocrisy?

Mr. Tony Banks: A bit of both.

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman is aware, there will be a statement on the Tamils after Question Time, and therefore I leave comments on the Tamils to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. On the question of asylum abuse generally, this country has an excellent record of hospitality towards genuine refugees. We are entitled, however, to take firm action to deal effectively with the large increase in the number of passengers who are arriving here with forged documents, or who have destroyed their documents and who are making asylum claims that prove to be baseless.

With regard to the other matter that the hon. Gentleman mentioned—which is also within the duties of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary—my right hon. Friend has met right hon. and hon. Members to discuss the allegations of the Simon Wiesenthal centre. We have urged the centre to provide information to substantiate its allegations. The case for any change in our law would depend substantially on the weight of evidence brought forward. The hon. Gentleman does not need reminding that it is not guilt by accusation, but it is guilt only through evidence in a court of law.

Mr. Michael Marshall: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the growing concern over the delay in responding to the proposals on future space policy of the British National Space Centre? Is she further aware of the opportunities which are open to us through the European Space Agency and NASA? Will she bend her efforts to reaching an early decision on this important matter?

The Prime Minister: Yes. One has to look at those space proposals carefully to see what part of them would benefit the United Kingdom. Many people want more to be spent on research and development. It is not just extra expenditure that would yield returns, but being selective in the amount of expenditure one makes. We must look at the proposals in that light.

Q4. **Mr. Kennedy** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 3 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Kennedy: In view of the magnificent and resounding SDP-Liberal alliance triumph in the Greenwich by-election last week, will the Prime Minister take this opportunity to congratulate and welcome an excellent new Member of Parliament for the constituency? Will she have a wee word with her party chairman, whose advice to the electorate is clearly as discredited as that of the leader of the Labour party? *[Interruption.]* An alliance vote——

Mr. Speaker: Order. We shall have all of this in a minute. The hon. Gentleman must relate this to the Prime Minister's responsibilities.

Mr. Kennedy: Will the Prime Minister exercise her responsibilities over her Cabinet Minister and remind him that an alliance vote, far from letting in Labour, keeps out Labour and Conservative and will help to elect an alliance Government after the next general election?

The Prime Minister: I remind the young Member of what happened to the alliance Member who was returned for Crosby when it came to the general election.

Rail Crash (Shropshire)

3.31 pm

Mr. Derek Conway (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (*by private notice*): I am grateful to you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing this question. I wish to ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will make a statement about a matter of which I have given prior notice — the rail crash at Westbury in Shropshire yesterday.

The Minister of State, Department of Transport (Mr. David Mitchell): At about 8.55 yesterday evening, one of the new Sprinter class 150 diesel multiple unit trains ran round the passing loop in the down direction at Westbury on to the line from Shrewsbury to Aberyswyth and passed at danger the signal controlling the entry to the single line section to Welshpool. A similar train was waiting at the signal in the other direction before proceeding into the loop.

The down train collided head-on with the up train. The leading bogie of the latter was derailed and there was considerable damage to the front-end superstructure of both trains. The emergency services were quickly on the scene. I regret to inform the House that 37 people were taken to hospital suffering from minor injuries, but I am able to say that only four were detained overnight. One of those detained was the driver of the down train and it has not yet been possible to interview him formally. In these circumstances, I am sure that the House will understand that I am unable to give any reasons for the likely cause of the accident. British Railways is planning to hold its own internal inquiry on 10 March, but it is still too early to say whether my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will order a formal inquiry by an inspecting officer of railways.

I pay tribute to the emergency services and in particular to the ambulance crews, who appeared promptly. I am sure that the House will wish to express the hope that the injured will make a rapid recovery.

Mr. Conway: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that reply. I wish to associate myself with his thanks to ambulance men and firemen who were efficient and prompt in dealing with the incident. When I talked to the Royal Shrewsbury hospital this morning I was given to understand that of the 37 patients admitted, five have been detained. I hope that, in view of that, my hon. Friend will think again about appointing a railways inspector for a formal inquiry. If that is not possible, will my hon. Friend ensure that the details of the British Rail internal inquiry be made public? Will my hon. Friend also ensure the expedition of claims for personal injury submitted by my constituents and the constituents of other hon. Members who were involved in this sad train crash?

Mr. Mitchell: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. It is important to say that British Rail's internal inquiry, colloquially known as the joint inquiry, is held by senior regional officers to establish not only the cause of the accident, but a basis for any disciplinary proceedings or a defence in any litigation. Therefore, at this early stage, we have to wait to see whether there is an open-and-shut case for the cause of the accident before we proceed to the greater arrangements involved in establishing a formal inquiry.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): My constituency is served by this railway line and for a long time my constituents have been anxious about the use of single track along part of that line. If the inquiry recommends that there should be a double track along the line will the Minister undertake to ensure that that is installed without delay?

Mr. Mitchell: It would be prudent to wait to see what the inquiry finds as the cause of the accident. If the inquiry was to make the recommendation to which the hon. and learned Gentleman referred it would be given serious consideration.

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): With all the restrictions placed on British Rail in recent years—the singling of railway lines, less checking of the permanent way by British Rail employees and the introduction of advanced automatic level crossings, will the Minister ensure, as a result of the inquiry, that he can reassure those of us who have single track railway lines in our constituencies that they are perfectly safe and that safety standards have not deteriorated? If the Minister cannot do so will he take immediate action to ensure that he can give us such reassurance?

Mr. Mitchell: I am not quite sure what restrictions, to which the hon. Gentleman referred, have been placed on British Rail——

Dr. Marek: Financial.

Mr. Mitchell: There are no financial restrictions that in any way affect the safety of British Rail operations. I must say that the hon. Gentleman is trying to make bricks without straw. The signalling was checked after the accident and a full report will be made to the British Rail internal inquiry regarding that.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): I hope, Mr. Speaker, you will not mind if I aim this question as much at you as at my hon. Friend the Minister of State. Is it not extraordinary that, as a result of this accident, albeit one in which few people suffered minor injuries and some superstructure damage occurred, a parliamentary question has been granted by this House——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must not say that. I granted the private notice question.

Mr. Adley: In that case I withdraw that comment.

Does my hon. Friend agree that 15 people are killed each day on the roads but that we never have statements about that? Indeed, last week a coach fell off a bridge onto a motorway, yet no statement was made to the House. Will my hon. Friend use this opportunity to state that, were it not for the strength of these new Sprinter units, a more serious accident may have occurred? Will my hon. Friend pay tribute to British rail for doing everything it can to maintain an outstandingly good safety record?

Mr. Mitchell: My hon. Friend has rightly put his finger on the safety aspect. This is new rolling stock and it is the first time that there has been an accident of this nature involving such stock. I believe that it is a good indication of the strength of the design and of the build that there were not worse casualties on this occasion.

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): Will the Minister accept that we associate ourselves with his thanks to the emergency services for their prompt attention to the

accident? Does the Minister have any idea of the age of the signalling equipment used at Westbury at the time of the accident, and does he believe that the age of that equipment had any bearing on the accident? Following the comments of the hon. Member for Chirstchurch (Mr. Adley), is it not a tribute to the safety standards of British Rail that we have a private notice question after a comparatively minor accident — the sort of accident which, if it took place on our roads, would scarcely merit a paragraph in a local weekly newspaper?

Mr. Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman is entirely correct in the point that he has just made. On the signalling, it would be wrong for me to pre-empt in any way the British Rail inquiry. I can say that in any event British Rail is hoping to install the radio-electronic token block system in the middle of next year. It would be quite improper for me to influence opinion in anyway in advance of the inquiry.

Asylum Seekers

3.41 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Douglas Hurd): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I will make a statement about claims for asylum by travellers without proper documents.

Many Western countries have become increasingly concerned in recent years at the large number of people who seek entry with forged or fabricated passports or visas or without any documents at all. Very often they or the organisers of their journeys know that they have no legitimate claim to entry but hope that the absence of documents will hinder the immigration authorities in securing their return. At the same time, large numbers of people who aim to find a more secure or prosperous life in Western countries have been abusing asylum procedures as a means of evading immigration controls. Last year, during the United Kingdom presidency, the Ministers of the Interior of the European Community set work in hand on these problems. Last week I sent a message to the Belgian presidency expressing the Government's hope that this work would be pressed forward urgently.

In December and January, 600 people arrived here and sought asylum, the large majority of whom did not have the right documents. It is only recently that members of the public and of the House have become generally aware of the problem which faces us, so the Government have been considering what action to take to prevent evasion of visa requirements and the abuse of asylum claims as a means of securing entry.

We have decided to introduce legislation tomorrow to give power to impose a charge on carriers who bring to this country people who require leave to enter the United Kingdom but who carry no valid passport or other identity document, and those who have no valid visa where one is required by the immigration rules. The charge would be £1,000 for each passenger without valid documents and would be applied from midnight tomorrow. The carrier would not be liable to pay if he could show that the passenger had the necessary valid documents when he boarded the ship or aircraft or, in the case of forged documents or visas, that the forgery was not reasonably apparent. Payment would be enforceable, if necessary, by civil action in much the same way as detention and removal costs can already be recovered from carriers.

This change in the law would reinforce the messages already given to airlines and other carriers that they have a responsibility for ensuring that those who wish to travel here have obtained the necessary papers before they do so. A similar provision already operates in many other countries, including Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the United States and, more recently, West Germany and Denmark.

In the case of the Tamils who were last week given leave by the court to move for judicial review, I have to take account of the passage of time—more than two weeks—since their arrival and of the fact that the litigation is likely to take further time to resolve, given the rights of appeal on either side. Moreover, I understand that the United Kingdom Immigration Advisory Service has already been able to interview many of the applicants. In these circumstances, and in the light of the outcome of last week's court proceedings, I have decided that the most sensible way forward is to refer to UKIAS each of the 64

[Mr. Douglas Hurd]

cases and thereafter to reach fresh individual decisions in the light of all the relevant facts, including any representations UKIAS may wish to make. In doing so, I shall of course take account of any other representations I receive, including those from hon. Members. In the circumstances, I would expect to receive representations by Wednesday 18 March and to take decisions after that. My willingness to proceed in this way has been conveyed to the applicants' solicitors and UKIAS.

For the future, however, we need to change our procedures to ensure that we are properly protected against immigration rackets which take advantage of our generous procedures. In particular, we must not allow procedures which were intended originally as safeguards to become the vehicle by which those who have no entitlement to come here, whether as refugees or in whatever other capacity, achieve their ends.

Accordingly, the present arrangements under which my Department refers cases to UKIAS will be revised and I shall be inviting UKIAS to join in discussions to that end. I should stress, however, that the present arrangement does not involve the reference of all cases, and for the avoidance of doubt I must place it on record that in future there will be cases which will not be referred to UKIAS and that therefore applicants for asylum can have no expectation in future that as a resut of the arrangement arrived at in 1983 or otherwise there will in their cases be such a reference. Similarly there will be instances in which early removal is necessary in the interests of immigration control and it would not be right for me to defer removal on a Member's seeking to put a stop on the case. It follows also that those who seek to challenge in the courts decisions to refuse asylum cannot expect that they will automatically be allowed to stay here until proceedings are completed.

The Government remain fully committed to their obligations under the United Nations 1951 Convention to genuine refugees as defined in that Convention. The decisions on individual cases which I make as Home Secretary will respect that obligation. But we have to find the right means of preventing abuse of the asylum provisions and preventing evasion of the visa requirements which Parliament has endorsed. The policies which I have announced aim to strike that balance.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Is the Home Secretary aware that in making that statement he is having to swallow a great many of the words uttered by his right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State the week before last? The Minister of State told the House on 17 February that it was

"obvious, from the examination carried out by the immigration officers at the port, that the claims made by these people were manifestly bogus." — [*Official Report*, 17 February 1987; Vol. 110, c. 770.]

The Home Secretary has now decided that he disagrees with the Minister of State, and that he is not satisfied that the claims are manifestly bogus.

The Minister of State told the House on 18 February that the Government would

"contest . . . any application for judicial review."

The Government have now completely reversed that stand on the 64 Tamils in order to dodge the adverse outcome of a judicial review. Is the Home Secretary aware that it is because he fears that if he does not abandon his position in the House of Commons he will be knocked off it in a court of law? That is why he has announced this change in his position. He is now coming to the House with news of a hasty piece of panic legislation. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that that legislation has nothing to do with general immigration control, but is to meet what he views as a special situation?

Opposition Members are against bogus refugees who wish to exploit Britain's hospitality, and we certainly condemn greedy-for-money racketeers who prey on the vulnerability of people such as the 64 Tamils. Is the Home Secretary aware that even people who are the prey of greedy-for-money racketeers may, all the same, be bona fide refugees and that the problem arises in finding a procedure to identify bona fide refugees? The Home Secretary has recognised that by deciding, as he has put it, to reach fresh decisions on the 64 Tamils and to refer each of the cases to the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service.

Can the Home Secretary answer my questions? What, in future, will be the position of bona fide refugees without visas who arrive in this country under his newly announced legislation? Is he aware, for example, that if someone such as Mr. Shcharansky arrived as a refugee from Russia without a visa, the airline carrying him would be fined under the legislation that he has announced? [AN HON. MEMBER: "Quite right, too."] Oh, so Mr. Shcharansky should be turned away because he does not have a visa. The Prime Minister would not have been able to meet him in those circumstances.

Is the Home Secretary aware that the same goes for other seekers of political asylum from eastern Europe, Iran, Afghanistan, South Africa, Chile and elsewhere? In those circumstances, is it not clear that the words of the Minister of State were baseless when he said:

"we are determined to honour our obligations under the United Nations convention in the treatment of refugees."— [*Official Report*, 18 February 1987; Vol. 110, c. 909-911.]

and that foreign airlines are now to have delegated to them responsibility for implementing or failing to implement the United Kingdom's commitment under the United Nations convention?

The fact is that a problem has arisen that the Government have found themselves unable to cope with without panic legislation. If that problem exists, the Home Secretary would be better advised to consider carefully how to deal with it rather than rushing through the House of Commons legislation which he may well repent.

Mr. Hurd: I am not all that clear after listening to the right hon. Gentleman where the Opposition stand on the basic question of immigration control. Last year they proposed to leave open the loophole for so-called visitors, which we have closed. Now, they propose to leave open, although the evidence is clear before them, the loophole for so-called refugees. In the face of their determination to leave every available loophole open, it is less and less clear how they can claim to be in favour of effective control.

In answer to the right hon. Gentleman's points, we obey the law and, as a Government, we are under the law. We made the attempt to remove the 64 but were prevented from doing so by the intervention of the court. Since then, there have been judicial proceedings and in view of the course of those and the line taken by the court, the likelihood of no immediate outcome in sight, given the rights of appeal, has led me to take this action. That simply illustrates the point that I was trying to make to the House

—that our present procedures are well adapted to meet the needs of individual refugees coming into this country under the United Nations convention. They are not well adapted to people who come here, and who are coming here in increasing numbers, claiming a right of asylum to evade the controls. That is why we propose to change the procedures.

The great majority of refugees will not be affected in any way. Until the recent increase in the number of applications made from abroad, most applications for asylum have been made in this country by people who are already here. Genuine refugees do not usually have to travel very far to obtain immediate safety because they can find refuge in neighbouring countries. If they have links with this country or particular reasons which they wish to argue for coming here, applications for asylum here can be made by people given temporary refuge elsewhere. It is also open to those who wish to come to this country, for whatever reason including asylum, to apply for a visa and make arrangements at one of our posts abroad and many asylum seekers do that. In practice, I do not believe that the difficulty to which the right hon. Gentleman has drawn attention will arise.

Mr. John Wheeler (Westminster, North): Is not my right hon. Friend aware that the 64 Tamils referred to had found sanctuary in a safe country but were then transported to the United Kingdom for economic reasons and for gain by an indivudial or individuals? Is he not further aware that all the Western democracies are having to find other ways to contain the flow of people from Third-world countries who arrive for bogus reasons? Is he not also aware that there is a substanital increase in the forgery, alteration and counterfeiting of passports and other travel documents?

Mr. Hurd: In view of what I have said, I think that I had better not comment on particular cases. My hon. Friend is entirely right in his general point that this is an international problem. For the first time more and more people in the Third world have the means, knowledge and the will to try come to Europe, North America and Australasia in search of a more prosperous or more secure life. The present procedures are not adequate to meet that particular pressure. Many countries with which we are in touch have found the same experience and are looking for the right answers under their systems. As I have explained, we are in close touch with our partners in the European Community to exchange experiences on that. However, I did not feel that we could wait until those exchanges were completed before announcing the action that we propose.

Mr. Michael Meadowcroft (Leeds, West): Is the Home Secretary aware that every hon. Member despises and condemns the actions of racketeers? However, the more that the Government place restrictions on immigration, such as visas, the more they force refugees into the hands of racketeers. Is it not wholly unreal to put the restrictions on the airlines and shipping companies? How else are people to get out of countries? Are they supposed to come in rowing boats? What on earth does the Home Secretary think is going on if he believes that people under oppression are able somehow to get out of countries without using means of transport? Is the Home Secretary claiming that there are to be no means of appeal whatever and that there is no interview other than that by his own staff—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Telephone the high commission and ask what is going on in Jaffna.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Nellist: What about the hon. Member over there?

Mr. Speaker: Order. If I call the hon. Gentleman he will have a chance to say something, but not yet.

Mr. Meadowcroft: Does the Home Secretary not accept that for centuries Britain has had a reputation as a haven for people fleeing from oppression and that some hon. Members in all parts of the House would not be here if that were not the case? What price that reputation now, and what price the Home Secretary's reputation as a liberal Conservative?

Mr. Hurd: If being a liberal means that one denounces racketeers while opposing every effort to deal with them, I disclaim that label, because that is what the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Meadowcroft) has just done. In reply to the question by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), I answered the point about the genuine refugee. The hon. Member for Leeds, West asked about a right of appeal. Carriers who consider a penalty to be unfair may make representations, including representations to Ministers. The penalty is not automatic but discretionary. If such representations are rejected, the carrier can refuse to pay and can challenge his liability when he is sued in the courts. That seems to be a perfectly reasonable procedure.

Sir William Clark (Croydon, South): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the legislation he is introducing tomorrow to fine carriers will be widely welcomed? Does he agree that it appears that our immigration laws are too loose to cover this problem? Why can we not change the immigration laws at the same speed at which we change the fining of carriers? Will he tell the House how much it costs the taxpayer per day to house these immigrants? Surely it is a gross abuse and waste of public money to allow this sort of spectacle to go on.

Mr. Hurd: Under existing agreements the financial responsibility for detention costs and for the homeward passage falls on the airlines in respect of those people who eventually return to the countries from which they came. It is only in cases where eventually they are granted asylum or entry to Britain that the cost falls on the taxpayer. Of course I do not exclude any future revision of the immigration rules. We have often done that in the past.

The legislation that I have announced will put the onus where to a large extent it belongs—on the carriers. My hon. Friend will know that many airlines already follow this practice in their dealings throughout the world. They regard it as an elementary precaution to make sure that those whom they carry have the right eventually to go to the country to which they are being carried. We are proposing by legislation to impose that responsibility on all carriers whether or not they are carrying voluntarily. I draw my hon. Friend's attention to the last part of my statement, which talks about the new procedures that we propose to work out. The legislation on carriers and the new procedures when added together will provide an effective way of blocking this loophole while preserving our obligations under the United Nation convention. I am keen to preserve those obligations and, indeed, under international law we are bound to preserve them.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): I welcome the decision to allow careful representations to be made in the case of the Tamils. Of course, that should have occurred at the beginning when they came here. However, is there not a contradiction between the commitment that the Home Secretary gave again today and which the Prime Minister gave a short time ago about continuing the long and honourable tradition of this country of giving help to those fleeing from persecution, and the restrictions and obvious difficulties, because of the further restrictions, faced by anyone wishing to claim such refugee status?

Is the Home Secretary also aware that, while it may be expected from some Government Members, it was extremely disappointing to note that, in his response to my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), the Home Secretary seemed to be playing the race card in this pre-election period? Those who play the race card, whether from the Front Bench or from the Back Benches, usually end up by being totally discredited. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will rethink what he said.

Mr. Hurd: In answer to the hon. Gentleman's first point, there is no contradiction. However, there is a balance which must be struck between the solidity of immigration control and our obligations under the 1951 convention, which applies to individuals who have well-grounded fears of personal persecution. The measures that I have announced and the discussions that we shall have with UKIAS will enable us to strike that balance.

I entirely disagree with the hon. Gentleman's second point, which was bad history. It was the Leader of the Opposition who, in India, raised that general question. As often happens, he spoke to please a particular audience without regard to the impact of his words elsewhere. Ever since, those who know more about the matter than he does have tried to pick up the bits and emphasise the desire of the Opposition to maintain effective immigration control. However, the fact is that their reactions to what we have had to do, first of all on visitors' visas, and now on the right of asylum and our proposals for closing those loopholes, illustrate, to put it mildly, that they still have not thought the thing through.

Mr. Terry Dicks (Hayes and Harlington): May I welcome the rather meagre moves that my right hon. Friend is taking tomorrow to deal with this? However, I advise him that many thousands of people in this country will be angered that these liars, cheats and queue jumpers will have the right to be considered to stay here. Can my right hon. Friend advise me why he has disregarded the comments made by the Sri Lankan authorities about those in Malaysia who pointed these people out as racketeers? Will he promise me, as the Member for the Heathrow area, that people who demonstrate in our terminals and strip off their clothes will not see that as an opportunity to gain a quick entry to this country?

Mr. Hurd: The answer to my hon. Friend is that the Government operate under the law and I am sure that he would wish the Government to do so. He has asked me why I did not send those people back where they belong, and I shall rehearse the history of that. We come under the courts and must accept the legal proceedings. Even in his most ebullient moments, my hon. Friend would not suggest that the Home Secretary of a Conservative Government should ignore the rule of law.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): The right hon. Gentleman pretends to be preventing the abuse of our immigration procedures. Does he not realise that a direct result of his intended legislation will be the prevention of genuine refugees seeking asylum in this country? He must comprehend that. Does he not realise that this whole unhappy episode will be one of the less glorious chapters of his tenure of the Home Secretaryship?

Mr. Hurd: I vividly recall the hon. Gentleman huffing and puffing in a similar way when we discussed visas and visitors. That change, which was vigorously opposed by the Opposition, has now settled down and is accepted by many people in the ethnic communities as a great improvement on the previous turmoil. That is what we did against the huffing and puffing which we have experienced again, and I think that that will happen again.

Mr. Michael Morris (Northampton, South): Is my right hon. Friend aware that his statement this afternoon will be welcomed? However, two key questions remain to be answered about these Tamils. First, why did they choose not to go to the British high commission to seek visas, unlike hundreds of their compatriots, many of whom were much poorer than those people? Secondly, why are reports coming from the press and the Government in India, that hundreds of Indian and Sri Lankan Tamils are returning voluntarily to Sri Lanka, whereas we seem to believe that they require asylum?

Mr. Hurd: For the reasons that I have already given, I shall not comment on these cases—indeed, I cannot. However, it is important that all concerned benefit from a balanced view of what is actually happening in Sri Lanka and what is not, and my hon. Friend has contributed to that.

Dr. M. S. Miller (East Kilbride): Does not the right hon. Gentleman understand that Opposition Members are not objecting to his clamping down on the racketeers? There is no doubt of the rightness of that. However, we feel strongly that the draconian measures that are proposed will, as one of my hon. Friends has said, keep out genuine refugees. How does the right hon. Gentleman propose to ensure that genuine refugees are not kept out? It is impossible for them to bring with them certificates from their commissioners of police from the places in which they are persecuted saying, "This man is a genuine political refugee. We are persecuting and torturing him." Does the right hon. Gentleman expect them to bring such certificates with them?

Mr. Hurd: The hon. Gentleman says that he is not objecting to dealing with racketeers, but he is not helping in any way. We have not heard a single idea from the Opposition about how we could effectively strike the balance that I am talking about between the right of refugees under the United Nations convention and the absolutely crucial need to maintain an effective immigration control. All that Opposition Members have done is to suggest that what we are proposing is wrong. The House will have the opportunity to discuss this in detail when we come to the legislation because, unlike the West German Government, we do not have executive powers to do that without legislation — I am not complaining about that.

I repeat that if, between now and then, the hon. Gentleman does his homework about the way in which

genuine refugees come here, he will find that the majority are here anyway because they come for other purposes. Others, like Shcharansky, of whom the right hon. Member for Gorton made great play, come here by agreement and understanding, so this would not apply. Others go to countries which are much nearer to the places where they feel persecuted, and if they have a particular link with this country, they can apply from that country and their cases can be discussed in the ordinary way. That is how genuine refugees exercise the right of asylum in this country, and none of those means will be blocked or affected.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have to protect the rest of today's business, and as there are two other statements after this, I shall allow questions on this to go for a further 10 minutes—*[Interruption.]* Order. I shall allow a further 10 minutes and take that into consideration when we come to the debate that is to be held shortly.

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): Does not the right hon. Gentleman understand that legislation that is rushed through in a panic is usually the worst kind of legislation, especially when it deals with questions of civil liberties and when strong passions are aroused? If he is genuine in wishing to strike the right balance and to seek to protect the ancient right of people to come to this country when they are escaping from persecution, will he not consider postponing the introduction of the Bill until he has had a little time to think about it?

Mr. Hurd: It is not a matter for me, but I do not believe that the House will be asked to consider this issue in anything approaching a panic. That is partly why I made the statement that, if the House eventually agrees to the legislation, the penalties would be effective from tomorrow night, to make sure that the House has reasonable time to consider them. I entirely accept that that is desirable and I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that it is not a good idea to pass legislation in a panic. However, he is not facing the situation that we must face as the Government, which is that this is a loophole from which countries in Europe, North America and Australasia suffer and of which they are feeling the effects even more than we are. We cannot delay unreasonably before finding the right means to stop that loophole. Otherwise, we should look amazingly foolish. Those who obstruct what we are trying to do would bear a heavy responsibility.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have just called two hon. Members from the Opposition Benches, so I will balance that.

Sir Dudley Smith (Warwick and Leamington): Is my right hon. Friend aware that his statement will be welcomed by many people who are deeply uneasy about this current case? Can he say, because it is part and parcel of what has happened, whether he has any knowledge of what Malaysia and the other countries affected are doing to stop these immigration rackets from proliferating?

Mr. Hurd: I do know that the Malaysian authorities have arrested several people in connection with the fraudulent acquisition and sale of passports. We shall supply the Malaysian authorities with any information that we hold on forged documents, which may help them with their inquiries.

Mr. John Stokes (Halesowen and Stourbridge): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the vast majority of people in this country are thankful for the steps that he is taking to deal with bogus immigration? Is he further aware that the attitude that we have heard from the Opposition is quite untypical of the vast majority of all classes of people living in this country? In a small island, we simply cannot take in people from every country in the world, irrespective of whether they are bogus.

Mr. Hurd: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I worked out for myself one morning that, at the moment, 15 countries in the Third world have war or civil war at least as bad as, and in many cases considerably worse than, anything that may have been happening in Sri Lanka. The fact that we are not dealing only with the Sri Lankan Tamils adds to the importance and the vividness of the difficulties that we face.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Have not the Government done an embarrassing U-turn today to avoid greater embarrassment in the courts shortly? Will the Secretary of State make some amends for the lack of co-operation of his Department with those seeking to represent the Tamils, by allowing those with relatives here temporary admission while the inquiries are undertaken? Does he not understand that by introducing a procedure which denies those seeking refuge here independent judicial review, he is introducing a system which is arbitrary and denies justice? It is a recipe for injustice and he will rue the day that he introduces this procedure.

Mr. Hurd: I said that I would receive representations and I gave a date by when I should like to have them; that would cover both the temporary and substantial questions of detention. I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman's basic point. Like all Opposition Members except for the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot), he has not faced the problem. To use those objectives and such rhetoric before he addresses the problem with which we must deal shows a shallowness which is not right for someone with his experience of the matter.

Mr. Roger Sims (Chislehurst): Further to my right hon. Friend's reply, does he agree that, unfortunately, communal violence in Sri Lanka is of long standing? Does he agree that most of the Tamil community there could claim to be in fear of their life or in danger of persecution and that they amount to some 2 million people, not to mention the Sinhalese community which has also been attacked from time to time and which numbers 11 million?

Mr. Hurd: The United Nations convention and our practice in the matter draw a clear distinction between people who live in a troubled part of the world—as I have said, there are many troubled areas—and wish to lead a more prosperous and secure life here and those who individually have a well-founded fear of persecution. Only the latter category is covered by the United Nations convention and therefore by our international responsibilities. We must strike the right balance so that we can continue to honour that obligation to the second category while excluding the first, and my statement aims to achieve that.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Is the Secretary of State aware that his statement represents a further massive stride away from civilised behaviour by the Government? Is he aware that he should recognise that all

[Mr. Jeremy Corbyn]

asylum seekers are victims and not the cause of the problem? Instead of trying to appease European xenophobia by his racist remarks, should he not consider the root causes of the problem in Sri Lanka and other places and perhaps, just perhaps, question the sense of the British Government selling arms to fuel the flames in Sri Lanka at present?

Mr. Hurd: As I have tried to make clear, it is not just a question of Sri Lanka; the question goes wider than that. It is not uncivilised or wrong. Indeed, it is essential for the countries of Europe, working together to the extent that they can, to find a way of preserving, or in some cases instituting, effective immigration control. If we do not do that, the future for race relations and harmony in the United Kingdom is bleak.

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): My right hon. Friend will know that his welcome legislation will take some time before it is enacted. What guarantee can he give the House that we will not be treated to this same spectacle of intending refugees with similar spurious qualifications before that legislation is enacted?

Mr. Hurd: Because of my announcement that the penalties will become effective from tomorrow night.

Mr. Nellist: Why does the Home Secretary not admit, as the court case later this week would force him to admit, that a series of cursory 20-minute interviews three weeks ago has nothing to do with Britain upholding its obligations under the United Nations convention? When did he last phone the high commission in Colombo to find out the real position in Jaffna, the north and east of Sri Lanka? Does he realise that one of the families of economic refugees fled because their three-year-old daughter was shot dead? Does he realise that other families fled because their homes were bombed in the villages where they lived? Does he realise that they have relatives in Coventry and elsewhere, which enables them to come here? [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."] Yes, I am doing my job as an elected Member of Parliament, which is more than I can say for the bunch opposite. If the Home Secretary had occupied the same post in the 1930s or 1940s he would have sent thousands of people back to Germany, Italy and Spain and to their deaths.

Mr. Hurd: I am not going to comment on the particular cases, as I have said, but obviously we keep in constant touch with our High Commission in Colombo about the state of affairs in Sri Lanka.

Mr. Richard Page (Hertfordshire, South-West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that all carriers should act responsibly towards the country that gives them landing rights? If the £1,000 fine is not sufficient, will my right hon. Friend be prepared to review the landing rights of companies which abuse the particular procedures of our country?

Mr. Hurd: The sum involved is roughly in line with what other countries have instituted. We would propose in the legislation to take powers to revise that sum if it seemed inadequate, but that is a matter which the House may want to discuss. The House may also wish to discuss my hon. Friend's second point. He asked what would happen if this arrangement were not enough. The experience of other countries and our expectations are that this will be a powerful deterrent.

Mr. Kaufman: In response to a question, the Home Secretary said that the penalty on the airlines was discretionary, not automatic. If that is so, surely the airline will have responsibility to distinguish the bona fide from the bogus refugees? Faced with a fine in those circumstances, is an airline not likely to turn away bona fide refugees? Therefore, will the Home Secretary answer this question, which he has so far failed to answer and on which human lives may depend: how is a refugee without a visa — there will be such people, just as there were Jews in the 1930s in such circumstances, as I have cause to know — who seeks asylum in this country from oppression to find it if there is no provision for refugees without visas to be admitted without the airline being fined?

Mr. Hurd: I think that I have answered the right hon. Gentleman's question already. I have gone through the different ways in which refugees normally successfully obtain asylum here. First, they can come here through some agreement. The right hon. Gentleman mentioned Shcharansky previously, but he did not do so this time because that case would not be affected in any way by our proposals. Secondly, refugees can come here on some other basis and then seek asylum. Thirdly, they can go to a third country and argue that, because of a particular link with this country, this is where they need asylum. In practice, as opposed to theory, the right hon. Gentleman's point is not likely to be valid.

Later——

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): On a point of order Mr. Speaker. Earlier this afternoon we had a statement on bogus asylum seekers. I myself did not want to get in to ask a question of the Minister. I was just here, sort of observing an interest and seeing what was happening. You will know, Mr. Speaker, that there are perhaps one and a half times as many Conservative Back Benchers as there are Labour Back Benchers, You will know that during that statement, probably about one and a half times or twice as many Conservative Back Benchers sought to catch your eye as Labour Back Benchers.

You, Mr. Speaker, are the guardian of interests of individual Members, and you will know that each individual Member is equally important, irrespective of the party that he represents. I am asking you, Mr. Speaker, in future circumstances, if it appears tht there are a preponderance of Members of one side of the House or the other who wish to involve themselves in a particular statement, debate or whatever, that you take account of the balance of Members on either side of the House. I know it is a very difficult situation for yourself, but today it was very much one-sided. There were many more Members on this side of the House who wished to question my right hon. Friend than there were on the other side of the House. Given that, and given that each individual Member is as important, pari passu, as any other individual Member, I wonder whether in future you could take account of the balance on interest in a particular statement when people catch your eye?

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Could I urge you to take a long-term view, and bear in mind that in the next

Parliament Conservative Members may be in that minority situation, and that you would need to look after their interests in those circumstances?

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker, might I point out to you that the same problem, as outlined by the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow), obtains in the Scottish Grand Committee, given the small number of Conservative Members who are on it?

Mr. Speaker: It is always a difficult balance. As the hon. Member will know, I am reluctant to cut off question time after statements. Indeed, I gave that statement a long run, much longer than the other two statements. It is always a matter of deep regret if I cannot call on the statement every hon. Member who wishes to participate. I can only seek to be fair in giving them priority when the matter arises later. I always do that. It is a question of balance every day. I wish that it were possible to call all hon. Members, but the constraints of time do not allow it.

Mr. Marlow: On a further point of order, Mr. Speaker. I fully accept what you have said, and most hon. Members will believe that you are more than generous in the amount of time that you gave for that statement today. My point is not with your generosity and the amount of time that you give for a statement, but the balance that you give. There is a 100 per cent. chance that a Labour Member would have caught your eye today. There is probably a 65 per cent. chance that a Conservative Member would have caught your eye today. I just wonder whether, in the future, if there is a predominance on one side of the House or the other of people who wish to catch your eye, you would take account of the proportions of those hon. Members.

Mr. Speaker: That might have happened today. I always have to calculate and balance these matters. I seek on every occasion to be totally fair to both sides of the House.

Community Programme (Unemployment Benefit)

4.17 pm

The Minister for Social Security and the Disabled (Mr. John Major): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement on the benefit position of participants in the community programme following a recent decision by the social security commissioners.

As the House will know, it is a fundamental principle of benefit law that people who work part time and do so regularly are not entitled also to unemployment benefit for those days on which they would not normally work. That principle is not novel and has been applied consistently under successive Administrations since 1948. It has not been a source of contention. The point is currently covered in the Social Security (Unemployment Sickness and Invalidity Benefit) Regulations 1983 and was previously covered by the corresponding regulations made in 1975. It is frequently referred to as the full extent normal, or FEN, rule.

The community programme provides temporary work—normally for people who have been unemployed for 12 months, or six months if under 25—and a substantial proportion of those employed in the programme work part time. Until now, the adjudicating authorities have held that the full extent normal rule applies. This approach has hitherto been supported by the social security commissioners, and was also endorsed by a Court of Appeal decision in 1985.

However, in the case of Mr. Brunt a tribunal of commissioners has now decided that participating in the community programme on a part-time basis will not normally bring the full extent normal rule into operation. This decision was promulgated last week to the chief adjudication officer, who is independent of the Government, and I understand that he proposes to apply for leave to appeal against it.

The result of the commissioners' decision, if it were sustained upon appeal and applied generally, would be a significant change in current well established and understood benefit procedure. It would also cause a rise in benefit expenditure of around £2 million a week. This expenditure would be directed to people participating voluntarily in a programme from which the overwhelming majority receive earnings significantly higher than any unemployment benefit entitlement. The Government regard that as a quite unacceptable use of resources. We do not believe that community programme earnings and unemployment benefit should both be payable. Moreover, the adjudicating authorities will be uncertain of the law pending the conclusion of any appeal proceedings which could be lengthy. This, too, is unsatisfactory.

I am therefore laying regulations today under the urgency procedure to provide that people receiving earnings from the community programme are not entitled also to unemployment benefit. These regulations do not affect any supplementary benefit entitlement, because that benefit is not affected by the full extent normal rule.

I emphasise that these regulations are intended to establish beyond doubt the position that had, until now, generally been understood and applied. The regulations will take effect immediately.

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): Is the Minister aware that the statement that he has just made will cause depression and real anger among those who are working part-time on the community programme, for whom he has just explicitly confirmed that the programme is not an avenue for hope but a dead end? Did he not also confirm that, far from the community programme grooming people to move on to full-time work, it is the best that they can expect under this Government before they go back to the dole?

Is the Minister aware that the statement itself is in some respects misleading? It is not true that the application of the principle of full extent normal work

"has not been a source of contention,"

as the Minister says. Nor is it true that adjudicating authorities have always held that the rule applies, as he said in the statement. Indeed, it has been overturned in a number of cases.

The Minister's remarks on the community programme are contradicted explicitly by a document produced by the Department of Employment in March of this year, which stated:

"some part-time participants may be entitled to claim unemployment benefit for the days they are not working".

The commissioners' decision makes it quite clear that that is the case, quoting the leaflet issued by the Manpower Services Commission.

Many would doubt — I hope the Minister will confirm this—whether someone who is offered only two and a half days a week on the community programme and is pushed into taking opportunities offered by programmes, such as the Government's restart programme, has voluntarily chosen part-time employment in preference to full-time work. Will the Minister now confirm that the long-established principle of the rule to which he refers is that a person should not be encouraged by benefit rules to choose to take well-paid work for a few days and then supplement his income by drawing unemployment benefit? Will he tell the House whether he really believes that that is the definition of the community programme? Does he not understand that for some time there has been increasing concern at the rigid application of this rule, especially at a time of high unemployment? Does he realise that he has confirmed the view that people on the community programme are not being groomed for real jobs, but are merely being kept off the unemployment register?

Are not the Government, as usual, simply ignoring an opportunity to reassess the operation of the full extent normal rule and the community programme and to improve the training content and other aspects of that programme as the commissioners suggested in the judgment to which the Minister referred?

Finally, are the regulations intended to preclude the consideration even of different individual cases in future, as has been the case in the past?

Mr. Major: The hon. Lady should remember that, when the community programme began in 1982, it was not envisaged by the Government or by anyone else that both community programme earnings and unemployment benefit would be payable. That underlying point, which undercuts a substantial amount of what the hon. Lady had to say, was fully understood by all concerned at the time.

As regards the hon. Lady's remarks on depression and anger, my announcement today re-emphasises and re-endorses what has long been understood to have been the position.

The hon. Lady will know that a large number of people do not conclude their participation in community programmes, precisely because they obtain employment during the passage of that programme.

There has been some uncertainty about the full extent normal rule, although I quoted the most notable court case that had taken place. I confirm that I shall be considering the operation of the full extent normal rule separately from the instance that I mentioned today.

As regards the hon. Lady's comments about people being pushed into the community programme, I reaffirm what has long been understood — that the community programme is and will remain voluntary.

Mr. Roy Galley (Halifax): The fact that the social security commissioners' decision in this case is ludicrous is surely underlined by the thin arguments presented by the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett). It is anomalous that the state should provide work for someone and yet allow him to register as unemployed. It is also anomalous that the state should provide a wage and expect at the same time to provide unemployment benefit. Will my hon. Friend assure the House that he will act swiftly in bringing these regulations before the House and that they will be legally watertight when they are presented?

Mr. Major: On my hon. Friend's second point, I live in hope and trust that that will be the case. On his earlier remarks, it is certainly true that the present position would be anomalous if people received both earnings on the community programme and unemployment benefit. That was never the intention, and these regulations will take effect immediately to prevent that occurring. The commissioners' decision may be surprising, but that is a matter for the chief adjudication officer who has appealed against it.

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that this is the first time that I have known a Minister to step in and change the rules before an appeal has been heard? I wonder what he would say if someone was found not guilty of a criminal charge and the Government stepped in before any sort of appeal could be heard—although, of course, one cannot appeal against a not guilty verdict in a criminal case. However, is the Minister aware that by these regulations he is robbing unemployed part-time workers of up to £15 a week? It is wrong to regard people who are employed for a fixed temporary period as being fully employed. Will he think again and withdraw these regulations?

Mr. Major: I reiterate that the regulations will ensure that the law that we all thought existed does exist. There is nothing novel in the principle of these regulations. On the matter of cost, the right hon. Gentleman will know, as well as any hon. Member of this House, that there are a vast number of competing demands upon Social Security Ministers. Double provision of this sort is not the most effective use of the resources at my hand.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): I congratulate my hon. Friend on coming to the House with quick and effective action which will stop a disincentive to

people taking jobs that are available and will also save the taxpayer money which should not have been spent and otherwise would have been spent. Will he tell the Chief Secretary to the Treasury to add another £100 million to the taxi meter, so that he is operating on behalf of the Labour party? Will he also assure the House that he will now take much more vigorous action to stop the payment of supplementary benefit to those many hundreds of thousands of people in the south-east of England who are not taking jobs when the jobs are manifestly available?

Mr. Major: I take note of my hon. Friend's important points. I shall certainly draw the attention of the Chief Secretary to the Treasury to the observations of the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett).

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): Is not one problem the low level of earnings on the community programme? The average rate of pay, £67, has been virtually the same now for many years. As the community programme has to pay the rate for the job, the participants have to work fewer and fewer hours, so that there are very few now doing a full-time job. Many do only two days a week. Therefore, is it surprising that the industrial tribunals do not look upon those as proper jobs and award unemployment pay?

Should we not increase the level of earnings and upgrade the community programme, so that it is not a cheapskate programme but a proper, credible programme that would be so regarded by industrial tribunals?

Mr. Major: It is so proper and so credible that it tends to be substantially over-subscribed. The hon. Gentleman might also bear in mind the fact that the amount available as earnings under the community programme is substantially higher than the amount of unemployment benefit that would generally be payable. The community programme is popular and successful. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman cannot see that.

Mr. John Watts (Slough): Does my hon. Friend agree that it would be totally unacceptable for someone employed part-time on the community programme to be treated more favourably than someone employed part-time in the private sector? Will he confirm that entitlement to family income supplement is not affected, just as he confirmed that entitlement to supplementary benefit is not so affected?

Mr. Major: I confirm my hon. Friend's latter point, and I entirely agree with his earlier observations.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): May I follow the point raised by the Chairman of the Select Committee on Employment, the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton), and take the Minister one step back? Surely the nub of the problem is the large proportion of people on the community programme who are there on a part-time basis. Will the hon. Gentleman look at the per capita funding of the programme? There seem to be some signs that the suburban criterion which is used as the base line is not relevant to the creation of full-time CP jobs in rural areas and inner cities which, for different reasons, have higher overheads. Will the hon. Gentleman ascertain whether the method used is sensitive enough to give an accurate figure for those two categories?

Mr. Major: I understand the points that the hon. Gentleman makes so cogently. I shall draw them to the attention of my right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State for Employment.

On the community programme, I am bound to reiterate what I have said: whatever defects the hon. Gentleman may fear exist in the programme or in its funding, it is substantially over-subscribed and very popular.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Is not the reason why it was never envisaged that benefit would be paid in addition to earnings the fact that, when it was introduced, it was a full-time scheme based on full-time employment? Transforming it into a scheme of part-time working was a Government cut. Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that, although many people want to have a place on the community programme, they want full-time employment? The reform should come there. It should not be a matter of changing the rules in this way when they were set following a perfectly reasonable commission decision.

Mr. Major: The hon. Gentleman, as ever, is very ingenious in the points that he makes to the House. The underlying principle is the full extent normal rule, which precedes the community programme by some 25 years, so the hon. Gentleman's point is not valid.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): The Minister spoke about the community programme's success and popularity, but I should point out that a recent inquiry by the MSC in the west of Scotland revealed serious irregularities in the management of such a programme. Surely we need an independent inquiry into the management of such schemes.

Mr. Major: I understand that that matter is under investigation, but, to be frank, I am not sure that it arises from the statement that I have just made.

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): It is very difficult to believe the Minister when he says that this is such a long-established principle. Why have the social security commissioners found differently? They must understand the law and the principles only too well. All my hon. Friends who have spoken have pointed out that thousands of people on the community programme desperately want to work because they have been unemployed for so long. That means that they feel poor and cut off and that they cannot contribute to society. Most are taking home about £40 a week, which leaves them poor.

Does not the hon. Gentleman think that, as the commissioners have found that those people are entitled to a top-up on that money, they should have it? Should he not appeal against the decision and not change the law in the middle of the game? Is not the Government's real worry the fact that this rule means that many people on the community programme will again be counted in the unemployment figures? Is not the Government's major intention keeping the figures down rather than helping the unemployed?

Mr. Major: I cannot comment directly on the commissioners' decision in this case, which is the subject of an application for leave to appeal by the chief adjudication officer. Commissioners had previously specifically endorsed the full extent normal principle, as has the Court of Appeal.

Diabetics (Needles) and NHS Charges

4.33 pm

The Minister for Health (Mr. Tony Newton): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the supply of disposable syringes to diabetics and NHS charges from 1 April 1987.

There are in this country an estimated 1 million people who suffer from diabetes, of whom up to 200,000 require regular injections of insulin to maintain the stability of their condition. While some receive disposable syringes through the hospital service, the majority receive only re-usable syringes and needles, which is all that is available from their general practitioners on prescription.

As the House is aware, this situation has been widely perceived as unsatisfactory. We have received many representations from hon. Members, the British Diabetic Association and others about the disadvantages of the re-usable equipment, and the greater comfort and convenience of disposables. This has been particularly strongly argued in respect of children.

I am pleased to be able to tell the House today that the Government have decided to make disposable insulin syringes and needles available on general practitioner prescription. Since diabetics are among the groups who are exempt from all prescription charges, this supply will, of course, be free. Discussions with the manufacturers to make the necessary arrangements, in particular to ensure an adequate supply at an appropriate price, will start immediately. Our aim will be to introduce the new supply at the earliest possible moment. The estimated cost may well approach £10 million in a full year.

As I am sure the House would think right, we have linked our consideration of this matter with that of the appropriate level of prescription and other charges for the forthcoming year.

First, taking account of the existing wide range of exemptions from prescription charges, which will continue to mean that some 75 per cent. of all prescriptions—including all those for pensioners—are free, we propose to increase the charges broadly in line with the cost of the service, balanced, however, to improve still further the value-for-money offered by the "season ticket" arrangements. The item charge will rise by 20p to £2·40, the four-monthly pre-payment certificate by 50p to £12·50, and the annual pre-payment certificate by £1·50 to £35. Full details are available in the Vote Office, and the necessary regulations will be laid shortly with a view to their taking effect on 1 April. Equivalent steps will be taken by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. We estimate that these increases will produce of the order of £10 million in 1987-88.

Secondly, there will be no change in dental charges. They will therefore remain on the basis set in April 1985.

Thirdly, on charges for private patients, the House will be aware that, in response to recommendations from the Public Accounts Committee about the structure and level of these charges, regulations were laid last month to allow health authorities in England and Wales from 1 April either to determine their own charges to recover costs or to adopt the model charges of a central reference list. I have today placed in the Vote Office details of these model charges. For amenity beds, they are 8·3 per cent. higher than the current charge, set two years ago. For private out-patients, they are 6·1 per cent. higher than that set last year. For private in-patients, the increase is larger at 17·6 per cent., to reflect not only increased costs but the PAC recommendations and the fact that private in-patients have shorter lengths of stay than NHS patients.

Fourthly, charges for overseas visitors in England and Wales will be increased in line with the central reference lists for private patients. Regulations to specify these new charges from 1 April will be laid shortly. Charges for private patients and overseas visitors in Scotland will also be announced shortly.

The context of the measures which I have announced today is an overall increase of expenditure on the NHS in England of over £1 billion in the coming year. Alongside the development of cancer screening services announced last week by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, I believe that the House will endorse the sensible ordering of priorities that now enables us to develop our services for diabetics, too.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): I welcome without reservation the announcement that the Government have decided to provide free disposable syringes and needles for diabetics, as called for by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition. The Opposition always welcome the Government's conversion to the principle of providing national health services on prescription free of charge. Will the Government agree to make blood glucose test drips available free to diabetics, so that diabetics can carry out tests on themselves necessary for the proper control of their condition?

The need for the Government to be converted to the free provision of national health services is demonstrated by the Minister's suggestion that the free disposable syringes for diabetics are to be paid for by a £10 million increase in prescription charges. That is insulting to diabetics and to those who have to pay the higher charges. This is an increase up to £2·40 from the 20p which prevailed in 1979 when, as reported in that model of accuracy, the *Daily Mail*, when reporting matters to do with the Conservative party, we were told that the Prime Minister—then the Leader of the Opposition—had said:

"We have no intention of increasing"

prescription charges.

The increase is disgraceful. As the Minister knows, doctors believe that people are putting off treatment. Some doctors are resorting to the unfortunate practice of giving prescriptions covering a lengthier period so as to reduce cost. That is a reasonable thing for the doctors to do, but it is dangerous to have those drugs about. The Opposition welcome the decision not to increase dental charges and assume that the Government accepted our recommendations that the 1985 increase in charges discouraged people from seeking necessary treatment.

As to charges for private patients, the Government have got into the ridiculous position whereby, since 1979, there has been a substantial increase in the number of pay beds in NHS hospitals but fewer patients are being treated in them. The Government are now failing to recover the costs of those patients. Health authorities are now faced with the ludicrous dilemma of increasing charges and losing patients or cutting charges and losing more money. The Government have not yet resolved that dilemma.

We regarded charges for overseas visitors as a squalid measure when they were introduced. We were told that

those charges would raise £6 million a year. I doubt whether they have yet raised £6 million in all the time that they have been in operation. Those charges have only damaged this country's reputation as a hospitable place for people to visit.

Mr. Newton: To take those points in reverse order, I believe that most hon. Members will regard charges for overseas patients as entirely sensible and justified. Those charges have raised about £6 million—albeit less than we originally hoped—which would not otherwise have been available to the Health Service. The hon. Gentleman has persistently failed to recognise that point. As to private patients, the Government are concerned to respond to the Public Accounts Committee and to ensure that costs are recovered on a better basis than in the past. That is the basis of the proposals.

On dental charges, there is no evidence to support the propositions put forward by the hon. Gentleman. The number of courses of dental treatment has continued to rise. We seek to check prescribing for long periods through the normal operation of the administration of prescriptions and their control. Lastly, the cost of blood-testing insulin strips would be roughly the same as the cost of supplying needles which I announced today. Although that is something we would like to do in due course, we have come to the conclusion that the supply of needles should be given priority at this point. The hon. Gentleman's whole response was typical of the Opposition, who relentlessly promise everything and will never face up to the need to pay.

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham): I congratulate my hon. Friend on his announcement about disposable needles, which will do more for those who suffer from diabetes than almost any other action apart from the supply of blood-testing insulin strips, which he also mentioned. This campaign has been continuing for a long time. The Minister's announcement is all the more welcome news for that and demonstrates beyond doubt that the Government listen and do what is right for those who suffer most.

Mr. Newton: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and I pay tribute to his efforts to bring about the decision which I have announced today.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I welcome the announcement about disposable syringes for diabetics. The Minister will accept that, not least among the campaigners for that change over a long time, both to his Department and to the Prime Minister, has been my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith).

Does the Minister not accept that the increase in prescription charges of over 200 per cent. since 1979 is bound to mean that some people are deterred from going for a prescription when they need one? Does he not accept that last year the estimate was that by putting up the charge there would be a £30 million loss because of over-prescribing to compensate and that there may well be a similar loss to the Health Service this year?

In relation to private patients, in addition to this change, which is less than the increase in prescription charges, are the Government satisfied that the so far unrecovered money will be recovered? Is he aware that in the health authority in Camberwell, in my area, the figure was about £83,000 in the last full year and over £100,000 in unpaid private patients' fees in the regional health centre?

Mr. Newton: It is my growing experience in this Department that there are few policies that can be undertaken without problems but the income we have gained from prescription charges has been more than matched by the improvements in various services which have been made possible.

As to private patient charges, the aim is that costs are properly and fairly recovered. That has not been done effectively in the past and we are now seeking to change that.

Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock (Batley and Spen): I welcome my hon. Friend's statement. There are many diabetics in my constituency who will welcome this measure greatly, including the parents of a three-year-old boy, whom I recently wrote about, and a young lad who will now find it much easier to continue in his normal daily employment with disposable syringes rather than having to bother with the ones that have to be sterilised.

Mr. Newton: It is the children that I am particularly pleased about. I am glad to have been able to do something to respond to my hon. Friend's efforts in this field.

Dr. M. S. Miller (East Kilbride): May I extend to the Minister a welcome for his decision on the supply of disposable syringes. It would have been ludicrous not to supply diabetics with disposable syringes when drug addicts are to be treated to that so-called privilege. May I impress upon the Minister the necessity of these disposable syringes being disposed of and not used again. In today's context it is essential that there be no contamination and that patients should be given a clear indication that the disposability of the syringes and needles is absolute, and that they cannot be used again.

In connection with the increase in prescription charges, many people are exempt but a number of people are still put to the very considerable expense of paying more and more. Would it not be better for the Government to consider methods of decreasing rather than increasing the prescription charges?

Mr. Newton: On the second point, it is precisely to assist with that possible problem, which I recognise, that the hon. Member will find that the increase in the season tickets is only about half, in percentage terms, the increase in the per item charge. We think that is a sensible approach. As to disposable needles, we shall be giving further consideration to whether extra steps need to be taken to safeguard their disposal.

Mr. Graham Bright (Luton South): May I ask my hon. Friend to accept grateful thanks from every diabetic and certainly from the parents of young children and young people in general for his announcement? May I ask that this measure be introduced as soon as possible and that, where young people and children are concerned, clear instructions are given about disposal, because otherwise there might be other problems? With that in mind I welcome the Minister's statement.

Mr. Newton: The answer to the latter question is yes. The answer to the former question is yes, as soon as possible, but we are talking about tens of millions of syringes and needles and we need to be sure that the supply is available.

Mr. Laurie Pavitt (Brent South): While the Minister claims 75 per cent. exemptions, has he also read the report of the Pharmaceutical Society, which shows that one in two of every FP10 is paid for? With regard to the increase in the season ticket, is it not appalling that people who are chronically sick with angina or Parkinson's disease—young people—may be paying this extra burden for the rest of their lives? Young women who have had mastectomies and chemotherapy are paying £2·40 every three weeks or £35 a year. Is this not really the height of meanness?

On overseas charges, is the Minister aware that, although he takes the credit for income, he does not take the debit for extra administrative costs that every hospital's in-patient and out-patient departments must bear? This has a racist impact. Those who are questioned the most are the ones with a different skin pigmentation.

Mr. Newton: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman knows—he has studied the matter carefully—that we have issued guidance to health authorities which is designed to avoid the problem upon which he has touched and to keep administration to a minimum. On prescription charges, I should not at this stage wish to hold out hope of reopening the exempt list. It is precisely for reasons of the type upon which the hon. Gentleman has touched that I have taken steps to keep down the increase in season ticket prices.

Dr. John G. Blackburn (Dudley, West): Will my hon. Friend accept the warm and generous appreciation that has been expressed by all hon. Members on behalf of diabetic patients? In addition, will he seriously consider the provision of blood glucose treatment and the provision of Nova pens, which are most important in treating diabetics, bearing in mind the tremendous savings to the Health Service by not having such people in hospital? Will he accept that his statement will be greeted with acclamation?

Mr. Newton: I am afraid that I cannot give my hon. Friend an immediate yes to either of his specific questions, but we shall certainly keep his points under sympathetic review.

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): Is the Minister aware that his statement will be most welcome, certainly throughout my constituency and in Dr. White's clinic in my area? Has he considered that the costing is only for syringes that will be disposed of immediately after they have been used? Has he also taken into consideration the saving that will be made by non-disposal of syringes?

Mr. Newton: I have certainly heard it argued that the cost will turn out to be lower because some people will use syringes more than once. The hon. Gentleman will understand that I do not wish to base a Government policy proposal on the assumption that people will use syringes more often than originally intended.

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): The Minister will know from the dozens of letters that I have sent him from diabetics and their children that we welcome such a compassionate move by Her Majesty's Government. We recognise that prescription charges have gone up, but my hon. Friend has announced that 75 per cent. of all drafted prescriptions do not need to be paid for. That is an important element.

Mr. Newton: I am suitably grateful to my hon. Friend, and likewise pay tribute to his efforts on behalf of his constituents in this matter.

Mr. Gareth Wardell (Gower): I am pleased also to associate myself with what other hon. Members have said in welcoming the Minister's announcement. None-the-less, it is a pity that the announcement was not made at the same time as the announcement about free disposable syringes for drug addicts. On 3 November, the Under-Secretary of State wrote to Sir John Nabarro of the British Diabetic Association, stating that there were strong arguments for making blood monitoring equipment available on prescription. This afternoon, the Minister said that the priority must be disposable syringes. Will he give hon. Members some idea of how long it will be before the other important matter will be put right?

Mr. Newton: I cannot give a definite commitment as to time. I have made it clear that the Government are aware of the point and will continue to keep it in mind.

Mr. Robert Atkins (South Ribble): I declare an interest as a parent of a child who is a diabetic, and has been for about eight years. On her behalf and on behalf of many other children and adults who suffer from the disease, I inform the Minister that we are grateful for the way in which he has listened and heard representations from many hon. Member. Does he agree that it makes nonsense of the continuing cries from various parts of the country that the Government do not care? The Minister's statement demonstrates to all concerned that we care, that we listen to representations and that we act.

Mr. Newton: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. Frankly, not the least of my pleasures this afternoon is to know that I have helped to serve a cause in which he is greatly interested.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): Does the Minister accept that the decision was absolutely necessary because of the furore caused by the fact that drug addicts were to be issued with free syringes, whereas those who were born with an illness over which they have no control were prejudiced? Does he accept also that it is nonsensical to talk about giving massive tax handouts when such an announcement is likely to bring support from all hon. Members? Will he discuss with his right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer a better use of resources rather than giving tax handouts?

Mr. Newton: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has readily agreed to large increases in resources going to the Health Service over a number of years. I am grateful to him for that. Of course I am aware of the connection that has been made in the argument, but this measure stands on its own merits and could rightly have been done, and has been done, in its own right.

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): I thank my hon. Friend and the Scottish Office Ministers for urgently reconsidering a matter that many hon. Members have raised. Does he understand that many diabetics will appreciate the decision that has been made?

Mr. Newton: I am happy to pass on my hon. Friend's remarks to the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, who is sitting close by me. I know that he will be grateful.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): In warmly thanking the Minister for his decision may I associate with

those thanks the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security — the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie)—who replied to my Adjournment debate on this issue and added her efforts? I assure the Minister that costs could be substantially lower than he now supposes if admissions to hospital are fewer because better control is exercised through the more accurate plastic syringe. I ask him to be a little clearer about how quickly he hopes to get the measure into operation.

Mr. Newton: No one will be more pleased than I if the cost proves to be lower. It will make it much easier for us to do some of the other things that people have mentioned. On timing, I do not think that, at the moment, I should like to go beyond early summer. We shall urgently discuss the matter with manufacturers, but there is no point in saying that something will happen until we can say that supplies are available. I am glad to associate my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State, who I am sure deserves thanks on this occasion, as on all occasions.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): Given the cynical propensity of the Opposition to misrepresent everything that the Government do, will my hon. Friend assure the House that, when he puts out publicity about new prescription charges, he will reiterate the many categories of people who do not have to pay?

Mr. Newton: I certainly have no intention whatever of hiding our light under a bushel.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I thought, Mr. Speaker, that I would have to strip off like the Tamils at Heathrow to be noticed. *[Interruption.]* The Minister is considered by Conservative Members and by millions of other people to be one of the most caring — *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Winterton *rose—[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Mr. Winterton.

Mr. Winterton: I am sorry, Mr. Speaker, if you find it difficult to hear me. I was saying that my hon. Friend is considered by his colleagues and by millions of other people as perhaps one of the most honest, courageous and caring Ministers. His decision to provide free disposable syringes and needles to diabetics is warmly to be welcomed, although such a move is only just, bearing in mind that we provide free replacement needles to drug addicts. Diabetics deserve consideration and sympathy more than drug addicts do. Will he highlight to the people of—*[Interruption]*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member might as well get it right.

Mr. Winterton: I apologise, Sir. Because of the polemics from the Opposition, will he highlight to the people of this country the fact that 75 per cent. of all prescriptions are provided free and, therefore, that the benefit of a free prescription system is available for all who need it?

Mr. Newton: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for re-emphasising that important point. As for the earlier part of his question, I am tempted to ask whether I can now quit while I am ahead.

Mr. Derek Conway (Shrewsbury and Atcham): I hope that my hon. Friend will accept that the Shropshire diabetic association will greatly welcome his statement this afternoon, along with the 60 colleagues who very generously signed my early-day motion. Is it not the case that the more efficiency that my hon. Friend and his colleagues can introduce into the National Health Service the sooner the day will come when we shall also have a similar encouraging and welcome statement on testing strips?

Mr. Newton: I very much hope that the forecast will prove to be true, and I should like to pay tribute again to my hon. Friend, of whose early-day motion we have been very conscious.

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): Along with so many other hon. Members, I welcome my hon. Friend's announcement about needles for diabetics, particularly since their condition is not brought on by anything that they have done.

In that light, will my hon. Friend reconsider his decision to give free syringes and needles to drug addicts who impose their own condition on themselves? Will he talk to the Minister of State, Home Office, who is attempting to reduce drug addiction, compare notes with him and ask himself what his Department is doing and whether it ties in with what the Home Office is trying to do?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend will probably have heard me resisting the straightforward parallel that was implied in an earlier question. I shall say only this about pilot schemes for needle exchange in relation to drug abuse: intravenous drug abuse and the sharing of needles is one of the main ways in which AIDS can be spread into the heterosexual population, and it is vital that the Government should do everything possible to reduce that risk.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): As some of my constituents have had to pay £10 a month for needles for diabetic usage, I warmly welcome what my hon. Friend has said. Will dentists be paid a fee for examining people when no treatment is required? In order to obtain a fee, I believe that in some cases fillings and other treatment is given unnecessarily.

Mr. Newton: Having announced no increase in dental charges, I think that I ought to confess that I have not focused on that point very much this afternoon, but I undertake to look at my hon. Friend's point.

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): I join the many hon. Members on both sides of the House in warmly welcoming the Minister's announcement about free disposable syringes. I have received very many representations from diabetics and their relatives and friends in Norwich. Obviously they will welcome wholeheartedly this announcement. Also I join hon. Members on both sides of the House in asking my hon. Friend to think again as soon as possible about blood glucose testing strips and their inclusion on the prescription list.

Mr. Newton: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I note what he said in the latter part of his question.

NEW MEMBERS

The following Member made the Affirmation required by law:

Mrs. Rosemary Susan Barnes, for Greenwich.

Medical Act 1983 (Amendment)

5.3 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend section 36 of the Medical Act 1983 to enable the Professional Conduct Committee of the General Medical Council to exercise greater discretion in respect of conduct which they judge cannot be regarded as acceptable professional conduct.

The Bill arises from the tragic and harrowing experiences of two lady constituents of mine in Canning Town and Silvertown, respectively. The Bill has been printed and distributed in two previous Sessions, and it was opposed by the General Medical Council and the then Minister for reasons that they have given.

The Bill has been prepared after extensive consultation with medical institutions and bodies, including the General Medical Council. Last year, the council of the British Medical Association passed a resolution that it would not oppose the Bill. I am glad to see in their places the two hon. Members who are sponsoring the Bill with me, my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride (Dr. Miller) and the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West (Sir A. Grant). He and other hon. Members have examples of other tragic cases that highlight the need for amendment of the law. The hon. Gentleman explained his tragic case to the House on 25 March 1986. I am also glad to see the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security, the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South, (Mrs. Currie), on the Treasury Bench.

This is not kite flying or a testing of the temperature of the ten minutes rule procedure. In 1982, young Alfie Turner of Canning Town revealed, through his untimely death, an otherwise unknown and unsuspected gap in the legislation. I believe that this private Member's Bill, which consists of only two clauses and eight lines, is an excellent way of putting right the law in this case and that it is a proper use of this procedure.

It is not a matter of doctor bashing. The overwhelming majority of the members of the medical profession are dedicated and skilful, and I pay tribute to them. Indeed, at the age of 13 I owed my life to the work of a general practitioner who operated on me in a cottage hospital. But for that, I might not be here. Because of the very nature of its work, the profession needs protection, as do the public, from that tiny proportion of doctors whose conduct has proved to be unacceptable. The task of dealing with this problem falls to the General Medical Council, which was set up as a self-regulating professional body under section 36 of the Medical Act 1983.

Through its professional conduct committee, the GMC is able, by statute, to administer the mildest of sanctions at its legal disposal — that of conditional registration. There is an elaborate series of standing orders and rules that assist and are auxiliary to the legislation, but the General Medical Council can apply those sanctions, particularly the mildest of them — conditional registration — only if a doctor is found to be guilty of serious professional misconduct.

Even if professional misconduct is proved, or even if, according to its own rules, that conduct cannot be regarded as professional, the General Medical Council has no sanction. In the case of the late Alfie Turner of Canning Town, the facts alleged were proved. The doctor had failed to treat, to call an ambulance and to be courteous to the family of a seriously ill boy who was later found to be in a coma. Unfortunately, he died five days later. I am not suggesting that he would not have died had there been treatment immediately. Nevertheless, they were found as facts. The General Medical Council found that those facts were unacceptable, but did not amount to serious professional misconduct. Therefore, no action could take place.

A second, and rather horrific, case occurred in Silvertown some time later and, as a result, the doctor was found guilty of serious professional misconduct and appropriate steps were taken. But for that — two and a half years after the first case — the doctor would still have been practising.

Most hon. Members and others might be surprised that the hurdle of serious professional misconduct must be surmounted before constructive and remedial steps can be taken. The law at present does not permit appropriate action that could protect the public and the profession. The purpose of my Bill is to give discretionary power to the GMC so that it can impose conditions on a doctor where its professional conduct committee judges that the doctor's conduct is unacceptable. I use that term because it is already used by the GMC in respect of its own internal processes, and was accepted in the case of Alfie Turner. Although it found the doctor's conduct unacceptable, it did nothing about it. But for the bravery of a lady and her husband in Silvertown, in particularly distressing circumstances, in bringing the second case, that doctor could be practising today.

I hope that the House will find that position unacceptable. Why then does the GMC oppose my proposals? It gave its reasons in correspondence to a former Minister. First, it considers that its powers are adequate. As I and others have demonstrated, the events show the opposite.

Secondly, the GMC fears the substitution of the greater charge for the lesser. But do we have only dangerous driving? It not driving without due care and attention a useful and proper measure? In any case, surely Parliament and the public are more concerned with proper preventive and remedial measures than any technical difference between serious and other professional misconduct?

Thirdly, the GMC says that it is impracticable or inappropriate to attach conditions to a doctor's registration. The GMC already has that power and it uses it, as it has done for so many years. In my proposal, the use of it would be optional and at its discretion.

Recently, in notes sent to Members of Parliament, the GMC states that it is not conceivable that it could equitably examine all cases of alleged unacceptable conduct in relation to 100,000 doctors. The professional conduct committee could not do that. There is already an understandably elaborate preliminary process.

My Bill, as published, would mean that only doctors whose conduct was judged unacceptable by the professional conduct committee could be placed on conditional registration. In the same notes that were sent to hon. Members, the GMC states:

"The Council's primary task is, and always has been, of informing and protecting the public."

If that is so, it must not only be done, but be seen to be done. The Merrison report of 1976, Cmnd. 6018, on which much of the current legislation was based, in paragraph 10, says:

"We have suggested that the regulation of the profession can be looked upon as a contract made between the public

and the profession. It is important to understand in this context that the GMC is merely the instrument for the proper supervision of this contract and that it derives its authority, and indeed its being, from legislation. The legislature—that is, Parliament—acts in this context for the public, and it is for Parliament to decide the nature of the contract and the way it is to be executed."

On that, I rest my case in the hope that the Bill can proceed without opposition or objection.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Nigel Spearing, Dr. M. S. Miller and Sir Anthony Grant.

Medical Act 1983 (Amendment)

Mr. Nigel Spearing accordingly presented a Bill to amend section 36 of the Medical Act 1983 to enable the Professional Conduct Committee of the General Medical Council to exercise greater discretion in respect of conduct which they judge cannot be regarded as acceptable professional conduct: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 13 March 1987 and to be printed. [Bill 94.]

Orders of the Day

Local Government Bill

5.19 pm

The Minister for Local Government (Dr. Rhodes Boyson): I beg to move, That the Bill now be read a Second time.

This Bill contains four measures. First, it contains provisions to prevent authorities from using advance and deferred purchase schemes to avoid the Government's capital expenditure controls and store up major future commitments. Secondly, it gives local authorities powers to provide financial assistance to the private sector to provide rented housing accommodation. Use of the powers will be subject to the agreement of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. Thirdly, it makes minor adjustments to the arrangements for paying block grant relating to expenditure on further education. Finally, it contains measures to make the land register system more effective.

This is a further local government Bill. It is the same cast, but a different play. We do not move around, so we cannot say that we are in rep. However, the House must blame, if it blames anybody, a minority within local government for the Bill. Particularly in the case of the provisions dealing with advance and a deferred purchase, we have been forced to take action because of the breakdown, from a small minority of the local authority side, of consensus. There used to be an acknowledgment by local government that central Government govern in the national interest, but that has been challenged by a handful of reckless authorities. This handful of authorities is tarnishing the reputation and honourable traditions of the majority.

Central Government take a view of what can be afforded by way of public expenditure. I remember that, in 1976, when I sat on the Opposition Benches, the Labour Government, under pressure from the IMF, had to tell local government that it must reduce its expenditure substantially across the board. It is difficult to do this when budgets have already been set, but local government made significant reductions in its spending because it automatically responded to central Government priorities when it came to safeguarding the national economy.

By the same token, the then Government felt able to ask for cuts. They did not have to wield the weapon of statute. It is a sad reflection on what has happened in some parts of local government in recent years that such consensus has disappeared. Nowadays, it is necessary to bring the weight of Parliament to bear before any local government worthy of the name is carried out in certain parts of London under hard Left control, including in my borough of Brent. I see the right hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Freeson) here. This also happens in other major cities.

Let us look at this against the background of advance and deferred purchase schemes. Such schemes have a long and reasonably respectable history, but recently they have been transmuted by a minority of authorities into creative accounting devices as a means of evading the Government's spending controls on a grand scale. In that guise, those devices are borrowing masquerading as expenditure.

[Dr. Rhodes Boyson]

My right hon. Friend announced on 22 July, as hon. Members will remember—that was the day in 1918 that the Allied forces crossed the Marne in France—that he would be introducing legislation to stop this abuse. These schemes make use of a bank or other intermediary to transfer expenditure artificially from the year when the work is done, and is normally paid for, to an earlier or later year. The interest is rolled up and the first payments deferred, usually for at least three years.

If indulged in on any scale, as in some authorities, the devices store up massive problems for ratepayers, regardless of future election results. The recent Audit Commission report on the management of London's authorities identified eight boroughs that have entered deferred purchase arrangements amounting to over £550 million. The Government deplore the use of any creative accounting device that leaves ratepayers facing huge bills in the future. We consider it reckless and imprudent. It mortgages the future to save people facing up to reality now.

Some authorities are relying on an incoming Labour Government to bail them out of the financial consequences of using these devices. They will have to wait a long time. However, out of interest, let us spend a few moments exploring just what the Labour party would do if it were in power. I trust that this afternoon we shall hear what the Labour party would do about creative accountancy as it is now and as it may be if other authorities went on with it and we did not legislate.

In a speech to the Association of Metropolitan Authorities' annual conference last year, the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), whom I see in his place, made an important statement. Far be it from me to take biographical details from him, but I shall honour him with quotations. I have the full speech here, with the correct page marked.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): My hon. Friend used the expression "creative accountancy", and we have come to hear that expression a great deal. Does he not agree that, not only in the context of the Bill but in many other sectors of accountancy, the expression "creative accountancy" means nothing more or less than cheating?

Dr. Boyson: It is financial cheating in so far as money that should be paid that year in total is rolled forward for somebody to pay in a minimum of three years, and sometimes up to 10 years, later. I have illustrations of the number of years in some cases. Such authorities are living off the future generation and taking on commitments for which they will not have to foot the bill. That is wrong and the Government deplore it. I was quoting from a speech made by the hon. Member for Copeland to the AMA. I am not sure where the conference was.

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): In Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

Dr. Boyson: That is a good north-east location.

I shall not read all that the hon. Gentleman said, because I do not have the time. If the hon. Gentleman wishes a copy of his speech, I can provide it to him. He said:

"There can be no blank cheques, no easy money."

No hon. Member would disagree with that, and perhaps we can take it as the text for our debate today. So far, so good. That is an admirable sentiment, but what does it mean in practice?

We get a further clue from the Labour party's latest policy document, which I have with me, unleashed at its local government conference in Leeds recently. The document proposes manipulating the control system to ease the problem of the handful of reckless authorities that have indulged in these schemes. Page 51, paragraph 7·3 —I like to be helpful to hon. Members by providing information—of the Labour party's document "Local Government Reform in England and Wales", which is a draft consultative paper, says:

"The sensible solution is to recognise that capital expenditure under deferred purchase arrangements has already taken place."

Those two quotations are completely different. Would a Labour Government be legislating as we are against creative accountancy? If we were in opposition, we would support such moves because we also do not believe in blank cheques.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): I am grateful for the opportunity to come back on this point. The direct answer to the questions is that in government we would review the situation. *[Laughter.]* There is no point in laughing at this, as Conservative Members are. We do not know, and neither does the Minister, the full extent of indebtedness of individual local authorities until that indebtedness arises in a particular year.

Secondly, I should have thought that the Minister would approve of the point that the expenditure incurred should be counted in the year in which it takes place rather than in any future year. Thirdly, if these authorities are as reckless as the Minister suggests, how does he explain why the Government-controlled Public Works Loan Board has not been reducing its lending to London boroughs such as Haringey? It has increased lending to these boroughs quite dramatically in the past four years so that, for example, in Haringey's case, 50 per cent. of its debt four years ago was accounted for by the board while today 82 per cent. is accounted for by the board. Why have the Government increased their lending to such boroughs if they have been so reckless?

Dr. Boyson: I am delighted that the Labour party, if in government, would be considering what to do. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that the document states that the capital expenditure will be charged for that year, but what will happen in future years? Will extra money be given to the authorities or will they have to contain their budgets?

Mr. Reg Freeson (Brent, East) *rose*——

Dr. Boyson: The right hon. Gentleman may not like that, and I gladly give way.

Mr. Freeson: Earlier on, the Minister said that there are situations—there have been plenty in the past and there are plenty today—when the use of the deferred purchase procedure is quite reasonable and produces good results. I am almost quoting the phrase that he used. Is it not perfectly possible for individual local authorities to work out, with the help of the director of finance, a likely programme of capital spending over a given run of years —providing the Government do not interfere too much with that spending—so that authorities may judge the profile of expenditure?

That spending may go up or down over a period. To an extent, it is possible to adopt the procedure to even out —not to always increase—the burdens over a run of years. I used that method many years ago when I was a chairman of finance in my local authority. No great harm, if any, was done, but a great deal of good was done.

Dr. Boyson: When local authorities used that procedure responsibly—not involving great amounts—it was fair enough, but things have run amok. Hon. Members will recall the article in *The Guardian* on 19 November 1986. The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) now reads the *Sunday Telegraph*, but I read *The Guardian*. Under the headline:

"Councils facing £2 billion catastrophe after election, Labour warned",

John Carvel, the political correspondent, wrote:

"This problem of 'suppressed' expenditure was likened yesterday by one member of the report team to a financial time bomb which could explode on a Labour government if Neil Kinnock wins the next general election."

I have a list of deferred purchase schemes undertaken by local authorities and known to the Department of the Environment. It includes £100 million borrowed by Hammersmith, £100 million borrowed by Camden, £100 million borrowed by Sheffield and £100 million borrowed by Manchester. Nothing will be paid back for three years, and that will leave a bill——

Dr. Cunningham: What about Torbay?

Dr. Boyson: Torbay is not on that list, but I would welcome any information from the hon. Gentleman.

The right hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Freeson) may say that the procedure has an honourable history, but nobody knows the extent of the spending at present; that is why the Government are stepping in. The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) accepted that, if the Labour party was in government, it would be considering the problem. We are all concerned about the problem. The loans must be paid for by the ratepayers. Where will the banks rushing to put up money for the schemes stand when the burden turns out, as it may in some cases, to be more than ratepayers can reasonably be asked to bear?

I wish to reiterate what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment said in answer to a written question from my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) on 19 February. He said:

"A local authority's debt and its creditworthiness have always been its own responsibility. The Government do not stand behind local authority debt."—[*Official Report*, 19 February 1987, Vol. 110, c. *743*.]

That type of recklessness must be curbed. To deal with the problem, clause 1 and schedule 1 of the Bill define the time at which an authority will be treated as incurring expenditure against its spending ceiling by reference to the time at which works are carried out, regardless of when payments are actually made. The new provisions apply to all works carried out under arrangements to which an authority becomes committed after 22 July 1986.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I wish that the Minister would cease to use the pejorative term "reckless" when referring to arrangements that have been made by local authorities with respectable lending institutions. When a bank decides whether to lend money to a local authority, it takes into account all the factors, including the ability of that borough to pay back the money that it borrows. Who is the Minister accusing of recklessness—the local authority that borrows or the bank that lends?

Dr. Boyson: Every bargain requires two sides—the lender and the borrower. The reason I repeated what my right hon. Friend said is that we will not stand behind that form of local government debt.

Mr. Straw: The Government never have.

Dr. Boyson: It is a good thing for all to know. I am glad that I have the unanimity of the House, as that is always pleasant.

I consider it reckless for local authorities to undertake commitments that they cannot meet at the time and roll them forward on to future ratepayers five or 10 years ahead. The ratepayers will have to pick up the bill from the limited income of the local authority and pay for what is being spent at the present time.

Mr. Banks: I am fortunate to be a member of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee. When one studies international debt, it is apparent that a number of the banks that lend to local authorities in London and around the country also lend to Third-world countries. The banks often lend at a rate that is grossly in excess of their capital. Who is being reckless—the country that borrows or the bank? Who is being reckless—the local authority or the lender, the bank?

Dr. Boyson: I have put on record my views and those who read them must learn. I must point out the recklessness of one London borough that follows an anti-apartheid policy, but which has borrowed from a bank in Paris, which is financed from South Africa. Very odd things are going on. The hon. Gentleman may consider that reckless——

Mr. Banks: Unwise.

Dr. Boyson: The regulation-making powers will enable my right hon. Friend to make exemptions from, or to modify, the provisions in the Bill if that is seen to be necessary. My right hon. Friend has promised an exemption to allow authorities to continue to use deferred purchase schemes prudently for their original purpose——

Mr. Freeson *rose*——

Dr. Boyson: I must finish this—I am not finishing a sentence, let alone a paragraph, at the moment.

The original purpose was an occasional, one-off project that would be difficult for a local authority to accommodate within its spending ceiling for a single year. The exemption will be restricted to one project, not exceeding a given value, per authority in a specified period. I will announce the precise details of the exemption during the passage of the Bill. I am willing to give way to the hon. Member for Brent, East if he still wishes to intervene.

Mr. Freeson: I am grateful to the Minister. I accept that the Minister intends to introduce the details during the Committee proceedings, but it would be useful to have some idea of the criteria that will be used. If there are cases where the excessive use of such procedures builds up an indebtedness in a few years, well above reasonable levels, that is not very prudent. However, there will be other cases where there is likely to be a downturn in basic expenditure

[Mr. Freeson]

on capital programmes and it would be perfectly reasonable for an authority to undertake such schemes. Is that the type of guidance that will be issued?

Dr. Boyson: I have listened to what the hon. Gentleman has said. I cannot go into more detail. We are concerned about small authorities facing large expenditure in one year. Such expenditure may be easily covered by a large authority through its rate income, but in the case of a small authority the cost must be spread over a number of years. We are bearing in mind the fact that a small district council may have heavy capital expenditure in one year.

I turn now to the provisions in the Bill that deal with the financial assistance for private housing and the statement made on 5 February by my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing, Urban Affairs and Construction. It is the Government's wish to widen the variety of landlords providing rented housing. Our aim is to increase the choice for the substantial number of people who want or need to rent their homes. We want to re-establish the right to rent.

In many areas, the supply of privately rented accommodation has simply dried up. In 1951 there were 6 million privately rented homes in England, whereas today there are 1·6 million. The numbers are declining by an estimated 70,000 a year.

A combination of statutory rent controls and private landlords' inability to compete with other subsidised forms of housing has forced many of these landlords out of business. In some areas, local authorities are virtually monopoly suppliers and their provision of housing has some of the worst characteristics of old monopolies. There is restricted access to rented housing and little choice. Tenants get a low standard of service and poor value for money. That is not true of all authorities, of course. Some manage their housing effectively and I pay a tribute to them. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members may disagree, but I visited a council housing estate in my constituency on Sunday and heard the complaints of the tenants. They took advantage of my coming and showed me rooms that were continually damp, and other things, and they had written to their authority.

I realise that there have been bad landlords, but in the north, from which many hon. Members come, the old ambition of the Lancashire working class was to retire on three houses. They would live in one and spend their old age on the income from the other two. Since the House insists on more information, I will tell hon. Members that I grew up in 18 Hoyle street in a house owned by a person who lived five doors further up the road. My father is dead now, so I cannot find out what we paid, but we lived in harmony with the landlady. The house was whitewashed every year and was in a very much better condition than many council houses that I have seen.

Mr. Straw: The Minister said that it was the ambition of Lancashire working-class families to retire with three houses, in one of which they lived, with the other two from which they gained income. That could only ever apply to one in three families. What about the other two out of three families who lived in private rented accommodation?

Dr. Boyson: I will answer mathematically. They had to save up to the age of 40 to 50 before they could buy their houses. So the first 50 years were spent in the two out of three group and they then moved into the one out of three group. The average age of death was 75 so it was only necessary to buy at the age of 50, and 50 was known as the house-buying age. That may not be understood by all hon. Members.

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): Is not the point in answer to the question of the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) that there are hundreds of thousands of young people who are here in London homeless and who want access to rented housing accommodation, and that they are the other two thirds who yearn for the day when this Conservative Government will deregulate new lettings?

Dr. Boyson: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend, for whose clarity and strength of view on this matter I have great respect.

We want to give tenants greater choice. We want less municipally provided housing and more rented housing provided by other agencies. This Bill will help to achieve the second of those objectives. It gives local housing authorities a new and specific power to give financial assistance to private landlords, including housing associations. The aim is to stimulate the provision of rented accommodation by the private sector, using predominantly private sources of finance.

I see this as an important step in developing the role of local authorities as "enablers" rather than providers of housing. That is the same attitude as we have on competitive tendering. They provide the services, but they do not need to run them. Under this new power, they can use public money to draw into the provision of rented housing larger amounts of private investment. Every pound of public investment can lever two or three pounds of private investment. They can help the private sector to develop rented housing schemes which might otherwise not have been economically viable, and they can help tenants by keeping rents down to affordable levels. The most appropriate form of assistance may be annual revenue grants: these would enable an authority to make its assistance conditional on the maintenance of acceptable standards by the landlord. But other forms of assistance may be appropriate, depending on the circumstances, and the Bill provides for this.

The financial help which will be possible under this Bill is aimed at the new breed of responsible landlords who are now beginning to let under the assured tenancy scheme —landlords who have been approved by the Secretary of State. They comprise housing associations and offshoots of building societies and pension funds, as well as property companies and developers. The all-party support which the newly extended scheme has attracted for assured tenancies in recent months is a great fillip to our efforts to rehabilitate the reputation of responsible private landlords. We think that financial assistance given under the new power might be particularly appropriate for the support of developments involving assured tenancies.

I urge all authorities to make the maximum use of the new power. This is, however, subject to an important proviso. As my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing, Urban Affairs and Construction said when announcing these proposals to the House on 5 February, we do not intend that financial assistance should be used simply to featherbed the private sector. Nor would we want the new provision used as a device to provide more municipal housing in a private sector guise.

The Bill therefore provides that the use of the new power and of any existing powers which are capable of being used for similar purposes should be subject to the consent of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. The criteria which we propose to use when considering applications for consent were set out fully in a consultation document sent on 5 February to all local authorities and a variety of other interested bodies. We have invited views on these criteria and on other aspects of these new powers by 31 March. I would emphasise that we are ready to listen to views from both local authorities and the House, this afternoon, about how the new powers can best be used.

Sir George Young (Ealing, Acton): Would my hon. Friend say what the position is about those proposed deals involving housing associations and local authorities in the private sector where an umbrella agreement had been entered into shortly before my hon. Friend's statement but where section 9 consent from the housing association had not been secured? What is the position about those proposed deals?

Dr. Boyson: I take the point that my hon. Friend makes. I know that he is concerned about a particular scheme in the Ealing area, along with our hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway). The Department is looking at the material, which has only just come to us from Ealing. I also take the point regarding the Housing Corporation having to give permission for this. This has already been mentioned to me earlier today and I shall pass the information on. But at the moment I cannot say whether it had been sealed before midnight on 5 February or had not been completely sealed, in which case it would come under these regulations. As soon as a decision has been made by the Department, I will let my two hon. Friends know.

Mr. Michael Meadowcroft (Leeds, West): It is not just Government Members who are concerned about this, because my colleagues in Tower Hamlets have been caught by the same position. Is it not slightly unusual to put something out for consultation and while that is going on to bring forward a Bill for Second Reading? Could the Minister give us some indication of what he proposes to do in Committee with regard to the particular clauses if the result of his consultation is not available in time to be enacted through the various clauses as they come forward in the Committee? The Committee stage may well be completed before we get the appropriate decisions.

Dr. Boyson: I know that Parliament has been considering this for some time and it is quite an accident that this is linked with certain other matters. The date 5 February is an important one, as the hon. Member will agree. It was the birthday of Sir Robert Peel and also of John Dunlop, the pioneer of the pneumatic tyre. It was the day that General McArthur re-entered Manila—at the same time I was serving in the East Indies fleet—and we all remember Guantanamo. So it was a very significant choice of date.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North) *rose*——

Dr. Boyson: I have not finished yet, unless my hon. Friend would like to help me, in which case I do not need to finish that bit.

We have given them until 31 March for that consultation. It is 3 March today and I hope that we shall be going into Committee in about a fortnight's time. I should not imagine that this Bill will get through as speedily as the last one, which got through in two sittings in the other House.

Mr. Greenway: I am just trying, Mr. Speaker, to interpret my hon. Friend's answer. Does he mean that, until his Department has had a chance to look at the situation, he will ask the Housing Corporation to withhold section 9 consent to any of these proposed deals?

Dr. Boyson: If the deal was not settled before midnight on 5 February, it does not stand. I shall look into what my hon. Friend said, but I understand that the deal had to be fully settled and legally tied up before midnight on 5 February. I believe that the Department is looking into the material that has only just come from Ealing to find out whether that is the case. I take the point that the Housing Corporation has to give permission, and we shall be considering the matter with that body.

The criterion of risk seems to us to be critical, and some of the schemes already put to us by local authorities are unsatisfactory in that respect. We are trying to encourage the provision of rented housing by the private sector, and that means that the commercial risk of any development should rest substantially with the private sector investor. Schemes under which the local authorities give an open-ended guarantee to meet the whole of any difference between costs and income would not normally be acceptable. In such schemes, the private investor takes no risk because the local authority stands fully behind the landlord. That is barely distinguishable from ordinary local authority borrowing—the private investor relying not on the landlord's creditworthiness but on the local authority. Such use of guarantees can be simply a device to evade normal controls over local authority borrowing—controls that all Governments have found it necessary to maintain to regulate the volume of public spending.

That does not mean that guarantees are unacceptable per se. A limited arrangement under which a local authority guarantees an agreed proportion of the financing cost may be perfectly reasonable, but the main burden of risk should lie in the private sector. Furthermore, authorities should not have to carry the risk of overruns in construction costs, inefficient management or unexpected repairs. The private investor should shoulder the risks.

Clause 2 provides a new power for local housing authorities to give financial assistance, including grants, loans and guarantees, to housing associations and other private landlords in connection with the provision of housing for letting. Clause 3 contains the requirement for local authorities to obtain the consent of the Secretary of State. That applies both to the new power in clause 2 and to any existing local authority powers. The clause has effect from 6 February 1987. It specifies a number of exemptions from the need to obtain consent.

Mr. Freeson: In the past two or three years agreements have been fairly extensively negotiated on the initiative of housing associations and the like. Is the Minister saying that in future only a proportion of the capital costs involved can be subject to a local authority guarantee, rather than the general overall guarantees that have been negotiated? Is he saying that an important criterion will be that local authorities will be allowed to guarantee only a proportion of the burden to be carried by the financial institutions? Does he realise that that will wreck about

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£500 million-worth of expenditure that has already been the subject of negotiations? Will that not now be put at risk by the Minister's decision?

Dr. Boyson: I should have thought that the Labour party would agree that, if housing is built largely with private money, the private investor should take the risk, and should not be covered by public guarantees. I thought that the Labour party believed that private enterprise should be private enterprise and should not be socialistically guaranteed.

Mr. Freeson: Answer the question.

Dr. Boyson: I am answering the question. If housing is built by one of the private bodies that I have listed, that body should take its share of the risk. We do not want to socialise private enterprise. Without the risk factor, it would become corrupt, and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would not wish that to happen. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] I have answered clearly; I am not running away from the question. Private enterprise is not private enterprise if it does not carry any risks. I know the definition——

Mr. Tony Banks *rose*——

Dr. Boyson: This is the hon. Gentleman's second time, and his last. He will have to wait until I have finished if he wants to say any more.

Mr. Banks: It is my third time, so I am even more grateful. The Minister asked why a local authority should guarantee or underwrite a scheme undertaken by private enterprise. But that principle is established throughout the capitalist economy. Through the Export Credits Guarantee Department, for example, the Government underwrite private transactions between suppliers in this country and buyers abroad.

Dr. Boyson: I do not wish to get involved in credit for overseas trade.

We are a radical Government, and we believe that private enterprise should stand on its own two feet. It may amaze Opposition Members that we take that view. Indeed, there is a look of horror on Labour Members' faces.

Clause 4 sets out the way in which the Secretary of State may exercise consent powers. In particular, the clause provides for the matters that the Secretary of State may take into account during the transitional period before the Bill comes into effect. A number of authorities have come forward with schemes since 5 February, including Winchester, which is a Conservative-controlled authority, Tower Hamlets, which is alliance-controlled and Castle Morpeth, which is Labour-controlled. The popularity of the scheme is clearly spreading rapidly throughout the country.

Clauses 5 and 6 deal with the arrangement known as pooling, whereby the costs of advanced further education are shared between local education authorities. Neither clause reflects a change in policy. They are designed to allow the pooling system to operate as intended by the Government and as expected by local authorities.

Clause 5 is technical and amends part I of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980, which provides for the transfer of block grant between England and Wales. The purpose of that part of the 1980 Act is to ensure that the costs of advanced further education are shared equitably between authorities in England and Wales, and the proposed clause would more accurately reflect that purpose.

Clause 6 will allow my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Education and Science and for the Environment to recalculate allocations from the advanced further education pool for 1981-82 as originally intended, and to adjust the block grant of local education authorities accordingly. The local authority associations asked that the legislation be so amended, and we think it right to meet their request. The provisions will be spent when the adjustments have been made. On 7 July 1986, the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) asked for such a provision, and Lord Irving of Dartford also requested the change. This clause should therefore be non-controversial, although I am glad to see with us my hon. Friend the Minister with responsibility for advanced further education.

At the beginning of my remarks I referred to recklessness; at the end I refer to the scandal of idle land. Land that lies unused and neglected in public hands is a particular outrage, as public bodies have a special duty to use the resources available to them economically, efficiently and, above all, for the common weal. We have already made a determined attack on the problem in order to get such unused land back into use. Under the 1980 Act, we set up registers of unused and under-used public land, with the result that an important part of the problem has been quantified for the first time. Of the 150,000 acres registered since 1980, about one third have been removed, most because the land has been brought into use by the owners or sold. There are now 99,000 acres on the register that need to be tackled.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has intervened to secure a substantial programme of disposals, using his powers under the 1980 Act. We have initiated statutory procedures on 175 sites, 110 of them in 1986. However, our increased use of the statutory procedures has led us to the belief that what has proved an elaborate, cumbersome and time-consuming process should be speeded up and made more efficient. That is why we propose, in this Bill, to take powers to improve the quality of the information about the idle land in the registers, and to streamline the procedures for securing disposals. That is what clause 7 and schedule 2 are designed to do.

One key feature of the new provisions is that they will enable my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment to modify or revoke a direction to sell that appears inappropriate in the light of the owners' representations, without much ado or further delay. At present we would have to issue a further notice of a direction, consider further representations to that further notice, and only then decide whether to proceed, not to proceed or to go back to square one with a further notice, and so on ad infinitum. This is subject to the safeguard for the owner that such a variation can only reduce the area of land to be sold, or be in response to the owner's representations. Any wider variation would still require the old full procedure.

The other key feature is that our powers to obtain information about land are clarified and, to some extent, increased, particularly by a right of entry on to registered land.

Mr. Straw: What does that mean?

Dr. Boyson: I shall explain it to the hon. Gentleman. I would not want him to pass the evening wondering what I meant. At present, we have no right of entry, so we cannot even go and look through binoculars. We can only look through binoculars from a tower some distance away.

Mr. Tony Banks: We have 110 of those in Newham.

Dr. Boyson: I saw them last week. I thought that there were 113, so three must have gone since then. However, the hon. Gentleman's mathematics may be better than mine.

At the moment we have no right of entry. It is interesting that the hon. Member for Blackburn should have asked me that question, and I welcome it. I obtained the information only this morning and I can now pass it on to an astonished world. It appears that when we issued a directive, the public body that owned the property visited it and found, to its amazement, that people were already using it. Therefore, in future we can go and look as well. It came as a shock to the public body to learn that the property was registered. That is why the Bill gives a right of entry on to registered land.

Owners will be placed under a duty to tell us if our information is wrong or out of date. Provided that public bodies maintain their own records of land efficiently, that should not present them with much difficulty, but it will enormously assist our task in maintaining the registers as a useful tool for developers and others needing to know about idle land.

This speech has been a long haul for a short Bill. The Bill contains important provisions that will protect the ratepayer and improve the effective use of public assets. I commend it to the House. As I said earlier, I began with a reference to recklessness, and I end with a reference to scandal.

Dr. Cunningham: I intervene only because the Minister keeps referring to these matters as scandals. I should put it on record first that all local authorities, regardless of political control, have been acting quite properly within the law. There is nothing scandalous about that. As the Minister has used the word "scandal", I ask him to comment on what is happening in the Conservative-controlled borough of Merton, where, without any committee decision and against the standing orders of the council, the Conservative leader of the London borough of Merton has instructed the officers secretly to expend £100,000 of ratepayers' money on the Pollard's hill estate, but the expenditure can be agreed only if it is done before 19 March.

I should like the Minister to ask his civil servants to inquire into the behaviour of the Conservative leader of the London borough of Merton. It has come to our notice that not only had he issued those instructions without any committee decision, but that it may not be unconnected with the fact that a by-election is taking place at the Pollard's hill ward in Merton. If the Conservative party does not hold that seat, it will lose its control of the council. As the Minister is talking about scandals, will he look into that matter?

Dr. Boyson: I was unaware of any by-election in Merton. However, I shall certainly look into the point that the hon. Member for Copeland has made. The hon. Gentleman seems to object to the word "scandal". I do not think that "scandal" means something that is illegal. I do not have the Oxford English dictionary with me, but I stand by the word "scandal" as well as the word "reckless". Scandal means something that upsets people and everybody says, "Shame." I am sure that my hon. Friends would also shout, "Shame," in the context of idle land. If one incurs a great deal of expenditure that has to be paid for by ratepayers in three, four, six, seven, eight, nine or 10 years, it is a scandal and it is wrong. I am sure that most people would think that. I am sure that the hon. Member for Copeland, at the bottom of his heart, also thinks that. I believe that the Bill will meet that problem, and on that ground, as well as for other reasons, I commend it to the House.

6.7 pm

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): This is the third occasion in six weeks on which the House has had the doubtful pleasure of debating a Second Reading of a local government Bill. The Second Reading of the Local Government Finance Bill was on 12 January. No sooner had it gone to the Lords, than we had the Second Reading of the Rate Support Grants Bill on 4 February. That Bill had hardly found its way upstairs into Committee before the Secretary of State announced on 18 February that the Local Government Bill, which we are debating this evening, was to be published.

In 1974, just after the Minister had entered the House, he made a speech that is worth repeating because he roundly attacked his party's reorganisation of local government in London and elsewhere. He said:

> "One of the reasons for much of the cynicism of the public towards politicians is that people feel that no one in politics is prepared to admit that has made a mistake".—[*Official Report*, 5 July 1974; Vol. 876, c. 822.]

It is a great pity that the Minister and his hon. Friends did not accept his advice, because the present chaos into which local government finance has been plunged is a direct result of one major misjudgment and mistake by the Government compounding another. If we are to talk in hyperbolic terms of scandal, the real scandal is the chaos into which local government finance has been thrown by the Government and the fact that this Bill will be the 43rd Bill to affect local government since the present Administration came to power in 1979.

Not a week passes without local authorities having to cope with another change, whether it be by Bill or administrative fiat. No sooner had this Bill been published than local authority chief executives received a missive, dated 23 February, from the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, responsible for local authority expenditure and rates, apologising for what he described as

> "two small errors that we have discovered in the calculation following inquiries from local authorities."

Because of those two small errors, which amounted to millions of pounds for individual local authorities, tables F, G and I of various papers sent out had to be resubmitted to the authorities.

The Government criticise the efficiency of local authorities and we have heard that again this afternoon. However, the Government are the single greatest source of inefficiency. No set of institutions can run efficiently when the rules of the game are literally changed week by week. The fact that there are three Bills on exactly the same subject, local government finance, proceeding through Parliament at the same time is a testament to the extraordinary and unrivalled incompetence of Ministers at the Department of the Environment. There is nothing in

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this Bill that could not have been included in the Rate Support Grants Bill and there is nothing in that Bill which could not have been included in the Local Government Finance Bill.

The story of this Bill is the story about the dog that did not bark. We were promised a mountain of a Bill. Instead, the Government have brought forth, if not a mouse, a rather mangy gerbil.

In October, I spent one afternoon watching the Secretary of State make his keynote speech to the faithful at the Conservative party conference. I have to say that my heart went out to the Secretary of State.

Mr. Michael Brown: It was a good speech.

Mr. Straw: That is a matter of opinion.

Dr. Cunningham: He did not receive a standing ovation.

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend has stolen my line. As he said, it was almost the only speech from a Minister that failed to earn a standing ovation.

Mr. Michael Brown: That says a lot about how good it was.

Mr. Straw: My impression of the Conservative party conference is that if one were to read out the Ascot telephone directory, one would gain a standing ovation. I do not know why the Secretary of State failed in that respect, except that he had the misfortune to speak after lunch.

The centrepiece of the speech was his proposal for legislation on privatisation of local authority services and competitive tendering. The Secretary of State repeated that promise in the debate on the Queen's Speech on 17 November. His ever loyal, if hapless, lieutenant, the Under-Secretary of State, repeated that pledge again in a speech to a *Local Government Chronicle* seminar on 4 February. The Under-Secretary of State said that the new Bill

"will introduce a regime of compulsory competitive tendering and separate accounting for the provision of six major services which were first mentioned in the 1985 consultation paper."

The Under-Secretary of State may smile. Throughout his speech, he spoke as if the Bill had already been drafted. He told his audience time and again what the Bill would contain. There was no qualification and no hesitation. Two weeks later the Secretary of State came to the House and had to announce that that major part of the Bill and two others were to be dropped, on the incredible grounds that there had been insufficient time to draft the necessary legislation. The argument that it is drafting difficulties alone which led to that section of the Bill being dropped does not bear examination. I am glad to see the Minister smile along with his colleague, the Under-Secretary of State.

Dr. Boyson: Pleasantness of nature.

Mr. Straw: Yes, that may be, and an understanding that the Government told a bit of a whopper.

In his statement to the House on 18 February the Secretary of State said:

"we did not know at the time of the Gracious Speech that we would have the problem of total expenditure which, as the House will acknowledge, proved to be an exceptionally complex and complicated matter." — [*Official Report*, 18 February 1987; Vol. 110, c. 920.]

That was incorrect. The Secretary of State knew on 17 November, when he made his remarks on the Gracious Speech, about the problems of total expenditure. It is true that we had to drag the information out of him as to when he knew, but in two successive interventions on the Floor of the House he admitted that he knew at the end of September, even before his speech to the Conservative party conference, that there was a major problem on total expenditure and that he knew by the end of October, two weeks before his speech on the address, about the advice of the Attorney-General that there would have to be legislation.

In any event, if that policy is so important to the Government, what have the Secretary of State and his predecessors been doing for the past two years? It is two years this month since the Government first published the consultation document, to which the Under-Secretary of State referred in his now inoperable speech of 4 February.

In the consultative document on competition in the provision of local authority services, issued with a great fanfare in February 1985, those consulted were invited to send in their comments on the proposals, to arrive no later than 30 April 1985. What have Ministers been doing since 30 April 1985 if the legislation is so important?

Mr. Tony Banks: In fairness to the Government, there have been many changes in Ministers in the Department of the Environment since that time.

Mr. Straw: That is true, but my hon. Friend will know that the constitutional theory, at least, is that Ministers are like a seamless robe—as one bows out, another bows in.

Mr. Meadowcroft: All roads lead to Boyson.

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) may be suggesting that the two previous Secretaries of State were lukewarm about the idea and did it only by way of a gesture towards their Right wing. However, there has been a clear-out of any reasonable people. We now have zealots in the Department of the Environment to deal with local government. The present lot are the Right wing of the Conservative party. They believe in the nonsense contained in the consultative document; they believe in the wholesale privatisation of services.

When the Under-Secretary of State comes to reply, I hope that he will tell us what he was doing. No doubt when he got into the office after recovering from the shock of the call to No. 10, he said to his officials, "Let me have all the stuff on privatisation." Indeed, he has claimed credit elsewhere as the inventor of privatisation. That is one of his great claims to fame. We will listen to his reply to the debate with great interest because he has yet to explain how he came to make his promise to the local government seminar on 4 February in which he told the country what the Bill would contain in detail. Did he make that speech with the approval of the Secretary of State?

Mr. Tony Banks: Answer.

Mr. Straw: The Under-Secretary of State says that he will have a chance later, but I would be happy to give way.

Was that speech made with the approval of the Secretary of State? It was certainly billed by the press office at the Department of the Environment as a keynote speech. It went out on official Department of the Environment paper. I assume that the press officer tells the Secretary of State what he is doing, if it is anything like the

old system. Had the Bill been drafted? One or two of us were made aware that the Bill was fairly thick. Are we to believe that two weeks before the Secretary of State came to the House and made his announcement it was all off, that nothing at all had been drafted? Is that what we are expected to believe? I put it to the Minister that there were duplicated drafts of the Bill, clause by clause, in the Department. Is that true? Of course it is true and they know it is true; we can tell from their smiles.

The idea that it is all down to drafting is utter nonsense. Perhaps when the Minister comes to the Dispatch Box he will come clean and tell us what he knew on 4 February and what changed in the intervening days. It was clear that it was nothing to do with drafting difficulties. In our judgment the real reason for the removal of a major section of the Bill is that at the eleventh hour the Secretary of State woke up to the damaging electoral consequences of such a measure after, as the *Local Government Chronicle* put it, the

"private and powerful warnings of Conservative opposition."

It has been said that the slogan of Right-wing Ministers is "the next move forward." It has now become "the latest move backwards".

With regard to the other sections of the Bill, the excuse about drafting difficulties has no foundation. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts) said on 18 February, those sections of the Bill dealing with so-called political publicity by local authorities had not only been drafted, but were published and debated by the House a year ago. The Government should have the grace to admit that these proposals have now been dropped because of the united opposition of the local authority associations, including the Conservative-controlled Association of District Councils. Given the Government's outrageous use of the central Government publicity machine for wholly party political purposes, the Government may have developed some sense of shame about the restrictions on the freedom of speech of councillors — including Conservative councillors — that they were seeking to impose.

The Minister was also coy about the omission of contract compliance provisions from the Bill. Why have they been dropped? Have they been dropped because of drafting difficulties? Were they dropped because of an argument that has been well reported between Environment Ministers, on the one hand, who wanted all contract compliance conditions declared unlawful and Employment and Home Office Ministers, on the other hand, who declared their support for authorities which, for example, used provisions in race relations legislation to enforce equal opportunity employment practices by councils?

Good relations between contractors and local authorities are essential. That is why the Association of Metropolitan Authorities has been holding discussions with the CBI and the Building Employers Confederation to discover whether there can be voluntary agreement on the acceptable boundaries of contract compliance provisions. I hope that the Minister will support those discussions in the same way as the Opposition have supported them.

Another previously promised section of the Bill to which the Minister made no reference relates to another pledge by the Under-Secretary of State in a written answer on 3 December 1986, when he said that

"provisions relating to . . . (the 'Local Ombudsmen') will be included in the Local Government Bill."—[*Official Report*, 3 December 1986; Vol. 106, c. *684-85*.]

The Under-Secretary of State in his written answer itemised nine amendments to strengthen the powers of the local ombudsmen. They related especially to the need to ensure that local authorities, when they are served with a second report by local ombudsmen, must consider that report and cannot simply pigeon-hole it as they can at present. The amendments included other provisions to give local ombudsmen power over the housing functions of the Commission for the New Towns and other sensible practical changes in the way in which the local government ombudsman conducts his business. All those proposals were sensible and uncontroversial. The House needs to know why they have been omitted.

I now want to consider what is left in the Bill. The Minister sought to make much of the advanced and deferred purchase schemes by local authorities. However, the truth is that the Government have been two-faced about local authorities' borrowing through those and other schemes. Publicly, as the Minister did today, they seek to damn such borrowing; privately, they have encouraged it. Much of the money so borrowed has been spent on building new homes, renovating old homes and on non-housing construction projects from the improvement of road systems to the building of sports halls. Most of the work has been carried out by private contractors. That borrowing has maintained thousands of jobs within the construction industry and greatly improved the profits of construction companies. Once again, the Government have willed the end but refused to will the means.

The Government have not simply encouraged all kinds of additional borrowing — additional to authorities' principal allocations — but they have budgeted for that borrowing. Why else was £700 million deducted from auhorities' housing investment programme allocations for 1986-87? Why has £1,200 million been deducted this year as the Government's own estimate of what authorities will spend from accumulated capital receipts and other sources of finance? The Government are expecting authorities to borrow in that way. They have made a judgment about how much the authorities will spend and they have deducted that from the money that would otherwise be allocated by way of housing investment programme allocations. The Government have done that because of their obsession with the size of the public sector borrowing requirment.

We do not need any lectures from the Government about the true size of the borrowing by local authorities. The Government are in pursuit of the shibboleth of the money supply figures. They have overfunded. In other words, they have borrowed £17·5 billion through the purchase of commercial bills to get the money supply figures down and then lent that money on to commercial companies. If a Labour Government had done that, we would never have heard the last of it. However, because a Conservative Government are borrowing at about 2·5 times the nominal size of the PSBR, we hear virtually nothing about it.

If the borrowing position of the authorities to which the Minister referred is reckless, why is the Public Works Loan Board increasing its lending to those authorities? The Minister has not answered that question. He may want to send a missive from the Dispatch Box. Why, in 1983, did only half of Haringey's borrowing come from the Public

[Mr. Straw]

Works Loan Board when last year 82 per cent. came from the board? I will give way to any other critic of the so-called reckless councils. Why have the Government increased their lending to the authorities? Is there no one on the Government Benches who can answer that question? I offer the Minister the opportunity to answer, and I will give way. He obviously does not know the answer.

Dr. Boyson: Purely and simply, the Public Works Loan Board is lending to those bodies reasonably and well. However, over the past six months to a year recklessness has crept in. Presumably, the Labour party is aware of that recklessness. Sheffield is borrowing £100 million and over seven years it will have to pay back £175 million. If that is not reckless, I do not know what is. I noticed that the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) pulled out his cuttings of the comments made by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment. He also quoted from speeches that I have made, and I do not mind that at all. However, no mention has been made about what action the Labour party would take. The comments of the hon. Member for Blackburn are a smokescreen to hide the fact that the Labour party has no policy to deal with this matter. The Opposition have been condemning what has been happening, but they have no policy. Would the Labour party introduce a similar Bill? I believe that it would. Although it may not be hypocrisy, it would be ill advised for the Opposition not to admit that today.

Mr. Straw: I have answered that point before, and I will answer it again. The Minister seemed to refer to page 52 of the consultative document. However, it has only 28 pages. We have spelt out in great detail, and I will repeat for the Minister, what the Labour party will do.

Dr. Boyson: Tell us what the Opposition would do, because the country is anxious to know.

Mr. Straw: The country is very anxious about the chaos to which the Government have reduced local government finance.

The Minister had no answer to the fact that lending to Labour-controlled local authorities by the Public Works Loan Board had increased. That will continue. Nothing has happened in the past six months to change that. Since 22 July last year—more than six months ago—local authorities have been on notice that such arrangements for advanced deferred purchase would become unlawful. The Minister has not answered that point.

In the debate on housing and homelessness three weeks ago, we were treated to a lecture from the Secretary of State about the merits of the free market and the perils of buying shirts in Moscow where no such free market is alleged to exist. No man believes in a free market more than the Secretary of State and no one believes less in Government interference. As he rightly reminded the House two weeks ago and as the Minister reminded us again today, local authority debt is not backed by central Government. Everybody knows that except, apparently, Ministers. The authorities are on their own.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North West said in an intervention, not only has the Public Works Loan Board been happy to lend the authorities money, but many of our leading financial institutions have also done so. Those institutions are not charities. Indeed, they are packed full of the Secretary of State's friends. They do not lend money unless they are satisfied that they will get it back, and they must have been satisfied about the financial probity of the authorities before they lent them millions of pounds. Why does the Secretary of State think that he is in a better position to judge the risk than such financial institutions?

The Minister asked what we would do. First, we would not start from such a point, and indeed we did not. We had a sensible relationship with local government. I remind the Minister that he and his colleagues voted for the 1980 Act which we opposed. The Conservatives voted for it on the basis that it would produce a new and improved relationship between central and local government. It has done no such thing. In its report, published at the end of January, the Audit Commission said that creative accountancy was an inevitable consequence of the chaos into which the Government had plunged the rate support grant system.

Mr. Michael Brown: The hon. Gentleman talks about about the relationship between the previous Labour Government and local authorities. That Labour Government had the good fortune to be dealing with responsible Conservative-controlled local authorities. This Government have the misfortune to have to deal with irresponsible Labour-controlled local authorities led by people like the Labour candidate in last week's Greenwich by-election. That is the problem that we have; and, indeed, the Labour party has the same problem in dealing with such people.

Mr. Straw: That is not the case. I have experience of some of these so-called responsible Tory councils. Many of them were highly irresponsible, for example, in neglecting the needs of the homeless and in failing to meet social need. The difference between this Government and the Labour Government is that we respected the autonomy of local councils, whether they agreed with us or not, whereas this Government seek to control any institution with which they disagree.

I shall now deal with clauses 2 to 4 which relate to housing. We were treated to a lecture by the Minister of State about the need to re-establish the right to rent and about how there has been a decline in the private rented sector. For their own advantage, Ministers ought to look again at what happened after rents were decontrolled in 1957. The then Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell), moving the Second Reading of the Rent Bill in late 1956, said in terms—the Minister can look at the Second Reading debate, but I know it almost by heart—that the Bill to decontrol the private rented housing would reverse the decline in the private rented sector. That was the clear promise of decontrol. However, it was followed by the swiftest decline in the rented sector that there has ever been.

If Ministers seek to decontrol the private rented sector again—they are being coy about their real intention this side of the election—that is what would happen. We have no objection to responsible private letting by institutions by way of assured tenancies. Our support for assured tenancies did not occur in the last two weeks. I was on the Committee that looked at the Housing Bill in 1980

and we fully supported assured tenancies at that time. We object to the evils of individual private landlords.

The Minister talked about Lancashire. Two weeks ago, in the Mill Hill area of my constituency, I was called across the road by an old lady and asked to look at her house. Its condition was Dickensian. She had a galvanised tin bath in which she was expected to bathe, and one cold tap. I saw an oil lamp on the dresser in the scullery and I asked, "What is that for, love?" She said, "That is to go to the lavatory with." The lavatory was 10 paces across the yard and it was frozen up and had no electric light. That house was rented from a private landlord. That is the reality of private landlordism, and that is why the Labour party has opposed the evils of private landlordism. I also discovered that that old lady paid about £10 a week in rent. That was £10 too much for the conditions in which she was living.

I am happy to say that, not least because of representations that I made, a housing association has now agreed to buy the property and the woman will be rehoused. The idea that somehow the welfare of our people would be served by reversion to private landlordism and that if rents were decontrolled the homeless in London could pay the rents that the overheated market demands is utter nonsense.

Mr. Michael Brown: Surely Opposition Members who represent constituencies in places such as Newham and Islington recognise that it is the shortage of rented accommodation that drives up the price and gives rise to vast numbers of young homeless people. The hon. Gentleman and I are probably about the same age. When I first came to London, after I graduated from university in the early 1970s, I found that many people who leave college or university and come to work in large cities like London are unable to obtain housing or rented accommodation because the present rent legislation means that only a certain amount of rented accommodation is available. The prices go sky high and a whole raft of young people in their teens and twenties and early thirties cannot be housed. If rents were decontrolled, prices would come down and people like that would be able to get accommodation.

Mr. Straw: This is a crucial point and I hope that I can teach the hon. Gentleman something. I do not say that in any derogatory way. In London and elsewhere, the price of rented accommodation is determined by the price of owner-occupied accommodation. The two are not separate. The average price of a house, even in Walthamstow, is £60,000. Whether one buys such a house for renting or for owner-occupation, it means that even to make a 10 per cent. return on capital—and in practice if a landlord is borrowing money at an interest rate of 15 per cent. he will want a return of 18 or 20 per cent.—a landlord would have to charge at least £6,000 a year. That is £120 a week for an ordinary three-bedroomed terrace house in Walthamstow. That is the reality. That is what the market rent would be. No one would be willing to rent out properties like that unless he could recoup his investment. A landlord would be better off putting his money in national savings.

There is a shortage of accommodation in London and people are homeless, because, unfortunately, they had to accept the advice of the chairman of the Conservative party and come to London to search for work. They then had to register as homeless people. Changing the regime for private renting by individual landlords will not solve that problem.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): My hon. Friend is making an excellent point about this problem. In my constituency there were a large number of privately rented flats and rooms occupied mostly by low-paid single people or by low-paid or unemployed families. Now those people are being persuaded—I use the word advisedly—to leave those places so that they can be converted into up-market flats or second or city homes for the wealthy. Those tenants are literally forced on to the street and come under the care of the local authority, if the local authority can provide anything.

There is a great increase in homelessness, but there is no increase in the number of homes available at cheap rents. Decontrol has forced those people on to the streets and caused homelessness. It is the enemy of good housing and working-class people. We need much more money spent on local authority and social ownership schemes to provide cheap rented houses for the people who need them, not for the yuppies that the Conservative party wants to bring into central London.

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend makes the important point that the more there is decontrol, the worse the position will become, not better. That was the economic fact of life that Conservative Ministers and many Conservative Members discovered to their shock after the passage of the Rent Act 1957. I repeat that it was said that that was introduced to expand the supply of private rented accommodation, but it had exactly the opposite effect.

The Government say that they would like to encourage local authorities to enter into co-operative arrangements with private institutions such as housing associations and building societies to provide housing for rent or sale. Most authorities, whatever their political hue, have taken the Government at their word and are actively working in co-operation with the private sector. The best but by no means the only example of that is Sheffield, which has developed an imaginative scheme with the housing association and the Nationwide building society to build 2,000 houses, of which 1,200 would be available the local authority, 200 to the housing association and 600 would be for sale. However, unable to keep their fingers out of anything, the Government's response has been not to praise the authority but to seek to control it.

In his statement and consultative document, the Minister claimed that he would provide "new powers" for local authorities. However, as far as we can see, that is disingenuous nonsense, because we see no new powers, only new controls. Nobody that we have consulted can find a single additional, substantive new power in the Bill that the authorities do not already have. However, instead there is the most horrendous system of controls, at a time when the Department made much of the fact that it is abandoning detailed project control over schemes wholly in the public sector. Much of the detail of those provisions will have to be examined in Committee.

I ask the Minister to advise us whether the authorities are correct in fearing that the provisions in those clauses could make many of the bed-and-breakfast arrangements for homeless people unlawful; that the schemes that the Government say that they encourage, by which authorities

[Mr. Straw]

take on short leases of private property to accommodate homeless families could be rendered unlawful, as could some community care schemes.

How many staff will the Department of the Environment need to vet the thousands of applications for consent? How does the Minister intend to implement his pledge in the so-called consultative document to take account of the local authorities' comments received before 31 March, when, according to the Whips, by that date the Bill will have completed half its stages? The more we look at these clauses, the more we are led to the conclusion that they are motivated by ideological spite against the local authorities, not by any significant problem which has arisen.

Clauses 5 and 6 take us into the arcane area of further education pooling. It is all to do, I am told, with the need to make lawful the rolling process to cap the pool. Happily, those clauses have been agreed with the local authority associations and they need not detain us.

Clause 7 relates to land held by public bodies, and it also contains a schedule, which we shall examine in detail in committee.

The Government were elected in 1979 on a pledge to reduce the controls on local authorities—to set the town halls free. However, 43 Bills later, the Government have enmeshed local authorities and themselves in a tangled web of restrictions and controls without precedent in this country, without equal in the Western world.

Time and again, the Government have sought to override the wishes of local electors and their councils, in the name of democracy. However, I remind the House that all the local councils in this country have a mandate that is far more recent than that of the Government. All the London boroughs, which were so woefully abused by the Conservative party, had full council elections last May when, almost without exception, the Labour party sharply increased its share of the vote and its number of councillors. True accountability of local councils can only be achieved through the ballot box. The Labour party is not afraid of that test, although the Government may be.

Elsewhere in the country, outside London, there are annual electoral tests for local councils in almost all districts, through the retirement by thirds of district councillors, and all-out elections in the fourth year of the shire councils. In London, since the abolition of the GLC, there will now be an electoral test only once in four years. That period is far too long.

In its consultative document on local government, which was published last month, the Labour party proposes electoral tests for all districts and London boroughs each year by rotation. I challenge the Government to bring forward legislation to do that. If they do, and if they are ready to discuss its provisions co-operatively and in advance, we shall raise no impediment. Indeed, we shall welcome it. It would be one of the few local government Bills for which the Minister would receive the acclamation of the House.

We understand the problems that the Conservative party faces, and appreciate that its local base has been severely eroded. The centralisation of local government has been paralleled by the centralisation of the Conservative party. That was spelt out in a perceptive article in last Friday's *Spectator*, which stated:

> "Poor electoral results have meant that many Conservative supporters have found themselves out of office in local government . . . many long standing Conservative workers believe that they have not had what they would regard as a proper recognition for their years of service . . . can the Conservative party really survive without these sort of people in the longer term? How long can it succeed in national elections, if it is an ever decreasing force in local life and politics?".

In 1974, in a much better speech on local government finance than he has made today, the present Minister said:

> "I believe that at some point in the future we shall have to return to local government units which are answerable to people within a measurable distance."—[*Official Report*, 5 July 1974; Vol. 876, c. 822.]

The Minister believed in local accountability then. Why does he not do so now? This is a bad Bill, born of the Conservative party's new centralist tendencies. We shall vote against it.

6.46 pm

Mr. Michael Knowles (Nottingham, East): If I may, I should first like to turn to a point made by the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) about the large number of local government Bills. That is easily explained by our parliamentary system. In other countries the problems that have arisen would have been dealt with by executive fiat, in one form or another. However, in our system, if a case goes to court and the law turns out not to be what people think it is—even if they have acted upon that presumption for many years—the only way in which that can be remedied is to pass another Act of Parliament. That explains the large number of Bills that go through the House, not just in relation to local government but in many other areas also.

Mr. Meadowcroft: The hon. Gentleman is arguing for a written constitution, rather than defending the present system.

Mr. Knowles: That may well be so and I am tempted to stray because we may find some common ground there. There are good reasons why a written constitution should be considered. Indeed, I took part in a vote the other week, as did the hon. Gentleman, that would have incorporated features of that.

However, the point made by the hon. Member for Blackburn was that relations were easier between the central Government and local government under the Labour Administration. Although in some ways that was true, the reason for it was simple. Most of that time was a period of expansion and much of our local government machinery over the years was built up during times of expansion when central Government, for good or ill, and in my view ill——

Mr. Corbyn: I thought that it was supposed to be expanding now.

Mr. Knowles: Central Government used local government machinery for a large part of the welfare state which was built on an endless expansionary network. However, when money was short the system suddenly had to be tightened up. I well recall that in 1979 the then Secretary of State for the Environment my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) told local government that finances would have to be tightened and that there would have to be a downturn in expenditure. At the time, all the local government associations said that they had always delivered when local government and national Government had gone to them. That was the proud boast

of local government, but it failed to deliver. That Secretary of State has since said that he regretted his decision not to incorporate that provision in legislation. It was another 18 months before that nettle was grasped.

People will recall that during that same period of the Labour Government, Tony Crosland said that the party was over and in a sense it was. Both local government and the Labour Administration cut capital expenditure, not current expenditure. Indeed, the country is still recovering from the savage cuts in capital expenditure made at that time. That has been the problem in local government time and again.

All too often when one calls for cuts in local government capital expenditure is cut because it is easy to cut something in the future that people do not see the necessity for today. If current expenditure is cut, one can be sure that the beneficiaries of that current expenditure will immediately bring pressure to bear, and they do. Therefore, the easy step is always to mortgage the future and that is what has happened.

That is what has happened and is now being called creative accountancy. It is the endless deferment of the costs of capital expenditure, leaving a reasonably free hand for current expenditure. The time will come when those bills must be met—in many cases in two or three years' time. Some London boroughs may feel the pressure by the end of this year. In two or three years' time local government units could face a real crisis of finance because those bills will become due.

We have seen what has happened in other countries. The best examples come from the United States where precisely the same tragic path was followed: the future was mortgaged in order to maintain current expenditure. The best known example is New York, but it also happened in Boston and Chicago. When the horrible moment of truth arrives one is talking of cutting current expenditure, not by 5 per cent. in a year, which good management can cope with, but by 25 per cent. or even 40 per cent., as those American cities had to do. Some of our cities may face that if the Government do not pass the Bill and impose some sort of control over deferred payments.

I am worried that the Government may have left the legislation too late already and that we shall see some local government units go to the wall. When any local government unit starts to default on payments and must go to Carey street, the whole of local government will be affected together with its status on the money markets. Indeed, that may affect the whole of government. This is not a negligible problem, considering what it could portend. It could produce a real crisis.

The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) mentioned lending and asked who was reckless—the banks or the local authorities. The truth is that both probably are. Certainly, Margaret Hodge has written to colleagues saying that mortgaging the future

"is a high risk strategy, because not only does it depend on a change of government, but it also depends on a commitment by the Labour Front Bench to bail us out when they return to power."

Will they do so? Neither local government nor we have heard any specific pledges.

Mr. Corbyn: As the hon. Gentleman mentioned the leader of my borough council perhaps he will answer this question. If he were a councillor in Islington and faced long housing waiting lists, rapidly increasing demands on social services and pre-school provision and a whole host of serious social problems, would he seek to carry out the mandate that the electorate gave him to do something about those problems, or exacerbate them by dismissing home helps and meals-on-wheels workers, increasing housing waiting lists and ignoring social problems? If he were to do the latter, he would merely bring on the day of the most awful social deprivation, instead of trying to find a way out. Moreover, he would do so when the Government in power were not even prepared to recognise that the problems existed in the first place.

Mr. Knowles: Let me go through the various points of that statement. First, I would not have stood on such a mandate. At the end of the day one can spend only what one can afford and the sooner the country realises that, the better. That was proved in London by my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Chope) when he was leader of Wandsworth council. The contrast between Wandsworth and Lambeth has been drawn endlessly. Conservative-controlled boroughs have proved that throughout the country. Moreover, when it comes to the delivery of services at the front line, their delivery is better than that of neighbouring Labour-controlled authorities. A willingness to recruit endless numbers of local authority staff and compassion do not go together.

I was speaking about the recklessness of local authorities and banks. I have no background in banking and I do not worship at the shrine of banks. Indeed, I have doubts about their judgment, considering some Third-world countries to which they have lent in the past and other areas of their lending. I suspect that, just as the banks expect someone else to bail out Third-world countries when those countries get into trouble, so they expect someone else to bail out local government when it gets into trouble and, consequently, to bail them out too. The banks, too, are taking a gamble that may not come off.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) has left the Chamber, because he made an impassioned speech about housing and said that having housing controlled by the private sector inevitably leads to shortages. That could have been a tremendous speech made by the Labour Front Bench in 1950 or 1951 against removing controls on food. We have three necessities in life: shelter, clothing and food. It is a historic irony that one of those is controlled by local government mechanisms. I ask hon. Members to picture a system with council food committees, a council food officer and a council clothing officer. Can we imagine how well dressed and well fed our people would be? We know what the result would be.

Mr. Meadowcroft: The hon. Gentleman's analogy falls down. The problem with housing is that a permanent supply cannot be created because land cannot be created. An everlasting supply of food and clothing can be created with good management skills and production, but that cannot be done with housing.

Mr. Knowles: But private enterprise brings other factors into play. The greatest factor that raised our housing standards had nothing to do with the creation of land; it was the electric tramway. More land became available on which to build houses and people could still get to work. We preclude developments to freeze society

[Mr. Knowles]

in a certain mould—the mould at the end of the first world war—and so long as we do so, we shall not solve the problems of our cities.

We froze rents during the first world war for the best of reasons. In 1918 the Government intended to release them but did not and they only slowly released them in the 1930s. When they were released, blocks of flats began to be built, and indeed one can still see the blocks that started to be built before the second world war. Before that came fully into effect we got into the second world war and rent control was imposed again. We have lived with the awful consequences ever since. We must grasp that nettle. I hope that this Bill is a step in a strategy to that end. If it is, there is some hope for homelessness and solving the problems of housing in this country. If it is not, it is yet another tinkering with the problem.

Mention has been made of the postponement of parts of the Bill as it was originally drafted. The hon. Member for Blackburn has postulated various reasons as to why parts have been put off. I suspect that I share a sense of relief with various other Conservative Back-Bench Members. We do not wish the Secretary of State to shoot our fox. I am sure that that thought would never have occurred to the Secretary of State. There is a lot of political mileage in this yet. Once this legislation has been drafted can we get it absolutely right this time?

I remember the words of a previous Secretary of State in a debate similar to this. I said that I could see loopholes in the Bill being discussed. He said that that was no doubt true, but that we must draft laws on the basis that we expect people to comply with them, that we should not expect people to try and deliberately break the law. The Secretary of State must have the laws drafted with precisely that in mind. If they cannot be that watertight it is as well to defer them until such time as we can get them that watertight.

7.1 pm

Mr. Reg Freeson (Brent, East): I shall concentrate my remarks on clauses 2, 3 and 4, although I could perhaps preface them with a brief reference to the matters with which clause 1 is concerned. Much play has been made of that by the hon. Member for Nottingham, East (Mr. Knowles), the Minister and others.

I make it perfectly clear that I hold no brief for irresponsible financial management by any local authority or for any authority or any Government that consciously conduct their financial affairs in such a way as to create burdens that they cannot foresee being carried sensibly in two or three years from now. That does not, in my view, justify the sort of interference that the Government seek to introduce in clause 1.

Some local authorities probably behave somewhat irresponsibly or thoughtlessly in that respect, but they are a tiny minority. There can be no justification for introducing this catch-all legislation that will cover all local authorities, whoever they are, and whatever sort of schemes they may be trying to introduce. The legislation cannot be justified because two or three local authorities may be behaving in a way that the Government do not like and therefore the Government consider that they should all be brought under this sort of control.

I do not wish to concentrate my remarks on clause 1, or on any clauses other than those concerned with housing. Let me say straight away that the announcement of this legislation on 5 February and the implications of clauses 2, 3 and 4 halted a whole series of major housing schemes using private finance that had been pioneered by housing associations and local authorities. Although most of the local authorities concerned were Labour authorities, there were also some Conservative authorities. Tower Hamlets, which is alliance-controlled, has also been involved.

On 5 February when the Minister for Housing, Urban Affairs and Construction made his announcement with which today's Bill deals under those clauses—ostensibly clause 2 was forecast—I quote the Minister's words on that occasion—

"to give local authorities an explicit statutory power to provide financial assistance to the private sector, including housing associations in order to assist in the provision of rented housing using private finance"

In making that statement, the Minister stopped all such schemes not signed by midnight that day. They would in future need his permission. We must presume that the permission will be forthcoming only when this legislation gives him the power to give such permission. He has no authority to give such permission until the legislation is passed.

What was the consequence of that? As I have said briefly, and as I shall spell out in rather more detail, the Minister halted several major housing schemes using private leasing arrangements that had been pioneered by local authorities and housing associations. He said, in effect, that they would not proceed even in the future under this legislation without four conditions applying. I summarise what is a detailed series of conditions that are set out in the consultative document that I have read. They are:

"that the financial risk should rest with the private sector that assistance"

which includes guarantees by local authorities, among other methods,

"should not amount to more than 30 per cent."

The Minister came very near to confirming that in his reply to my intervention earlier this afternoon. The conditions continued:

"that the private sector must own and maintain the housing, and that if local authority land is involved, the land should not be sold freehold or on a lease of not less than 99 years."

Other factors will be taken into account which I shall not proceed to deal with. I wish to spell out the results of this legislation already, not in the future but as we debate the Bill this evening. As a result of the legislation it is estimated by the National Federation of Housing Associations that £500 million-worth of privately financed schemes have been brought to a halt or are at risk.

It is interesting to observe in passing—this is not in any way an insignificant point — that the Building Employers Confederation in recent documentation urging the input of £500 million-worth of capital expenditure in the public sector, calculated that that would produce an additional 60,000 jobs directly and indirectly.

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): Sixty-two thousand.

Mr. Freeson: I am corrected. Sixty-two thousand jobs will be created directly or indirectly as a consequence of new building, refurbishment, furniture, fittings and all the other things that go with such building activity or come as a consequence of it. Under cover of pretending to

introduce or to encourage more private finance, the Government have put a block on it and have prevented the potential for 62,000 jobs being created as a result of such investment.

Sheffield city council's scheme has been mentioned. It seems that, with good fortune and very hard work, that scheme got in before the midnight bar came down, but for many schemes that has not been the case or, at the least, the housing associations and the local authorities concerned are doubtful and worried about whether they got their schemes through in time.

I shall quote the director of a major housing association in my area which has pioneered, after 18 months to two years of hard work, such private finance schemes with the local authority. Malcolm Levi, director of the Paddington Churches housing association, which is one of the major associations active in my borough and in the inner-city area of north-west London generally, said:

"It's a great shame that the combination of housing associations, local authorities and private sector money providing schemes for the homeless have now been stopped in their tracks."

Following the Minister's statement, Stephen Hill, a director of the Samuel Lewis housing trust, said:

"We are bitterly disappointed because we have been working on schemes for the last 18 months. Now all that work has gone down the drain. We could have provided homes which would be cheaper than bed and breakfast."

That is an understatement. My borough has to spend millions of pounds a year on keeping homeless people in bed-and-breakfast hotels of poor standard. Hundreds of those people—I do not exaggerate—would have been taken out of that sub-standard accommodation and rehoused in good flats under a privately financed scheme, which one or two of the major housing associations and the borough have negotiated over the past 18 months, but that has been blocked because of the Government's action.

A consortium of four housing associations has been negotiating for £120 million on the Eurobond money market through the brokers Merrill Lynch to finance private leasing schemes. Hyde housing association, the Nottingham Hill housing trust, the United Kingdom housing trust and the South London family housing association intended to use £50 million of the total raised to fund a development of 600 homes in Tower Hamlets built by Samuel Lewis and the East London housing associations and arranged by the United Kingdom housing trust, which was also responsible for the Sheffield project. The remainder was to be divided between the other associations' schemes. That development is now at risk, to say the least. It is extremely doubtful that it will proceed.

The future of other deals using the same procedures to obtain other Eurobond finance are in doubt. The South London housing association says that its two schemes with Southwark and Lewisham are unlikely to go ahead. One was a scheme to convert the Amos estate in the London docklands, a plan which had the full backing of the London Docklands Development Corporation. Following the Minister's announcement, it is thought unlikely that the consortium will be able to use Eurobond money. The finance was conditional on the local authorities being able to provide the guarantees.

Richard Smillie, director of the East London housing association, doubts whether housing associations will be able to enter into many leaseback schemes in the future. He says:

"The City is extremely cautious about leasing money for these schemes. We need the Government to agree to guarantees if we are to be able to raise the money from private sources."

So much for those signs of the immediate consequences of the Government's action. Hundreds of millions of pounds of private finance have been blocked. Excellent housing schemes, imaginatively conceived and worked on for months and sometimes for more than a year, have been blocked.

What about the general position, even in the future? I listened with great care, although with some difficulty at times, to what the Minister said about the Government's policy, just as I did when the Minister made his announcement on 5 February, and I have read the consultative document. It seems that the Government—the Minister confirmed this today in reply to my intervention — believe that the main way to get the private sector involved again in housing is by ensuring that the market takes most of the risk. I shall not go into the detailed pros and cons of that, but shall just state what all observers have concluded for months and years—this is cloud-cuckoo-land. It is potty. I have said so before, and I mean it. Everyone who has observed and studied the scene knows that it is potty. That is not a condemnation of getting private clients into housing, but it has been recognised by all observers of the scene, apart from those who indulge in windy rhetoric in places such as this and elsewhere, saying that private finance — mainly institutional money of one kind or another—will come back into housing, as I wish it would, only if the right mechanisms are created. It will do so significantly—it may happen a little on the margin in other ways—only if we separate investment from provision and housing management.

If no one else has produced studies on this, I should think that the Government at least would have studied the report a year or so ago by the committee chaired by the Duke of Edinburgh which went into this matter. Its views were representative of institutions, house builders, housing associations and all manner of private and public sector bodies. On pages 27 and 28, the report states:

"We believe it is desirable effectively to separate the investment and provision aspects of providing rented housing. We do not think that major financial institutions will be interested in providing and managing rented housing. They might well, however, be willing to *invest*"—

the word "invest" is italicised to make clear the point about which the committee speaks—

"in its provision if it were built and managed by some secure body, and if their investment yielded an attractive return."

The report continues:

"We believe that suitable vehicles for such investment include index-linked housing bonds or units in a specially formed unit trust."

It refers later to an

"intermediary body standing between the investor and the approved landlord which would actually use the money to provide and manage the housing. The 'wholesaler' might draw in large sums of money, then lend them out in smaller chunks to the local authorities, housing associations, commercial bodies"—

for example, assured tenancy bodies—

"and so on, which would be responsible for provision of the housing. Building societies might well be an ideal instrument, acceptable both to the investors and to the organisations borrowing, to carry out this wholesaling function."

I could read other extracts from the report, but I shall not.

Since Labour left government, I have spent a lot of time pursuing ideas that I was pursuing while in government,

[Mr. Freeson]

directly involving myself in discussions with the building societies, pension funds, housing associations and other bodies with the aim of achieving such joint enterprises. Now the Government say, "Perhaps there should be a 30 per cent. guarantee only, or perhaps it should be 40 per cent. or a lesser proportion." Financial institutions will not lend money at risk but will seek a 100 per cent. guarantee, what the Government call an open-ended guarantee, either from the Government—which the Government will not give—or from a local authority or some other local sources. I am not concerned where that is, but they have said they will accept local authorities. These schemes have been negotiated with great effort, much imagination and hard work.

The Government have now turned around, firstly blocking financial institutions for an indefinite period until this Bill is passed, and requiring them to seek approval in the Department of the Environment by detailed centralised project control. Secondly, the Government say that approval will be granted to schemes only where there is a limited guarantee, if there is one at all. That Government intervention will drive some schemes into negotiating some insurance cover. That will not be easy and, even where that is achieved, will add unnecessarily to the cost of the housing provision because of Government intervention.

Mr. Christopher Hawkins (High Peak): I have also looked into private financing, including building and housing associations. Even if the Government and perhaps a local authority give a financial guarantee, the Treasury has an idiotic definition of the PSBR, which means that the whole of that expenditure counts on the PSBR even if all the money is put up by the private sector or a building society. Would the right hon. Gentleman like to comment on how much that is blocking the problem?

Mr. Freeson: The hon. Gentleman should not tempt me too far down that road. I started to get a little uppity about that with my then fellow colleagues in the Treasury when we were in government. I do not want to go into things here which I should not be talking about in these circumstances. It is an idiotic convention or rule. After several years of pressure, there have been signs that the Treasury has begun to relent a little on two or three schemes coming forward. The Minister on a previous occasion referred to them in this House. The Housing Corporation has been encouraged to become involved in putting housing association grant schemes together with private finance. The Treasury will not insist on categorising the private capital along with the housing association grant, as it is all public expenditure.

I remain unclear whether that is general policy, or is confined to the £20 million announced recently in this connection. I have never seen any reason why the rule should not be done away with. There should be a reliance only on the contingent spending of money. It is possible to calculate what has actually been spent in the event over a number of years and to say that is what should be slotted into the PSBR for a given year. I hope that the blocking action of certain Treasury rules, which have no financial or economic merit, will be ended if we can sustain sufficient pressure across the party divide. That is my answer and I agree with the hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Hawkins).

The Minister has made the announcement. The Bill is as much a Treasury Bill as a Department of the Environment Bill, although no Treasury Minister is on the Front Bench. I suspect it is as much, if not more, the Treasury initiative which has led to the introduction of these controls, pernicious as they will turn out to be. I trust that better sense will prevail in Committee and on Report and in another place, and that, at best, the controls will be withdrawn from the Bill by the clauses being voted out or at least will be watered down to reduce the controls that the Government are seeking to impose.

I trust, secondly, that the controls, if they are retained, are not retained in such a fashion as to make it more difficult for housing associations, local authorities and financial institutions to get together. The only way we will garner private capital resources into housing, be it housing for rent or other projects to refurbish our cities, is by encouraging rather than restricting the mechanisms of the housing associations and local authorities, which should be congratulated and not criticised for what they have been doing.

The Government have said that they want more private funding for rented housing, but Government actions are cutting that funding. Funding will be reduced, not increased, despite all the rhetoric. The Government have said they want to see funding widened and yet it is cutting it back. The Government should put their actions where their mouth is and ensure that the money is provided and not restricted.

The Government should drop the idea that we can go back to some imagined dream world in which all sorts of private sector people financed, provided and managed housing. That housing was pretty inadequate and that was why so much of it was cleared away by local authorities. But that will not happen, even if it had not been rubbish. The only way to get good housing is by creating the kind of mechanisms that the housing associations, the local authorities and the financial institutions have been using and with which the Government are now interfering. That policy should be reversed. Let us give them free rein and encourage them to do it. More housing will be provided and public sector expenditure will, I hope, be increased.

7.26 pm

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): The right hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Freeson) has addressed the House from his background of a great wealth of experience in housing. He knows, better than most of us, the difficulties and complexities of that subject in which he has immersed himself. To him this Bill is an irritation and a damaging limitation on what he describes as local democracy, whereas to many hon. Members on the Government side, the Bill is a disappointment—which we recognise perhaps most of all by our absence—and a recognition of the difficulties and complexities of controlling from the centre the vagaries of local government.

To many of my constituents in Wolverhampton this Bill, if they have noticed it, is more than a disappointment, it is a cause of deep frustration. Many of my constituents wonder how it is that Wolverhampton council can parade itself by reference to the figures as a moderate council which has not yet been rate-capped and in the immediate future may not be rate-capped but which nonetheless is able, within the very loose constraints of rate capping, to

demonstrate its prodigality and generosity to the narrow interest groups which the Labour-controlled council in Wolverhampton regard as its captive friends.

It is an extraordinary thing that, when one looks at those local authorities that have been selected for rate capping, there are our old friends Newcastle, with 26·41 per cent. over grant-related expenditure, Camden with 53·11 per cent. over grant-related expenditure, and one notes with interest Brighton with 13·31 per cent. over grant-related expenditure. Yet when one considers the figures, one will see that Wolverhampton is 3·4 per cent. below grant-related expenditure. Does that show that this has been a vicious doctrinaire Government, determined to take all local discretion from the elected councils of the land? Within the allegedly tight restriction, the Wolverhampton council now proposes to raise its rates by 15 per cent., and that is deeply resented throughout the town.

Since 1979, the Wolverhampton council has not only acted most generously in response to the demands on its conventional services but has introduced new areas of activity. For instance, contrary to the rhetoric in the House, the Government pursue a fairly interventionist policy towards industry. But it is not sufficiently interventionist for the Wolverhampton council. Since 1979, it has engaged in its own forms of industrial support. It has also extended its activities by support for ethnic groups. *[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Bruinvels) said, "And in Leicester, too."

Council support for ethnic groups in Wolverhampton has become more expensive. As you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, much of that expenditure was supported by grants paid under section 11 of the Race Relations Act 1976. That expenditure was justified on the basis that the persons who benefited from it were immigrants. Of course, the population in Wolverhampton is no longer an immigrant one. It is a second-generation population, sometimes even a third-generation population. Therefore, the council is no longer able to claim some of the grants that were available under section 11. Of course, to use grants, many people have been employed, but the council has a policy of no redundancy for all its employees. When the Home Office says that there must be a reduction in section 11 funding, there can be no question of making redundant those who were funded by section 11 money.

Wolverhampton, in spite of its considerable former immigration population — at any rate, its Commonwealth population—in common with all other areas of the country, has been hit by falling schools rolls. Of course, an effective local authority that did not regard education as, in part, a way of employing as many teachers as possible would have thought of ways of reorganising secondary education. Wolverhampton council has displayed a great deal of subtlety in the way in which it has sought to reorganise secondary education.

Since 1979, the council has put forward two proposals for reorganisation. As the House knows, the Secretary of State for Education and Science has only limited powers. He can either accept a whole proposal or reject a whole proposal. The Secretary of State has twice rejected proposals for reorganisation of secondary education in Wolverhampton because they included proposals for the abolition of the girls grammar school, a selective single-sex school which, of course, Tory Secretaries of State for Education and Science on the whole rather wish to preserve, and which is anathema to Socialist-controlled councils. The council proposes also to abolish a good comprehensive school called the Regis comprehensive school at Tettonhall in my constituency. That is very useful as far as the council is concerned. Its plans for reorganisation would have led to substantial economies being kicked out by the Secretary of State. The council knows that they will be kicked out because they include proposals that no Tory Secretary of State for Education and Science will countenance. The council will say, "But we have been prevented from taking economy measures by central Government."

Again, when one looks at the way in which the council conducts itself in relation to the activities of central Government, one will see that there is a need for reform. For instance, fun has been made by some commentators of the way in which central Government, in what may be an election year, bustled forward with their cold weather payments, even before their own indicators required such payments to be made. Whatever opportunism may have been undertaken by central Government, it was not good enough for Wolverhampton council—my goodness me, no. It had to make its own cold weather payments. It had to demonstrate that, however generous central Government might be with taxpayers' money, it could be even more generous.

Mr. Tony Banks: What was the reaction of elderly people and pensioners in Wolverhampton who received the extra additional weather payment?

Mr. Budgen: I have no doubt that they were absolutely delighted to receive it, in just the same way that business men who receive various handouts as part of the council's industrial policy are delighted. Most people are prepared to receive money that is lawfully handed over to them. Unfortunately, one usually finds that they say, "Thank you very much," for the money, and, when they find that the money that they have put into their right hand pocket has come out of their left hand pocket, they get frightfully angry.

As everybody knows, expenditure on legal aid is rising. One constantly hears of the way in which the Lord Chancellor recently pointed out that legal aid is an aid not only to litigants but to lawyers. That is not good enough, of course, for the Wolverhampton council. There was a tragic incident a short time ago in the centre of Wolverhampton. A young black Rastafarian, who was allegedly acting in a criminal way in a shop, was arrested by two police officers. He died during the arrest. There were riots on two days, in protest at what was alleged by many people, including the acting leader of the council, Councillor Bilson, to be bad behaviour by the police—bad behaviour which was wholly inappropriate.

To demonstrate that the council was on the side of black Rastafarians and against the police, the leader of the Labour group on the council said that the council would pay for the travel expenses of the mother of the deceased who lived in New York. He arranged for her to be transported from New York to Wolverhampton so that she might look after the interests of the deceased. It was also arranged that legal aid should be provided for the estate of the deceased so that Mr. Paul Boateng might be employed as solicitor to the deceased and, no doubt, pursue his vendetta against the police. That will probably not cost a very large sum of money, compared with some

[Mr. Budgen]

of the other activities. However, it demonstrates that in the opinion of many people the Government have imposed restrictions upon local government that are too lax and that they still give local government extraordinary discretion to abuse taxpayers' and ratepayers' funds, the consequences of which are regarded gravely and seriously by the people of Wolverhampton.

The level of rates acts as a major disincentive to those who might invest in industry in the west midlands. The level of rates has the effect of lowering the value of housing in residential areas. As people with money are less inclined to live in Wolverhampton, there is a knock-on effect in the shops. Far from describing this Government as being viciously restrictive in their attitude towards local democracy, the mood of my constituents, in the face of the 15 per cent. increase in rates with which they have now been saddled, is that there should be tighter control. They cannot understand whey a council that behaves in his way should still be 3·4 per cent. below its grant-related expenditure. They cannot understand why, so long after 1979, there is still no requirement to tender for so many of the council's services.

It is difficult to understand why, even under our unwritten constitution, there is no proper demarcation between the activities of central Government and those of local government. If there is a system of central legal aid funding, why is it lawful — if it be lawful — for Wolverhampton council to pay the legal aid costs of Mrs. McCurbin? If there is a system of making severe weather payments through central Government, why is it lawful for a local authority to make its own severe weather payments to a selected class of ratepayers? This Government have not yet solved these problems, but they have to face them.

I dare say that the reform of the rating system will create many difficulties, but I give my unreserved support to one of the Government's proposals—that everybody should pay something towards the rates. The more I see the way in which people in Wolverhampton behave, the more I regret the fact that some people, who are paying nothing towards their rent and nothing towards their rates, constantly demand more and more services and more and more employment by the local authority, in the sure and certain knowledge that they will not have to pay for any part of that which they demand.

There may be very many good arguments about how to shift the burden of local taxation, and I do not suppose that the balance will ever be precisely right between the private individual and industrial and commercial ratepayers. We may never even get it right as between those who rent houses and those who own houses, but I am absolutely certain that this Government are right when they say that in future everybody, but everybody, must make some payment towards local expenditure. That would go some way towards imposing discipline and saying to those who demand services, "If you want those services you must pay something towards them."

7.45 pm

Mr. Michael Meadowcroft (Leeds, West): We have an easy task this evening because of what is not in the Bill. I am wondering whether the hon. Member for Wolverhampton South-West (Mr. Budgen) was addressing himself to what is not in the Bill rather than to what is in the Bill. If his local authority is as appalling as he described, why are his Conservative colleagues so incompetent that they cannot defeat the sitting council? I suggest that the hon. Gentleman ought to address himself to that question.

It is not realised that everybody contributes towards the rates. Every customer in a shop and every employee in a company makes a contribution towards the rates—not necessarily directly, but indirectly. Some time ago the Confederation of British Industry asked its members to tell their employees that every £10,000 extra on the rates means that one job is lost and to make the point to customers that increases in prices are in part are due to the rates. Nobody escapes paying rates. Rates are paid in other ways than simply through the rates payment to the local authority.

We are not debating a Bill that might have provided us with more fun, but that would have taken longer. We are not dealing with competitive tendering, trying to limit political propaganda being paid for on the rates, or contract compliance. We await with interest the exigencies of the system that will produce draftsmanship that will include those points in a future Bill. Nevertheless, this attenuated Bill is no more worthy of support than such a Bill would have been. It further restricts and constrains local government and does not deserve support on Second Reading.

I am worried not just about the centralising tendency of the present Government, who go too far anyway, but about the suggestion that centralisation should be extended. Local government is not a servile lackey of central Government. It ought to be and must be an equal partner in a healthy constitution. If we move away from that position we remove that part of our constitution which guarantees the possibility of peaceful change in our towns and cities. Local self-government is the rock of our survival as a democratic state. Central Government, even more than local government, must recognise that fact.

As regards clause 1 and schedule 1, I accept that some local authorities have gone well beyond the bounds of legitimacy in their creative accounting. I accept that some local authorities are at a stage that will require some retrospective action if they are to be bailed out. At some point whether it is the Minister for local Government, a Labour Minister or myself, someone will have to do something about it. In the end, local people, not elected councillors, will suffer.

I want to make clear, as I have on previous Bills, what I believe to be the distinction between legitimacy and illegitimacy on expenditure. It is perfectly legitimate for a local authority to manipulate its accounting processes, if it can continue to maintain that expenditure indefinitely within the ideology of the Government who are in office —in other words, if it is not mounting up a debt that can only be paid by retrospection. That is perfectly legitimate. I do not understand why local authorities, with all their resourcefulness, should not be allowed to do that. However, when they are banking on a change of Government to one who will say, "These are our friends in local government; we will bail them out retrospectively," that is illegitimate, and I would not be prepared to countenance that as part of any philosophy which I could endorse.

Mr. Tony Banks: An additional dimension to the problem is that, even in the prevailing ideology of this Conservative Government, there is no consistency that

local authorities can use, for the simple reason that—as we have heard time and again and as the hon. Member for Brent, North (Dr. Boyson) knows — we get a local government Bill almost every week, which changes the accounting practices. That is another dimension to which the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Meadowcroft) has to direct his attention.

Mr. Meadowcroft: I am quite happy to direct my attention to that, because it enhances the argument that local government is so diffuse and diverse that no Bill can ever control all the different aspects of local government. The Government are chasing a mirage if they believe they can control it. They will not. It will break out in some other way, and other ways will be found to get round the restrictions that are imposed by the Bill.

The difficulty of the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) was raised in an intervention by the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn), who told us about the wonderful expenditure of his local council. I endorse that, of course. All the items of expenditure that he set out were beneficial to the local ratepayers in his borough. The problem is that it is no use my spending money on things that are wonderful and then seeing my bank manager and saying, "All the things that I have bought are worth while; they are all splendid things that have benefited my family and community." He would turn round and say, "That is splendid, but you do not have the income to meet the expenditure." If the hon. Member for Islington, North is correct, there is no city in the world, whether it be Calcutta, Dacca or whatever, that cannot solve its problems by simply spending money. That cannot be done. At the end of the day, we must find the income to meet expenditure.

The article by Councillor Hodge in *New Socialist* in January, which pleaded with the Labour Front Bench to rescue local authorities from the problems of having held up the dented shield for so long, was very good, and it set out the matter very honestly. However, we cannot continue a policy that requires retrospection to bear it out.

Local government has been culpable in different ways, collectively. One of the things that, in retrospect, local government should have done was to grab with both hands the Layfield report on finance. The report had many faults and it was defective in many ways, but the local authorities concentrated on those defects instead of realising that this was a way in which they could have got financial independence, could have gone along with local government reorganisation and obtained a powerful base which no Government would have been able to upset in the long term.

Mr. Freeson: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that although it was true at the time—I was in government at that time—that local authority representatives did not welcome the report, neither did the Treasury. It would not welcome it today either.

Mr. Meadowcroft: I remember it vividly. I urged at the time that it was the best solution that would be put forward and that local authorities should have grabbed it. It may be, as the right hon. Gentleman says, that it would never have gone through Parliament. Nevertheless, local authorities were culpable in not grabbing what was put forward and moving with it at the time.

The other matter which is interesting in this context is the change that took place in the constitutional position of the treasurer as a result of the 1972 Act. Prior to that, the treasurer was the city treasurer, not the council treasurer. He had the legal authority to refuse to carry out an instruction from his local authority which he believed to be against his fiduciary responsibility. That was taken away by the 1972 Act. The Government should look carefully at what occurred there, because it added to the problems that were faced in endeavouring to control local authority expenditure.

Central Government have a right to set out the total amount of borrowing that they regard as sustainable nationally and to negotiate with local government how much of that should fall within the local government sphere. Beyond that figure, it is up to local authorities to determine how best and how successfully they can raise and use that money, and beyond that they should not go.

Clauses 2 to 4 deal with housing and have a worthy aim. The problem with the aim is that it is no good without the means of fulfilling it. It is an aim of the Bill to draw private money into housing and to endeavour to utilise the good will of many people in the private sector—the building societies, insurance funds and pension funds—who are interested and concerned and not just trying to get their hands on some extra money in an exercise of bloated capitalism. I have spoken to many such people myself. The Bill, as fashioned now, will prevent that aim from being achieved.

It is no use saying that private bodies should take on the responsibility and risk. That would be fine if public authorities, whether central or local, could command the money. They cannot. We are crying out for the money to come into housing. We are desperate. All over the country, whether it be Newham, Leeds or Tower Hamlets, we desperately want money to come into housing. We shall find it impossible, whatever public money we could divert and devote to it, to resolve the problems of the fabric of our housing, let alone the problems of homelessness or of bed-and-breakfast accommodation. We need this extra money.

We are clamouring to draw money into housing, but we are saying to people, "The terms that you have negotiated with the local authorities are not acceptable to us. The people in London will stop these resources from coming in." I suspect that it is not possible to prescribe in a Bill such as this the means by which, on any uniform basis, the deal can be done between one local authority and a financial institution. Again, it is so diverse and diffuse. Therefore, this problem of how to draw three organisations together—the public and private sectors and the housing associations—is so delicate that the relationship cannot be prescribed in a Bill of this nature if it is to succeed.

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): Surely the hon. Gentleman would support the Minister's statement of trying to get institutions into the private rented sector? Is it not a fact that financial assistance may not be necessary, in as much as the property may already be owned by the local authority or may be land which is surplus to requirement? There are many ways in which local government can help private institutions. My hon. Friend the Minister said that perhaps a 30 per cent. grant could be made available. That will not be on every transaction; it will be on very rare transactions.

Mr. Meadowcroft: I am prepared to go along with what the hon. Gentleman has said. The Bill is not only

[Mr. Meadowcroft]

concerned with that aspect. The Bill is saying that the underwriting has to be carried out by the independent organisations as well. The 30 per cent. may have some validity, and so may other questions of tenure. The question to which the Minister has been addressing himself is the underwriting. He wants the financial institutions to take that risk. It may be that they are too cautious and that they ought to take more of the risks, but our problem is so acute we should look at it in a more delicate way, rather than simply say that we can prescribe it by statute.

Dr. Boyson: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, because it is difficult, however long we speak, to cover all aspects. One factor in this is that the 30 per cent. which is coming from the Government and the 70 per cent. which is coming from the private sector should mean that the rents that are chargeable are such that on the 70 per cent. they get a fair return. The 30 per cent. that is put in by local authorities is an "affordable rent". It should be 30 per cent. more than an open market rent.

Mr. Meadowcroft: The problem is that, once one has interfered in the market, whether it be by fair rents, and taken out scarcity, one has upset the market anyway. I shall not go along the road of deregulation, because there are other problems with that, particularly in the City, but I understand what the Minister says.

The hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill) is saying that in a sense our developments are only worth what return of rent we can get from them. It is no use a local authority saying that it has properties on its books at £20 million if the rent is only £1 million, because that means that they are worth only £10 million. If one wants to deal with a private institution and one knows that the properties need £5 million spent on them, then they are worth only £5 million to the private institution. Local authorities might have to write off £15 million, so the book value is wholly irrelevant. The properties might not even be lettable. The problem arises as to how one sorts out the future from the past, because in so many places the past is a tremendous millstone stopping the private institutions from coming in.

Mr. Hill: Surely the whole focus of what my hon. Friend the Minister was saying was about enabling local authorities to get rid of sub-standard housing—in many cases, perhaps, high rise blocks of flats. The hon. Gentleman is right. The book value of those is so low in some cases that some authorities have had to pay additional sums to demolish the buildings. The private sector alone can carry out such developments, on the understanding that it gets a fair return on rents for improvements.

Mr. Meadowcroft: I take that point. I am trying to look at broader perspectives than rehabilitation. In the interest of other hon. Members, I shall not give way again.

Mr. Leighton: Hear, hear.

Mr. Meadowcroft: I am glad that I have support for something.

It is an insensitive aspect of the Bill to suggest that there should be some consideration of what kind of tenants one has on the basis of whether they can pay. To say that one has to have regard to how many people will be in receipt of benefit runs counter to all sensitive management and will hurt those most in need. We already know that 75 per cent. of people in housing association dwellings are in receipt of housing benefit.

I find the catch-all provisions of clause 4, which virtually give the Secretary of State a free hand to bring in any kind of secondary legislation by allowing him to do anything that he believes to be necessary to constrict housing, is unacceptable.

The Bill also deals with education and capping the pool. I had some involvement with that in local government, and I found it then as complex as I do now, although I understand that this provision is relatively uncontroversial.

Clause 7 deals with land. In this day and age, particularly in areas under great stress, the hoarding of land is immoral. It is monstrous for people to hoard a substance that one cannot create, presumably with the prospect of making a quick killing in the future. That is immoral, and it should not be allowed. It is unacceptable. This happens not just with public authorities but with private people. We should be able to deal with it. I agree with registration and I do not object to the provisions in clause 7.

I am, however, concerned about the length of notice that is to be given to owners before officers can enter. I am concerned about the rights of owners and of possible abuse by those exercising the power of entry. Perhaps we could take account of that in Committee.

The register needs two improvements. One is that there might be a distinction on the register between land registered as available for development within five years and that which is not. Secondly, to deal with the point made by the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Bruinvels), I would wish the register to deal with land held in private hands. If we are ceasing to make a distinction in housing between public and private land as set out in clauses 2 to 4, I do not see why we should allow private owners of land to be feather-bedded in this way. Why do we treat them differently?

In politics, as in physics, laws apply. Newton's third law applies in politics. For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. Whatever local government does, central Government will do it worse, and whatever the Government do, local government will do worse still. So the nonsense continues. Political problems require a political solution, not a solution by repression. The Government are in the Paul Daniels school of politics. They think that they can produce a Bill out of a hat and that will solve the problem of what is going on in local government, but that just does not happen.

The Leader of the Opposition may be the only bull I know who carries his own china shop around with him. He carries it from by-election to by-election. However, that is of no value if one cannot solve the problems in the way that one would wish. I cannot understand why the Conservatives, who can identify the horrors of local government so vividly, have so little faith in their local candidates and associations and no trust that they can defeat these appalling councils. Instead, these local politicians have such inferiority complexes that they turn to the Government to do the job for them.

Accountability to local electors must be enhanced. That is the real test of local government, not constraining, constricting and repressing it. Accountability should be

developed and that is the right path down which to go. The Bill goes in the wrong direction. It is another repressive measure that will not succeed and should be defeated.

8.5 pm

Mr. Lewis Stevens (Nuneaton): I was surprised at some of the comments by the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Meadowcroft). I never thought of politics as being as logical as the laws of physics. He spoke about his general approach to local government spending relative to central Government's ideas. That is all very well as a theoretical aspect, but, following his argument, at the end we come to the point where some action has to be taken by central Government when local government does not fit in. This Bill, like other local government Bills, would not be necessary if councils and local organisations worked in an acceptable manner. However, when there are abuses of the system, action is necessary.

The Bill is concerned with the provision of rented properties. There is heavy regulation of such properties, which restricts their provision. We know that the restrictions are there to ensure that the abuses that we sought to get rid of in the early 1960s are not permitted to return. So often, our legislation is concerned with the prevention of abuses of the system. Often, those who abuse the system think that they have a good reason for so doing.

This is not just a matter of political colour. Some councils dominated by the Opposition party do not come into the category of high spenders, so do not need to find ways to fiddle the books. They carry on much more reasonably. Others take all the advantages that they can find in any system to get the maximum. I accept that they are not acting illegally. I have heard Opposition Members argue about what happens in business and how people look for ways around this, that or the other. Over the years, Labour Governments have attempted to bring in restrictions to close what they call the loopholes on that.

The important thing about the first part of the Bill is that it has undoubtedly been put in to answer a system of borrowing money that definitely increases the amount of the PSBR, puts forward, although not too far, the repayment problem, and creates a false impression. That is legal but it must be stopped if local government accounting is to fall properly within what is accountable in the short term and in the best way for total local government expenditure. It is only as a result of such abuses that the Bill has become necessary. The hon. Member for Leeds, West made an important point when he said that when we squeeze local government in one place, something else breaks out somewhere else. That is always a possibility with any system, whether it be local government or some other part of the law.

Within the general attitude to creative accounting, I believe that there has been a deliberate practice of finding ways round the restriction on capital expenditure. Some authorities have greatly exaggerated that practice, with the result that it has impaired their financial management. I have always questioned how far local government should go in its borrowing to finance particular projects. I have always held the view that local government finance should be considered within shorter-term borrowing. I do not believe that some local authority expenditure in the past 40 years—including over and above borrowing—has represented the most economical way of running local government finance.

Times have changed and we no longer have the expanding economy of the 1960s, which some local authorities thought could continue for ever. The escalation of costs and spending was, on occasions, out of control.

The Bill is concerned with the borrowing practices of local authorities. Many people in the financial world have thought that, if they were lending to local government, there was absolute security. They believed that, no matter what happened, Government would fork out for the local authority debts. They believed that there was no way in which Government would not step in—Government of any colour—and pay the debts of local government. Despite the absence of such a commitment, it is understandable for many people in the financial institutions and others outside this House to believe that if local government borrowed money it was as safe as central Exchequer borrowing. It is certainly not as safe.

The Bill also seeks to deal with the combined efforts of the private sector and local authorities with regard to the provision of housing. The provisions in the Bill are not as black or as preventive as has been claimed tonight. The Government are trying to encourage co-operation between the housing authorities and the private sector in financing projects. A local government contribution of 30 per cent. would help towards the prospect of a better return than present on the private sector money invested especially in the rented sector.

I am not suggesting that if one got rid of rent controls, a mass of private rented accommodation would become available at a reasonable rate. Some believe that total deregulation would provide satisfactory and quality accommodation. I do not believe that it is as simple as that. I do not believe that there should be total deregulation; we need some controls and regulations. However, present regulations deter private investment in the housing stock.

One thing that disappoints me about the Bill is that, unlike previous announcements, it contains no provisions relating to restrictions on contracts. Such restrictions would have been a most important area covered in the legislation. It must be in the interests of ratepayers and people in the community to know that their councils act in a responsible financial manner. I do not believe that local councils should allow their prejudices to influence, unwarrantedly, the placing of contracts for whatever purpose—for roads, equipment or anything else. I do not believe that it is reasonable for local councils to take that attitude.

It is certainly true that local authorities express their views on central Government and on what the Foreign Office or any other Department has done. Local authorities express their views on many things regarding privatisation and all the rest of it. I believe that it is to the detriment of ratepayers if such prejudice is incorporated in the placing of contracts. Perhaps when my hon. Friend replies he will be able to say whether there is a possibility of discussing this in Committee.

I appreciate that other items that have been omitted should also be considered, such as the use of rates for propaganda purposes and competitive tendering. I appreciate that, with regard to competitive tendering, there may be difficulties in providing satisfactory legislation—that is satisfactory from a legal rather than a principled viewpoint. I can understand why competitive tendering is not incorporated in the Bill.

[Mr. Lewis Stevens]

Competitive tendering is extremely important. I do not believe that it would represent a threat to a local council's direct labour organisations. Some direct labour organisations are very efficient. Indeed, the report of the auditors in my local authority is very favourable about some of the services provided by such bodies. It is important that competitive tendering becomes more common and results in a much more practical and democratic process within an authority to the benefit of that authority. It would not mean that, automatically, private firms would be brought in to do the work.

The Bill also deals with land held by local authorities. It is wrong that local authorities hold land for which there is no immediate or anticipated purpose within a reasonable future. This difficulty is especially acute in city and urban areas, but it also applies to some rural areas. Some local authorities hold land for no particular purpose —land that is needed for all sorts of projects. I believe that local councils should be encouraged—if they do not do so, action should be taken — to make such land available.

I do not believe that some of our schools—primary, middle or senior—need all the land that is designated for them. However, I am not suggesting that we should chop off an acre just because it is there. Often that land is a useful local amenity. I believe it is important to introduce legislation that puts at the forefront the need for local authorities to declare the purpose they have in holding land and to make possible the action needed to release that land deemed to be unnecessary to the local authority. A decision on unnecessary land would be an important qualification in the legislation.

I believe that this Bill introduces positive restrictions on local authorities. Essentially, it imposes those restrictions on those authorities which have deliberately taken advantage of the existing system to the detriment of their ratepayers and of local government in general.

8.20 pm

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): For nearly eight years we have had antagonism and a virtual state of war between central and local government. We have had one Bill after another until we have almost lost count. I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) counted 43. We are suffering from legislative indigestion. Even the parliamentary draftsmen cannot keep up; hence this truncated Bill.

The Department of the Environment regularly falls foul of the law. Unprecedented and sweeping powers have been arrogated by the Secretary of State and more are taken in this Bill. There has been an unheard of centralisation of state power, but not of the wisdom to exercise it. Elected councils have been turned into mere ciphers. The Government have moved the burden of local government finance from the taxpayer to the ratepayer.

When this Government came to office, rate support grant was 61 per cent. It has been slashed every year since then and is now only 46 per cent. So, while in 1979 for every £100 of local government finance, £39 had to be raised in rates, now, for that same £100 of expenditure, £54 has to be raised in rates. That is an increase of 35 per cent. in rates for the same expenditure. That is the reason why rates have gone up, but, while central Government make the cuts, it is local government that gets the blame.

I want to address myself briefly to the position of the London borough of Newham and to use it as an analogue and an example. Mine is an inner-city area in east London wrestling with a legacy of deep-seated problems. I will not take the time of the House by cataloguing details of the borough's social economic and environmental deprivation. I do not have to tell the Government about this, because they have told us. The figures from the Department of the Environment reveal that, with one exception, we are the most deprived local authority in the whole of England and Wales. Our difficulties are greater than those of eight of the nine authorities which have been given partnership status and therefore extra resources. This is a serious source of grievance locally. Expenditure per head in Newham is considerably below that in comparable areas. I am concerned that Government action should not exacerbate and compound our difficulties.

In the 20 February issue of *The House Magazine* the Home Secretary wrote an article in which he said:

"we cannot complacently wait for the next spark. Dereliction, disinvestment and despair in inner city areas need to be and will be tackled. For whatever reason, there have sprung up pools of disaffected youths in some of these areas and we must do our utmost to see that the springs of discontent are dried out, that the pools are not replenished."

This is the whole point. The Government's local government policy is threatening to make the dereliction in the borough worse and to take funds away from the voluntary groups working with the disaffected youth. That cannot be right. Government policy threatens to cause a crisis in Newham. Where is the sense in that? Any alleged savings could easily be swallowed up by the Home Office in the extra costs of maintaining law and order.

I was very pleased that the Minister of State accepted my invitation to visit Newham last Friday, when he had the opportunity to meet those principally concerned—the elected members and officers charged with administering the borough. He will have observed that they are reasonable, decent people, wrestling as best they may with intractable problems. He will have noticed that Newham is not a profligate or wasteful authority. The Audit Commission recently made a report. I am critical of the methodology of that report. However, it covered two groups of authorities, one of which it criticised and the other of which it did not. The Minister will know that Newham was in the group that was not criticised. It is an authority which is seeking to be responsive to local opinion and to achieve an efficient delivery of services. I hope that he felt that his visit was instructive and worth while, and I very much hope that something constructive will emerge from it.

The Government have decided to rate-cap Newham. This is not the time to debate the principle of that. I am opposed to rate capping, but Newham is not asking for the ability to raise its rates. The borough is aggrieved about the way it is rate-capped, the formula on which the rate capping is based and the base year that is used, which results in such a freakishly harsh effect. The infamous algebraic formula in the Bill now in another place was cobbled together in haste to meet the Government's legal problems. They were not of our making, yet we are expected to suffer because of them.

I hope that the Minister will agree that a standard, common formula saddled on disparate authorities must lead to anomalies and to uneven and grossly unfair results. In Newham's case it leads to a 26 per cent. rate reduction

—twice that of all but one of the other rate-capped authorities and more than three times that of 15 of the other 20 authorities. Furthermore, 16 of the others can spend 10 per cent. above grant-related expenditure, seven can spend 20 per cent. above GRE, but Newham can spend only 3·7 per cent. above. I do not think that the Minister will pretend that that is fair or evenhanded.

The legislation of 1984 recognised that. It allowed—great play was made of this at the time—redetermination, that is, appeal to have cases looked at on their individual merits. Last year six authorities appealed and they got increases of between 2·2 per cent. and 7·7 per cent. In other words, some attention was paid to individual and local circumstances. We came to see the Minister to do the same and we still feel sore that, although he listened to us, he knew that a Bill was coming to take away the right to redetermination because of the Government's stampede to get out of their legal fiasco.

Something has to be done, and I hope that the Minister learned in Newham that the main cause of our difficulty is the base year of 1985-86. The Government underestimated what the council spent in that year by about £15 million. That is where things have gone wrong. The budget of that year was distorted by completely lawful and legitimate special accounting, about which the council has been absolutely and completely open. Basing the Government's standard formula on that year's distorted budget means a cut of 15 per cent. of the amount above GRE in one year. That is an unreasonable and absurdly unrealistic cut.

What is to be done? The Government could not easily accept amendments that would wreck the Bill now going through the other place—I accept that—but they could accept the modest amendment moved by Lord Elwyn Jones, and I should like to give the Minister six reasons for looking upon it favourably. First, it would be a "class" amendment and so would not cause hybridity. Secondly, it would affect only three authorities. Thirdly, Newham would not gain at the expense of others. Fourthly, it would not cost the Government anything. Fifthly, it would mean that Newham would still have a cut in rates by 6·2 per cent. Sixthly, Newham would still have a cut in expenditure.

Those are six very good reasons for looking favourably upon that amendment. I do not claim that this would be a perfect solution, but it is something with which the borough could cope, with which it could live. It is my duty as a constituency Member to say that, unless something of this sort is done quickly, the Government will cause a crisis in the borough. Why do that? Who would gain from it? It would undermine the locally elected civic leadership. It would badly damage morale among council staff. It would cause cuts in education, environmental services, housing, social services and much else which would excaberate inner city decay and bring distress to my constituents. I call upon the Minister, after seeing the situation at first hand, to take action now to avert that iniquity.

8.29 pm

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East): I was interested in what the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) said about rate capping. As I am someone who believes very strongly in rate capping, obviously we would disagree widely on the need for it. But it is an uneviable position for any constituency Member of Parliament to have rates levelled at 80 per cent. as happened in Leicester last year and, as is, I understand, to happen in Ealing in this coming year.

I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to look at the way in which creative accounting has been used to deflect the wishes of the community. I know that the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) genuinely represents his own constituents, but I can say that my constituents felt let down when one year there could be rate capping imposed and in the next year, to recoup it, it was possible to whack in a tremendous increase of 80 per cent. and now, in local government election year, with the use of creative accounting, deferred payments and general liaison with the banks and other financial institutions, it has brought forward a 4·9 per cent. rate rise. Anyone in the House can understand why that is. In local election year it is obviously a great opportunity to get the most votes out of the electorate.

I would say to any hon. Member that if a local authority wishes to put the rates up to such a high level it should be fair and put that proposal in the manifesto. It is all very well for local authorities to say that they have a mandate to do this or that. However, in my own local authority only 30 per cent. of those who voted Labour pay rates in full. That is a significant fact. That is why, when community charges are introduced at a later date, it will be important to give the electorate a proper say in the running, administration and the levying of rates in their area. I look forward to that with great enthusiasm.

I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) that we must all stand for what is to be paid in local expenditure. It is necessary to have regular monitoring. That is why this Bill is so important. I do not deny, and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State knows, that I am disappointed that the Bill does not embrace propaganda on the rates or, at this time, competitive tendering. He, like me, has been active in the Right wing of the Conservative party and sees it as an important principle that we should get value for money. We should have the opportunity to compete fairly and we should certainly monitor the expenditure, which has been going crazy, like Topsy, in many ways. Local government expenditure has got out of hand. The hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Meadowcroft) made that very point.

Every local authority wishes to act in a responsible way but proper checks to prevent any abuses by local authorities; any devices brought forward to advance and defer purchase schemes, and payments to get round the present capital expenditure control system, must be particularly important now. Creative accounting and the using of reserves must be stopped. I believe that matters have got out of hand.

We should look at the typical local authority of Leicester and the extravagance taking place there. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister is fully aware of the fact that at the moment there is no control over whether a local authority such as mine is twinning with Nicaragua or appointing a twinning officer at more than £13,000 a year. That is paid for by the rates with no consultation or advance notice that it is to be done.

There is no control over the creation of nuclear-free zones. There are more than 170 such zones in the country. That was not part of any mandate. It never appeared in

[Mr. Peter Bruinvels]

any election address. Local authorities should stand ashamed of such partisan and political propaganda. There were no undertakings to do those things.

In my own area, because the Leicester Tigers, a well-known rugby team, went to South Africa to take part in special sporting competitions, the name of the park the team uses in Leicester, known as the Welford road recreation ground, was changed overnight to Nelson Mandela park. There was no consultation and no one spoke to Nelson Mandela to find out whether he approved. That was vindictive and spiteful. The local authority was trying to kick those good ambassadors for Leicester who were playing the best sport in the land. The team had people such as Dusty Hare and Paul Dodge, well known international players, but because of that visit they are to be kicked, effectively, in the crotch—after the game—and they are to be penalised.

My hon. Friends know that section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972 gives many additional powers to local authorities to levy a rate, but it must not be in a partisan way. We must have accountability of councillors. The GLC, Lambeth councillors and others have been fortunate to have surchages levied on them for what they have done. Some of them cannot even stand for office at the moment. I think that that is correct. If one breaks the law, one must face up to the fact that one could be surcharged and lose one's position as a councillor.

There is also the issue of the misuse of inner area programme funds. In my area the Labour-controlled authority never admits that, for every £1 spent, 75p comes from the Department of the Environment. One sees great big signs saying, "Your local council working for you." That money goes to the council's pet project.

The hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay), who is sitting on the Opposition Front Bench, is a fair man. He cannot approve of a partisan approach such as that. I am sure he wants to see, as we all do, finance given to help the entire community and not just one part of it. In my constituency there are more than 26,000 members of the ethnic community and because of that a large amount of the funds goes to the ethnic community. I am becoming almost a threatened species by not being a member of the ethnic community. We want to see a fair distribution of those additional funds to the entire community, not just one part of it. The fact that my Labour opponent may come from the ethnic community has nothing to do with it. It is interesting that the money can be misused in a way that might almost be said to be buying votes. That is unacceptable, and that is why a local government Bill has been brought in and is to be welcomed.

We hear a lot about the housing investment programme. In Leicester I believe that it may be misused to help pay for the pet projects and poodles of the Labour-controlled council. I cannot accept that there is a housing crisis in Leicester. I listened to the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Meadowcroft) talk about the hoarding of land. He condemned it, and so do I. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to come to Tithe street, in Leicester, East. He should come and see the areas owned by the council which it has not redeveloped, and ask, what is the purpose of that? I suspect that if the council developed it into a nice area and brought more jobs into the city along with new developments, housing developments and housing associations plans, people might come in, take over the projects and vote Conservative. I have a suspicion that that is why those areas have deliberately been allowed to run down. I am not exaggerating. Those are the facts of life.

That is why clause 7 and schedule 2 are to be welcomed. There will be a land register and it will show those empty areas. It is disgraceful that the council in Leicester can be campaigning for additional funds to build more council houses when there are 947 empty houses at present and 77 of them have been kept empty for more than a year. If that land was on the register and my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Department of the Environment were given the power to dispose of it, we could have proper buildings and proper jobs and we could stop some of the belly-aching we get from the council, which deliberately keeps those parts of the city run down for political purposes.

I am interested in the education provision of the Bill. There is no doubt in my mind that additional funds are available to help, yet again, the ethnic community, but they should help the entire community. There are music grants available under section 11 of the Race Relations Act 1976 to teach ethnic music. I see nothing wrong with that, but we should have all sorts of music. There should be more music teachers to teach the entire community. Why should ethnic groups have priority? Any additional help under the Bill that can be given to both the ethnic and non-ethnic communities must be welcomed.

We should look at the county council's education policy and see it justify a proper education policy for the entire community. Perhaps there could be more religious education. That could be paid for from the rates. That is more important today than the "go gay" policies we have in Leicester. At least religious education would promote family life, which is important now when normal people are treated as abnormal and people living outside wedlock are being encouraged and those living within wedlock are being treated as exceptional and rather strange. That is a sad fact of life.

It is important that the Bill comes before us today, because housing developments will be encouraged. I am sad that we cannot deal with propaganda on the rates at the moment. However, I can tell my constituents and anyone else who feels let down that more is to come soon. I have every confidence about that. In the meantime, the Widdicombe committee has reported. Anyone who believes that there is political or partisan propaganda on the rates must use the district auditor. When my hon. Friend the Minister replies, I am certain that he will refer to that. If the controls are tougher, and if the district auditor's address is publicised more regularly, we can catch out those councils which are abusing ratepayers' money. Thousands of pounds are spent every year on propaganda. That is a scandal and the councils will be brought to order over that.

When my hon. Friend the Minister of State introduced the Bill, he referred to competitive tendering. I appreciate that we are not to have that at the moment. However, even my local authority in Leicester is operating a restraint on trade. Organisations which have dealt with South Africa or have a nuclear interest—and there are plenty of companies with defence interests in Leicester which obviously have a nuclear dimension—are being denied their rights to take on contracts. The council insists that companies use the direct labour organisation. I do not knock everyone who works in a direct labour organisation, but it would be the jewel in the crown if we could bring

in competitive tendering to ensure the best tendering and the cheapest work and so do away with the amazing questionnaires which small businesses in Leicester guarantee that they do not have time to fill in and compromise their positions.

This is a good Bill which will help to bring councils to check. We have nothing to be ashamed of. The Bill will control public expenditure and stop councils and councillors cheating. Hopefully, local authorities will be more responsible. I would never knock all local authorities because some have done their best. However, the council in Leicester must pull up its socks quickly. My hon. Friends will have the powers in this Bill. The Bill is not a retrograde step and it is not regressive. It will ensure that local authority ratepayers have an absolute say. I welcome the Bill and look forward to its becoming law. I also want to see competitive tendering and the outlawing of propaganda on the rates brought in as quickly as possible.

8.42 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): It was interesting to hear the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Bruinvels) referring to himself as some form of threatened species. I can only think of him as a species of Leicester leprechraun and I can say that without being accused of being "sizeist" since I am the same physical height as the hon. Gentleman.

The hon. Member for Leicester, East raises the name of Leicester regularly, in the same way that my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner) raises it. We hear Leicester mentioned in this House almost as often as we hear Newham mentioned. For a change, it would be nice to hear the hon. Member for Leicester, East supporting his own council. His council is democratically elected. It represents the people of the city. Indeed, some of those who voted Labour in the local council elections might even vote Conservative at the general election. From my experience on the GLC over many years, someone like Sir Horace Cutler who was the Tory leader of the council was quite prepared to defend London and attack the Conservative Government in the interests of London.

There is an unfortunate divide in the House. Conservative Members take great delight in attacking their own local councils — mainly, of course, because those councils are controlled by a party other than their own. I should like to see a little more community loyalty, which would involve Tory Members defending their councils. They need not necessarily agree with everything that the councils do, but they could defend the councils rather than take every opportunity to attack them.

I will not speak for very long about the Bill as it is rather like Hamlet without the prince. However, it would be wrong of Opposition Members to make great play of the fact that it is not the Bill that we were all expecting. Frankly, I am absolutely delighted that it is not the Bill that we all expected. Obviously, we will take some pleasure in the general discomfort that will be felt on the Government Front Bench as they hear the criticisms from Conservative Members. I am glad that the Bill does not involve compulsory tendering amendments to the Local Government Act 1986 or controls over contract compliance.

A number of hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Leicester, East, referred to contract compliance as if somehow that was an invidious demand made upon local enterprise and that there was nothing good in it. The way Conservative Members refer to contract compliance, one would think that it had been imported by Labour authorities direct from Moscow. The GLC did much pioneering work on contract compliance. We drew our experiences exclusively from the United States, because we found that the practices adopted there had a great deal to commend them.

Contract compliance is taken from the world's premier capitalist state, not a Socialist state. It is not taken from the sort of country to which one would necessarily expect a Socialist GLC to be looking. We discovered that the way in which contract compliance was used to combat racism and discrimination in the United States was something we could bring into this country. I am glad that the Government are not pursuing the banning of contract compliance.

We have heard a great deal from hon. Members referring to creative accountancy and the reasons why local authorities have adopted such practices. The hon. Member for Leicester, East—I am sorry to give him this additional publicity; we know how much he thrives on it and it is very much his oxygen—referred to the list of problems in Leicester. Indeed, the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen), like the hon. Member for Leicester, East, ran out an annoying list which did not amount to a row of beans in financial terms.

When a local authority is spending money on policies aimed at ending discrimination against gays or lesbians, it is not the amount of money that upsets Tory Members, it is the principle. Even if it was only a matter of a few pounds, it would still offend and outrage them. When local authorities attempt to pursue policies to end discrimination against gays and lesbians, they run up against the accumulated years of prejudice and bigotry in our society. It is not surprising that there has been a backlash against Labour authorities especially in London which have attempted to deal with the problems of such discrimination.

Local authorities have become involved in creative accountancy not because they want that, or because they are "profligate" as I understand the word profligate, but because they are trying to counteract central Government policies. They have found that central Government policies have deprived them of the resources they so desperately need to defend jobs and services in their areas. It is not surprising that boroughs, especially in London, which have become so deeply involved in the various accountancy procedures are precisely those inner London boroughs with the greatest problems. The Government must surely be prepared to acknowledge that.

In a very statespersonlike speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) spelt out the problems in Newham. On this occasion, we are doing our best to be as nice to the Minister as we possibly can. That actually causes me physical and mental strain. However, I do not wish to upset the Minister too much while he is thinking about the things that he saw in Newham. We want extra resources for Newham. We are prepared to explain the problems to the Minister as patiently as we can so that he can understand our case. If he rejects our case in the end, we can at least say that we tried to demonstrate the problems, but the Minister was not impressed and we did not convince him. However, we did our best. That is because it is the responsibility of Opposition Members who represent Labour boroughs to

[Mr. Tony Banks]

talk to Tory Ministers. Sometimes we find that a fairly unappetising prospect—not in the case of this Minister, I hasten to add, but in the case of some of his colleagues. However, we have to do it, because that is the democratic process.

With creative accountancy, local authorities have been using the tactics, the techniques, and the skills to try in a democratic and lawful fashion to protect the jobs and services in their areas. They should not be subjected to the sort of vile campaign that they so often have to endure in this House and in the press generally. It cannot be unconnected with the fact that rate support grant, the money that goes from central to local government, has gone down from about 62 per cent. in 1979 to 46 per cent. of local authority expenditure. Even the *Financial Times* is prepared to acknowledge, and published a fine leader on the fact, that such reductions had a great deal to do with the level of rate increases that local authorities were imposing in order to try to defend their jobs and services.

None of this creative accountancy is unlawful, and it is wrong for Conservative Members to suggest that somehow it is. Indeed, Environment Ministers rather than local authorities have more often been found to be acting unlawfully. Therefore, we do not need any great lectures on legality from the Government.

My third point is about local authorities and their relationship with their communities, the electorate and the government. The hon. Member for Leeds West (Mr. Meadowcroft) and other hon. Members made a good point about this. If those authorities are so appalling, I am surprised that people still vote for them, It is not just a question of whether or not people pay the rates, because I do not think that this necessarily affects their voting pattern. When and if we get around to some kind of community poll tax, Conservative Members will find that what they thought would be a way of opening up these various local authorities to Conservative control will not work.

In terms of voting Labour, there is no direct connection with the amount of rates that are paid. There is nothing advantageous in just sticking up the rates. No one likes to find the rate demand going up by 30, 40, 50, 60, or indeed 80, per cent.

In his speech, the hon. Member for Leicester, East moved around the country and mentioned Ealing. I am surprised and to a certain extent disappointed that his hon. Friends the Members for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) and for Ealing North (Mr. Greenway), who travel mob-handed when it comes to local government Bills, did not come to the House to talk about Ealing's possible 80 per cent. rate increase. The residents of Ealing are probably not delighted about the likely increase, but if one looks, as I have, at what Ealing borough council is doing, one can see why those rates might increase by that amount.

I shall list some of the things that the council has done since May, 1986 when Labour was elected. It has signed deals to acquire 600 new homes to meet the housing crisis; employed extra home helps and under-fives staff; restored free milk to 10,000 first school pupils; taken on much-needed local housing repair teams; recruited 150 extra teachers; begun a £12·1 million programme of road and pavement renewal, including dropped kerbs and new cycle routes; restored grants to voluntary play groups; spent £500,000 on emergency care, responding in particular to the needs of the elderly during the recent cold spell; given schools 11 per cent. more to spend on equipment and books; funded a wide range of new summer play schemes; reduced adult education fees, resulting in a 25 per cent. increase in numbers and started a borough magazine to keep people informed about what their council does.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels: It is political propaganda.

Mr. Banks: The hon. Gentleman says that it is political propaganda. These are good services that the people of Ealing want and need. If the Government had not reduced the rate support grant and did not impose draconian penalty systems on local authority finance, the residents of Ealing would not now be facing an 80 per cent. rise, or whatever the increase will be, in their rates. Let us be clear about this. Local authorities which are given the choice will clearly attempt to maintain the existing level of services in their boroughs. It is wrong for them to be totally and continually castigated in this House and outside.

We have a major problem in Newham. My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East summed it up in an excellent speech. There was a meeting with the Labour group, the Labour party and representatives of the trade unions on Sunday afternoon. My hon. Friend and I were there listening to our colleagues agonising over how they will meet the Government targets.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East has made the case that Newham is the second most deprived local authority area in Britain. We have the worst housing situation and the fastest growing level of homelessness in the whole of London. Yet we have been told by the Government that we have to make a 26 per cent. reduction in our rates and must reduce our expenditure by about £12 million from its current level. We are attempting to do that.

The Minister knows what the problems are. He knows from his own officials and from the indices in his Department that we are not exaggerating the position. How can the Minister honestly expect us in Newham to make the sort of cuts that the legislation will require us to make? It cannot be done without risking all the social disruption mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East. I do not expect riots on the streets of Newham, but already we have a multiplicity of deprivation in our part of east London. This will make it worse.

The Government may well say, "Why bother about Newham? After all, it is a Tory-free zone." We do not have any Tories on the borough council, but we do not propose to put up any posters at the approaches to Newham saying, "You are now entering a Tory-free zone." If one were being cynical, one could ask why the Government should bother about Newham because in electoral terms there is nothing in it for them. There is no way that the Tories will win any of the seats in Newham—Newham, South; Newham, East; Newham, North-East; or Newham, North-West.

In the name of social justice and social harmony, and in order to try to solve Newham's problems through the ballot box, through the democratic process, the Minister cannot now require us to impose the level of cuts that he proposes. Frankly, it is beyond our ability to make such cuts. He came round with us and saw the problems and I ask him again to consider the case that we made, fairly,

coolly and objectively. If he does that, he will end up conceding that we have a case in Newham, and that despite everything that we have said about the Government and that they have said about us, on this occasion they will hear our case and make sure that we have the resources we need.

8.57 pm

Mr. Roy Galley (Halifax): I congratulate the hon. Members for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) and for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) on the way that they put their case. In local government debates we seem to hear ad nauseam about the problems of Newham. It is a compliment to those two hon. Members that the House is so well briefed on the details of the affairs of Newham. However, all that I have heard from those hon. Members suggests to me that a newer and more innovative approach, involving private enterprise and the private sector, would assist Newham, rather than thinking along the tracks and in the ruts about which we hear so much. However, one must compliment them for bringing the affairs of Newham so much to the forefront of the affairs of the House. Only my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Bruinvels) is more assiduous in putting local matters before Parliament.

Mr. Leighton: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that there is no antipathy towards private enterprise and that the borough is trying to bring in private enterprise? We want a partnership between central and local government, involving the public and private sectors and the public authorities and voluntary organisations. That is what we are working for and the chamber of commerce supports our efforts.

Mr. Galley: I am delighted to hear those remarks from the hon. Gentleman because they form part of the theme that I shall develop in my comments. It is important to develop that partnership. Too often, I fear, Labour Members suggest that the public sector is the be-all and end-all and that there are no solutions which are not publicly funded. We must get away from that and have a genuine partnership of all the interested organisations in the one locality to try to sort out the problems of that locality and to try to have a meeting of minds.

That brings me to one of the points that I wanted to make in this debate. There has been far too much politicisation — if that is the correct term — of local government during the past 20 years. It has so often been to the detriment of local communities that there has been so much political content in those debates.

The Bill is useful and its provisions relating to housing are sensible. Its provisions relating to the land register are vital and it has other useful tidying-up measures. However, one must regret that it does not get to the root of any of the local government problems with which we have to grapple in the 1980s. I pick up a point made by the hon. Member for Newham, North-West and record my disappointment that the Bill is such a slim measure and that it does not deal with the issues that we hoped to tackle during this Session.

It would have been most helpful if the Bill had dealt with the issues of privatisation, contract compliance and political progaganda on the rates. However, one accepts the difficult problems facing my hon. Friend's Department over the drafting of the legislation and the very heavy burden of technical legislation that he is facing during the Session. Therefore, one accepts, with regret, that it is not possible to bring forward the major measure for which we were hoping. With luck, in the next Session of Parliament we shall tackle those more fundamental issues.

In our debates on local government in the House we tend to lose sight of the functions of local government. we have almost ceased to debate and consider the relevant functions of local government. So often many local authorities seem to set themselves up as mini-governments for their area and regard themselves as having an all-pervading influence on all the relevant affairs. That is a fundamentally misconceived view. In our future local government legislation I hope that we shall address that problem.

One can understand immediately the enormous drafting and practical problems that would be involved. However, if at all possible I should like to see in future local government legislation some measure to set out, curtail and catalogue what is and what is not an appropriate responsibility for a local authority, and to see rather more than we see now aimed at curtailing the amount that local authorities may expend upon other matters. In various sections of the Local Government Act 1972 there are provisions to curtail expenditure on certain aspects. However, in recent years peripheral expenditure has burgeoned. One thinks especially of some London boroughs' activities with regard to equal opportunities, gay and lesbian rights, and a whole host of other aspects where money is spent in a way which is not pertinent to local authorities and detracts from their carrying out the essential functions of local government.

Mr. John Powley (Norwich, South): I am interested to hear what my hon. Friend is saying. Is he aware that at this moment Norwich city council—not a London borough by any means—is discussing the Government's trade union legislation? Does my hon. Friend agree that that is far removed from being a responsibility of local government? Does he further agree that the council would do better to spend its time and expertise on matters over which it has some direct control than to make pronouncements on matters that are properly the province of central and national Government?

Mr. Galley: My hon. Friend is right, and he graphically demonstrates my point. We need to say to local government that there are certain functions which this House delegates to it and that it is responsible for carrying out those particular functions. We must say that other functions are not the proper concern of local government. If local government wishes to debate, either within its political groups or outside the council, a whole host of national issues, that is up to the political parties, but local government should not spend its time dealing with national considerations at the ratepayers' expense. We need to set out a catalogue of what local government should do, draw a line under it and say, "Thereafter your activities must be curtailed."

Compared with other local authorities, my local authority is moderate and modest in some of its activities. However, recently in the Calderdale authority we have seen campaigns on social security, which have no relevance to the functions of that council. Recently we have, fortunately, seen the authority wind up a committee on health services in the Calderdale area which, again, is not

[Mr. Galley]

a matter delegated to it by Parliament. We have seen the development of Calderdale foreign policy over a wide variety of matters. We have seen the chief executive, who is properly dealing with housing policy and the regeneration of our area, writing speeches for the leader of the council about South Africa and umpteen other matters. That is wrong. We have seen attempts to name peace parks in our area. That is nonsense and diverts attention from the proper functions of local government.

We have seen to much politicisation of local government and with it too great an adversarial element in the conduct of local government affairs. I constantly return to the words of wisdom of the hon. Member for Newham, North-West. He talked about loyalty to an area and co-operation. I must say to him that co-operation must be both ways. The hon. Member of Parliament and the council must work together, even if they are of different political persuasions. That is the only way to make progress in an area. Far too often, local councillors snipe at the local Member of Parliament if he is not of the same political persuasion, when, if they put their resources together, they could achieve far more.

It is even more worrying that often in this adversarial contest councillors use senior officials to fire the bullets. We are beginning to see an abuse of senior officers. Political debates should be between politicians. Members of Parliament should not be engaged in purely political debates with the chief officers of their local authorities. We need to examine the role of chief officers and define it more clearly. Indeed, I hope that when we consider Widdicombe and further legislation, we shall deal with that. We must consider the functions of chief officers in supporting the council and selling their area.

Surely one function must be to seek the greatest efficiency of services and to persuade the council to use its resources in the best way possible. I can cite a good local example. We have Audit Commission reports which would save over 3p on the rates this year if they were fully implemented and which are supported by many officers, yet they are gathering dust on shelves. If the officers pressed for support for those reports, we would have greater efficiency and more accountability.

The Bill deals in part with capital expenditure controls. Prescribed expenditure often produces a variety of agonies for Members of Parliament. In the Green Paper it is suggested that capital controls should be tied more closely to capital receipts. That is useful but it should be applied in a limited way.

My authority, going back to its Conservative years, has a good record of selling its assets and making the best use of the resources that it has accrued. As a result the assets that it can sell have now been reduced somewhat. It is also the case—looking especially at houses but also at other property—that property values in my area are among the lowest in the country. Therefore, a substantial sale of council houses will produce a smaller net return than would be the case in London and many other parts of the country. Some mechanism must be built into future legislation to deal with that problem.

Finally, I shall deal briefly with some of the housing aspects of the Bill. I greatly commend my hon. Friend the Minister for bringing forward those provisions. There are, throughout this country, large estates that have serious difficulties. There are perennial problems on monolithic estates which we cannot solve by public sector solutions. We must have far more tenant involvment and local management. That does not just mean devloving the management from the housing director; it means that the people living on the estates must make meaningful decisions about the way in which their estates are run.

Mr. Meadowcroft: Where is that in the Bill?

Mr. Galley: There are in the Bill, as the hon. Gentleman knows, provisions for involving the private sector more in housing. We need to involve the private sector, the housing associations and the tenants. We need to break up the enormous housing empires and transfer responsibility in a diverse sort of way back to the people who run the estates and back to more manageable organisations, such as housing associations.

I must close there, despite the intervention from the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Meadowcroft). I commend especially the housing provisions of the Bill, but I hope that those provisions, and a number of other matters to which I have referred, will be developed much further in the near future.

9.12 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): Rates are currently a significant source of concern for my constituents in Leyton and for residents throughout Waltham Forest. A substantial rise is imminent of 62 per cent. for domestic ratepayers and 57 per cent. for businesses. That is an appalling prospect. No one is happy, including the local councillors with whom I have talked and who have to make this unpleasant decision.

My investigations have revealed four main reasons for this rise. The first reason is that the Government have savagely cut the rate support grant; for example in the Rate Support Grants Bill that follows this item of business, there will be no recycling of RSG. That effect will be a loss of grant to Waltham Forest of £1,678,000. That will mean 5½p on the rates at a stroke. Then there is the rate support grant cut overall. The director of finance wrote last month about the total local authority expenditure met by grant. He said:

> "In 1979-80 it was 61 per cent., whereas the settlement for 1987-88 is based on a figure nearer 46·3 per cent. Over this period, expenditure has almost doubled, but ratepayers will have to pay 2·7 times"—.

it is well over that double figure—

"more in 1987-88 than they did in 1979-80."

The leader of the council wrote:

> "If RSG was on the same formula as in 1981-82 (when the present system was introduced), the grant this year would be £20 million higher, and the rate-rise 35 per cent. lower".

The Government have also inflicted penalties. That is a substantial reason for the rise. For every pound that is spent, the Government are insisting that ratepayers are charged £1·64 because of those penalties. It cannot even be said that local ratepayers will get value for money as a result.

The second reason for the rates increase is that the Government have not properly allowed for inflation, which is running at about 3 per cent. Inflation on local authority costs, services and especially wages, which is a large part of the bill, is well above that.

Then there is teachers' pay. The Government are not properly financing the new level of pay that was announced yesterday. They are shifting that bill to the local authorities and to ratepayers.

The third reason for the rates measures is that, before the election last May, the previous council—it was a hung council but to all intents and purposes was controlled by the Conservatives and the Liberals in coalition—deliberately left the cupboard bare by spending £5 million of balances. It used up all the balances and reserves. Even the housing repairs budget was raided for about £600,000. Posts were deliberately kept vacant to save money, which meant that classes in local schools were regularly sent home because there were no supply teachers. Because of that, a 30 per cent. rates rise would have been needed to do nothing, just to stand still and provide the same services.

Before the last council elections, local Conservatives said that, if they were in control, they would cut services by 3 per cent. and still feel justified in raising rates by between 15 per cent. and 20 per cent. The SDP and the Liberals have supported many of the service developments, but do not properly explain what they would do about the rates. Even though the previous council cut the balances, it still left commitments to be funded this year.

The important service developments by the new council are the fourth reason for the substantial rates increase. The council was elected to develop services and this has caused an increase of about 10 per cent. in the budget.

I shall give some examples which reflect the local authority's response to the serious problems. Leyton's housing stock is among the worst 2·5 per cent. in the country for housing problems. The local authority is to put the £600,000 taken from the housing repairs budget back into housing repairs. It will provide £700,000 for permanent supply teachers and £418,500 for school building maintenance and repairs which are badly needed. It will provide £113,000 for social work services in child abuse cases and another £31,000 for legal services in such cases. Only last week, the front page of the local newspaper announced that, unless that money is provided, deaths will occur because of child abuse and child neglect in the borough. The council must be right to respond in that way to the problem.

The council has allocated £100,000 for improved foster care services and £113,000 towards the running costs of a disabilities resource centre. It is concerned with a range of services for community care and is providing, for example, £128,500 for a community alarm system for the elderly, £109,500 to extend home care services for the elderly at risk, £57,500 for improved meals on wheels services and £122,000 on improved staffing in the homes for the elderly. Are any Conservative Members laughing at those services? Are they saying that they are not necessary? Of course not. The council will provide £77,000 to employ extra crew for refuse collection services which have been run down. The council is making up for the urban aid to voluntary organisations which the Government have cut by allocating another £225,000 for special projects. Those are some of the developments which have been promoted by the council.

The 62 per cent. rates increase which results is a harsh burden on local people. It will force many more to rely on rebates. Already, about 50 per cent. of Leyton residents have to have rebates, and this means that they are caught in a poverty trap. Rebates do not help businesses or individuals who are just over the rebate level or those who are too proud or too worried to claim. One of the ironies of the increase is that the Government fork out for the rebate but have not paid the proper level of grant needed to keep the rates down in the first place.

Comparisons can be made with other boroughs. Rates increases will be huge in three London boroughs in which the Tories were in control last May. Ealing has been mentioned, but rates are also well above average in Hammersmith and Fulham and Waltham Forest. The unfair penalty system effectively says to such local authorities, "You must have the same policies as the previous council, the one that you defeated in the local election." How can that be democratic? How can the Minister justify that as being democratic?

Another comparison can be made with Waltham Forest and Redbridge, the borough next door. There will be a 3 per cent. rates rise in Redbridge compared with 62 per cent. in Waltham Forest. The rates in Redbridge will be half those paid by Waltham Forest ratepayers. Waltham Forest has greater needs and provides better services. That has been the local choice for many years, but it is nowhere double what is provided in Redbridge.

The Tories like to use examples like this as simplistic propaganda in an election year. This unfair situation shows how the Government have cultivated a perverted rate support grant system purely for political purposes. The Government have given to the Tory local authorities and deliberately targeted Labour authorities. This is cheap propaganda but it is expensive for local ratepayers. The Tory Government are principally to blame for the massive rates rise in Waltham Forest and in other areas.

What is needed is an increased level of Government grant to local authorities like Waltham Forest, an end to the spiteful political manipulation of the rate support grant system and to the grossly unfair penalties, and a fairer distribution of grant based on need. Labour in Waltham Forest wants to supply good quality services to the local community at a reasonable rate level. The Conservative Government are deliberately denying and thwarting that.

9.22 pm

Mr. Roland Boyes (Houghton and Washington): We have had a very interesting series of contributions this evening. My right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East (Mr. Freeson) identified the positive gains of £500 million expenditure under the Bill in creating, directly or indirectly, 62,000 jobs in the industry and improving conditions for the people who live in the houses. My right hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton), in what I consider to be a brilliant speech, defended the unprecedented taking of local power by central Government and illustrated the problems of social, economic and environmental deprivation in Newham. When my hon. Friend mentioned that the representatives on his local authority were responsible, decent people, the Minister of State nodded his agreement, having visited the area.

I share the delight of my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) that the Bill was not expected or anticipated and that a series of services that were to be included have been removed, as detailed by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw).

My hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) concluded with a vigorous contribution on the problems of his local authority and the financial problems left by the hung council to be dealt with by the present council.

[Mr. Roland Boyes]

We heard contributions from the hon. Members for Halifax (Mr. Galley), for Nuneaton (Mr. Stevens) and for Leeds, West (Mr. Meadowcroft), and—the only speech I have not heard this evening, for which I would apologise if the hon. Gentleman had bothered to stay in the Chamber — for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen). I was glad that he was able to put on record the positive decision of the Labour-controlled authority in Wolverhampton, whose concern for the elderly by making special payments to protect them in the cold weather spell undoubtedly saved many lives in that area.

I also mention that the leader of the Wolverhampton council, Mr. John Bird, will be our Euro-candidate in the European elections. I realise that the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West will find it impossible to utter the words "European Parliament" with his reactionary attitude. [AN HON. MEMBER: "It is an Assembly."] No, it is a Parliament and it has been deemed to be a Parliament.

We are clearly of the opinion that John Bird will enjoy a good victory in the forthcoming midlands elections. I take this opportunity of wishing him well.

We are discussing a Bill that reminds me of a bus with its wheels taken off. A host of matters that we anticipated have been blocked out of the Bill — for example, competitive tendering, contract compliance and powers to strengthen local ombudsmen and their relationship to new towns. Obviously, Opposition Members welcome that move.

We are debating yet another Bill that affects local government. From the Secretary of State's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) we know that the Government have introduced 43 Bills that directly affect local government. Many of them are in serious financial difficulties. Whether the Government intended to control spending and cash-raising powers or generally add to the mass of existing legislation, the effect is the same. Hon. Members and officers are finding it increasingly difficult to take decisions that are in the interests of the people that they represent. In fact, Derrick Hender, the local government adviser of Coopers and Lybrand Associates, said:

"If asked for a statement of key tasks many chief executives would simply state 'survival'.

That is no reflection on individuals who struggle against ever mounting odds but it emphasises the pressures caused by political upheaval or indecision, tight resource constraints and a hostile Government attitude."

Local government, like business, needs to plan. It needs to be able to formulate rolling programmes. However, local government has existed in conditions that are a continuing nightmare. Since the summer recess, many Bills have introduced retrospective legislation on matters that have been proved in the courts to be illegal Government actions. Bills have been introduced to rob local authorities of essential cash. In fact, immediately after the Division this evening, the concluding stages of the Rate Support Grants Bill will be discussed. A consequence of this Bill is that a further £400 million to £600 million will be taken from local authorities. Because of grant recycling, local authorities would have shared that sum, but the Government decided to end recycling. In support of that, the Government use dubious arguments, one of which is that local authorities cannot be certain of the amount that they will receive. Therefore, the Government are introducing certainty into local government finance. The uncertainty about how much a local authority will receive is replaced by the certainty that it will get nothing.

The Bill also further increases the power of the Secretary of State and civil servants. That has been a feature of successive Bills, ranging from the abolition of a whole tier of local government to giving increasing powers over local authorities and the power to discriminate between them.

By virtue of the Local Government Bill the Secretary of State will increase his authority and power over local government by the creation of consent procedures on housing and detailed regulations on deferred purchase. The chief executive of a major north-east local authority described the present processes as a continuing erosion of local government, which is a weakening of one of the strengths of our democracy—that politics is able to play a real and constructive role at local as well as at central level in Parliament. Eroding the scope and opportunity for local politics can only weaken the development of a mature and responsible political system. Politicians of all parties should be alert to that trend and seek to reverse it.

There are real dangers and related consequences if central Government continues to abuse the power of local authorities and their ability to serve their communities. In an article on the "Agenda" page of the *Local Government Chronicle*, George Jones and John Stewart stated:

"The decision may or may not be agreed with but it should be the right of the local authority to make it and be held accountable for it to its voters.

An elected local authority exists to make such choices. There will always be disagreement about the exent of local choice but it is critical that a council should itself decide how to organise its services."

There is a very real need for capital expenditure on our towns and cities. Many of the problems faced by the inner cities—housing, unemployment, social service needs and infrastructure renewal, to cite only a few of them—are horrendous. To begin to solve some of those very real and visible problems requires not only the injection of capital but local authorities which are able to determine needs and priorities and to decide how to make the best use of their scarce resources.

Local authorities spend a considerable amount of time on determining how to make the most effective and efficient use of their resources. This Bill increases the problems that local authorities have to face and therefore the problems, both social and economic, of the people they represent.

In addition, projects that require capital injection— for example, to protect the infrastructure — obviously become worse when starved of funds, and the cost to future generations is on a geometric, not linear, scale. Local authorities are being forced to pass the buck to our children. We have an obligation to provide for future generations. The Government are guilty of neglect, which I shall illustrate by considering the consequences of clause 1.

On 22 July 1986 the Secretary of State made an announcement in the House of Commons about his proposals for the rate support grant settlement for 1987-88. One aspect of that statement concerned capital expenditure. The Secretary of State said:

"I shall therefore introduce legislation to ensure that prescribed expenditure is incurred in the proper year regardless of when the local authority pays. This will apply

to all advance and deferred purchase arrangements, and other arrangements with a similar effect, entered into after midnight tonight."—[*Official Report*, 22 July 1986; Vol. 102, c. 183.]

Clause 1 brings into effect the consequences of the announcement that was made in July 1986 about the Secretary of State's intention to introduce legislation to negate the benefits of advance and deferred purchase schemes.

These schemes were being used by some local authorities as a means of either accelerating or deferring the impact of capital expenditure for prescribed capital expenditure control purposes, but I must emphasise that these activities were perfectly legal.

The words "scandal" and "reckless" were used by the Minister this evening. How can legal activity, supported by hard-headed, competitive business men, be reckless? I shall return to that point in a moment.

A deferred purchase scheme is the means used by a local authority to spend money on a capital project — for example, a sports centre—and to defer the time when the council spends the money over a few years. A financial institution is used to pay another company to build the project over a given period—say, three years—and the council repays the financial institution over, say, eight years. For an authority, in particular a small authority, the building of a major but necessary project—for example, a sports centre—could force major cuts in its planned capital budget. A local authority keeps within its capital allowance by spreading the cost. In effect, the bulk of the planned capital programme can take place in the short term and the sports centre can be built.

It is clear that by such means—strictly legal devices — local authorities have had more flexibility in scheduling their capital projects. Local authorities know quite well that the payments they eventually make will count against their capital allocations in future. However, the Association of Metropolitan Authorities makes two important points. First, the local authority and the finance company concerned are well able to assess the likely calls on the capital allocations of future years. Secondly, the Secretary of State will be substituting his discretion on the wisdom and appropriateness of deferred advance purchase schemes for that of local authorities.

However, on 22 February 1987 the *Local Government Chronicle* said:

"'But City financiers always carefully examined any deferred purchase arrangements before lending', said Jack Halligan of Butler Till. 'The money market has been looking very carefully at named authorities for a long time now, and business has still been carried out'".

Why must this process take place? The problem is that present capital allocations are inadequate. The treasurer of a county council told me in confidence that some local authorities have had to enter into these schemes because capital allocations have been dramatically reduced and the capital expenditure control system does not allow sufficient flexibility to enable authorities to respond to the needs of their areas. The treasurer says:

"It is not surprising that, faced with appalling problems, some authorities have found these schemes offer the only real alternative to a continued decline in the state of their capital assets."

The decline in the state of capital assets is caused by the Government, who are seeking to enforce their harsh regime of controls on the capital expenditure of all local authorities.

Since 1978-79, local authority capital expenditure has dropped by 41 per cent. overall and by 60 per cent. on housing. There are some illustrative figures in the September/October issue of *Community Action*. Only 33,000 new public sector houses were started in 1985, compared with 170,000 in 1976. Some 39 per cent. has been cut from capital expenditure on schools since 1981, £500 million needs to be spent on maintaining primary schools, and a further £700 million on secondary schools. Spending on local roads has been cut by 34 per cent. in real terms from 1976 to 1983 and £176 million extra needs to be spent on roads just to stand still.

The Association of Metropolitan Authorities has published a table of figures, produced by the Department of the Environment, which shows a massive reduction in gross local authority capital spending from 1976-77 to 1986-87 in real terms at 1984-85 prices. In 1976-77, the figure was £7,898 million and by 1986-87 the gross amount had been reduced to £3,952 million. In reality, the figures have almost been cut in half and mercilessly slashed. The massive swingeing cut is a backcloth to the problems that are faced by local authorities. I shall quote what one person has said:

"Into what state of decay is our physical environment to be allowed to sink before the Government recognise the distinction between just spending money and investing it to create real jobs and real wealth? Will we have to wait for a typhoid epidemic or some other disaster before the Government will permit essential expenditure on infrastructure in our towns and cities?" — [*Official Report*, 18 December 1984; Vol. 70, c. 167.]

That was the right hon. and learned Member for Hexham (Mr. Rippon).

Clauses 2 to 4 introduce specific statutory powers to give legal assistance to the private sector and require the Secretary of State's consent for the new power. Clause 2 deals with powers of local authorities to enter into leaseback schemes with housing authorities or other bodies through the arrangements which have been made subject to a consent procedure under which the Secretary of State will have to approve the terms of the scheme. These consents can be conditional, unconditional, specific or general as to class benefits, which can be provided and revoked at any time.

The Minister, in considering whether to grant a consent, has to take into account whether an authority should bear the financial burden and risks of acquiring, constructing, concerting, rehabilitating, improving, maintaining or managing any property and he may take into account any other matters that he considers relevant. In short, Ministers may do whatever they wish in terms of granting or not granting consents.

Clause 3 also contains retrospective provisions. Under clause 3(4) everything done by a housing authority after midnight of 5 February 1987 in pursuance of such a scheme which was not signed by that time and which would, after enactment of the Bill, have been subject to the consent requirements of clause 3, is deemed to require such a consent. There is little doubt that the announcement by the Minister for Housing, Urban Affairs and Construction on 5 Februay 1987 halted some major schemes. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham Perry Barr, (Mr. Rooker) said:

"The Opposition refuse to do that, but the Minister must be aware that his midnight deadline is causing problems up and down the land. I ask the Minister, while he is consulting on the issues, to reconsider whether he needed that midnight deadline last Thursday." — [*Official Report*, 10 February 1987; Vol. 1406, c. 246.]

[Mr. Roland Boyes]

Again, I ask the Minister to answer the question put by my hon. Friend.

The situation is simply not good enough. No wonder local authority members and officers have such difficulty in administering services when they are treated in such a cavalier way by the Government. It is only because of the devotion and professionalism of the people running local authorities that the system is not plunged into an unworkable morass. It was because of its capable members and officers that Sheffield city council was able to beat the 5 February midnight deadline. The people of Sheffield will benefit greatly by the joint venture between the city council and the United Kingdom housing trust. Some 2,000 houses will be built on land provided by the local authority. Development finance is being provided by the Nationwide building society and a merchant bank. I understand that Ealing council also managed to beat the deadline, but we do not know how many imaginative schemes missed the deadline. We will now suffer the consequences of the Government's action and such schemes may never reach fruition.

This is a bad Bill. It would have been much worse if it had not been gutted by the loss of the clauses that would have contained another major assault on the powers, responsibilities and duties of local authorities. Nevertheless, there is enough in the Bill to affect local government adversely. It will result in less investment in infrastructure, fewer houses being built and consequently more people living in substandard houses, and, even more of a tragedy, an increase in the number of homeless people. The Government's doctrinaire attitude to local government, as illustrated by the number of local government Bills that we have discussed since 1979, is simply strengthening Whitehall and weakening local authorities. This is a dangerous, backward step in the country's democratic process. As a consequence, we shall have no alternative but to oppose it.

9.41 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Christopher Chope): We have had a good debate on this short but important Bill. I shall try to answer as many of the points that have been raised as possible.

I thank my hon. Friends who participated in the debate for the good humour which they showed in the way in which they disguised their understandable disappointment that the Bill is much smaller than we would have wished. In case anybody thinks that we were frightened of proceeding with the compulsory competitive tendering provisions, I assure him that every day that goes by we get more independent evidence of the importance of going down that road. The most recent addition to that mass of evidence is the Audit Commission's occasional paper on competitiveness in contracting out local authority services. The conclusion is:

"The Commission is aware of a wide range of strategies adopted by authorities to avoid tackling the problems of non-competitive in-house services. Quite apart from any legal considerations, such moves are misguided. There is a massive backlog of work outstanding, on council houses and school maintenance in particular. So non-competitive local authority services are, quite simply, destroying value to no good purpose. The proposals set out above are designed to realise the potential value improvements worth some £500 million a year which seem to be available."

It is not necessary for there to be legislation for local authorities to carry out and realise these savings voluntarily. I am disappointed, although not surprised, that Labour Members are not prepared to encourage their local authorities to make those savings, which are there for the asking.

Comments have been made about the disparity between the performance of local authorities in response to what the labour Government were doing in the late 1970s, when they got the economy into such a mess, and what is happening now. It is worth reminding hon. Members that between 1976-77 and 1979-80 there was a 3 per cent. reduction in real terms in local authority current expenditure, whereas since 1979-80 there has been a 12 per cent. real terms increase in expenditure. I do not believe that I am alone in saying that I wish that more of that expenditure had gone on capital projects. If local authorities had controlled their revenue expenditure to a greater extent, more money would have been available for capital projects.

The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) made a number of remarks that cast aspersions upon my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and myself concerning the circumstances in which this Bill had to be reduced in size. At the time of the Gracious Speech it was not apparent just how much work would be involved in the Local Government Finance Bill. It was that volume of work that delayed the preparation of this Bill. Indeed, my hon. friend the Member for Nottingham, East (Mr. Knowles) stressed the importance of getting the measures exactly right. My right hon. Friend was correct when he said in his statement to the House on 18 February that had we waited until all the provisions we had originally intended to bring forward in this Bill were completed there would have been unacceptable delay of a month or more before we would have been in a position to bring forward this legislation for the House's consideration.

Although those facts have been stated on more than one occasion, I am disappointed that the hon. Member for Blackburn has not been prepared to accept them.

Mr. Straw: If those are the facts, will the Minister explain why he categorically told the nation on 4 February that the new Bill would contain all the provisions about competitive tendering?

Mr. Chope: At the time that I made the speech on 4 February, it was the Government's intention to bring forward the Bill as proposed in the Gracious Speech. What changed was the realisation that it would take at least a month, beyond February, to bring the Bill — *[Interruption.]* I do not know whether hon. Members are disappointed about that. However, I am correct in saying that the extra provisions will be introduced a lot sooner than the Opposition would wish.

Many references have been made to the number of local government Bills that have been introduced. However, as soon as we introduce a Bill there is almost always a universal chorus of, "We want another one." I do not doubt that more local government Bills will be brought forward in due course.

The hon. Member for Blackburn discussed clauses 2 to 4 and he made a serious allegation that should be answered. He asked whether certain types of local authority activity would become unlawful under clause 3. The short-term leasing of property by a local authority for

letting to its tenants is not affected by the controls in clause 3. Some leasing schemes which have come to the Department's attention involve the giving of guarantees to housing associations. Schemes of that nature may well require the Secretary of State's consent.

Bed and breakfast arrangements under which local authorities top up supplementary benefit are not affected by clause 3. Care in the community schemes may come within the exemption in clause 3(2)*(b)* or may be exempted from the need for consent if topping-up payments of the type I have already mentioned are invoked. Otherwise, consent may be needed and my Department will be ready to issue specific or general consents as appropriate for such schemes.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) made an all-too-rare intervention in the debate on the affairs of local government. He is a master of local government matters and I hope that we will have the benefit of hearing further contributions from him. He quite rightly referred to the frustration that he and no doubt many other ratepayers in Wolverhampton feel about the fact that that authority has increased its rates this year by 15 per cent. My hon. Friend asked why we were not able to introduce rate capping.

Mr. Greenway: What about Ealing?

Mr. Chope: I will come to Ealing in a moment. Unfortunately, Wolverhampton did not comply with the requirements set down by my right hon. Friend for rate capping. [HON. MEMBERS: "Unfortunately?"] I can assure my hon. Friend that the Secretary of State will carefully consider any authority that is spending and rating at high levels when considering the criteria for selection for rate capping.

My hon. Friend referred more widely to the unacceptable activities of his authority. I entirely share his concern, and I trust that the electors of Wolverhampton will take due note and elect next time a council that will concentrate on its proper responsibilities.

It is worth reminding the House of the very short intervention by the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) in which he made an allegation about Merton council, no doubt related to the forthcoming local by-election. I was surprised at his intervention because he comes fresh from the bruising at Greenwich and is now dreaming another impossible dream that the Labour party will be able to win the by-election in Merton.

I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was aware that we would be able to make contact with Merton so quickly after his allegation and therefore to answer it, but I can assure him that from the conversations that have been taking place this evening it is apparent that the Merton council officers have been asked to bring forward proposals for expenditure this month throughout the borough to avoid an underspend in the current year. As the hon. Gentleman will know, this is common practice not only among local authorities but also in central Government. I am assured that no special consideration is being given to the Pollards Hill ward. Projects are being brought forward throughout the borough.

I think that this is an important factor in a by-election because the electors in Merton will realise that their council is so prudently run that at this stage in the financial year it has extra resources to put into its programmes.

Dr. Cunningham: I am grateful to the Under-Secretary of State for dealing so promptly with this matter. I want him categorically to assure the House and the people of Merton that the instructions from the Conservative leader of the Merton council, Councillor Cowd, that £100,000 should be spent before 19 March in the Pollards hill ward, which is the ward where the by-election is taking place, will not be followed through, but that the expenditure will be considered on the basis of the problems of the borough as a whole and not just those of that one ward. It is his responsibility, he is the leader of the council and is a Conservative, and there is ministerial responsibility for these matters. Will the Minister give the House that assurance?

Mr. Chope: I cannot give assurances on behalf of Merton council, but I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the Conservatives will retain control of that council when the by-election takes place. It is significant that, whenever we are able to answer the allegations, the ground suddenly shifts and an alternative allegation is put forward.

My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, East (Mr. Knowles), in a perceptive speech born of his experience when he was leader of Kingston council, made some excellent comments about the need for local government to behave prudently. He said that in two or three years' time local authorities would have built up massive bills which could only result in either substantial cuts in services or enormous rate increases. He referred to what has been happening in Islington. Hon. Members will know that in Islington there are experts in raising all the "funny money" and in accounting measures designed to disguise from ratepayers the true expense of what is being done. It is estimated that by 1981 Islington will be paying for various creative accounting schemes no less than £11 million a year; and that is on top of the more orthodox debt servicing to which that borough is committed.

The right hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Freeson) made a long speech about the various housing provisions in the Bill, but, rather significantly I thought, he omitted to make any reference to the performance of the London borough of Brent on its deferred purchase schemes. In case anybody is in any doubt about the dramatic way in which the use of deferred purchase schemes can result in burdens being placed on ratepayers and citizens many years in the future, I can tell the House that as a result of the deferred purchase schemes already carried out by Brent, some 16 years ahead—that is, after the year 2000—there will be revenue burdens on the Brent ratepayers of £13 million a year. Those burdens will have to be borne as a result of spending which has already taken place but for which the bill has not yet been paid because of the deferred purchase schemes. I understood from the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes) that the Labour party supports the deferred purchase scheme and thinks that the Government have behaved unreasonably in putting an end to them.

Mr. Freeson: Will the hon. Getleman give way?

Mr. Chope: I will not. This is only a short wind-up speech.

During the debate we have had many reminders of what the Labour party is like when it is in power. My hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Bruinvels) reminded us that last year the Labour council in his area

[Mr. Chope]

increased rates by some 80 per cent. but this year, when facing the electorate, it will increase them by only 4·8 per cent.

Mr. Straw: It faced the electorate last year.

Mr. Bruinvels: It lost two seats—a 7·5 per cent. swing in Leicester, East.

Mr. Chope: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East for reminding me that last year the Leicester Conservatives had one of the best local election results anywhere in the country as a result of that massive increase.

We have heard references to Waltham Forest's 68 per cent. increase in rates this year, which is appalling. Hammersmith is talking about a 50 per cent. increase and Ealing is talking about an 80 per cent. increase. As far as I know, none of those increases was referred to in the manifestos put to the electorate of those local authorities.

For those hon. Members who have not seen *The London Evening Standard* tonight — an excellent newspaper, if I may say so—I should point out that it draws attention to the implications for ratepayers in Ealing of an 80 per cent. increase. It also draws attention to the implications for the health authority in Ealing. The proposed rate increase will add £400,000 to the bill of the health authority in Ealing. That means that some 30 nurses will have to be taken off the staff. That demonstrates that Labour local government in practice is cutting the ability of health services to meet patient need.

The same is true of the massive rate increases on business. For example, the Lyons Tetley company employs a large number of people in Ealing. The additional rate increase will impose the burden of £320 per annum for each employee of that company. That is a totally intolerable burden to place upon employees of any organisation.

During the debate we have heard reference to the Ealing schemes and it has been asked whether they would be caught by the Bill. We are aware of the two housing schemes being planned by Ealing with housing associations and using private finance. Whether the authority entered into legally binding obligations in respect of those schemes before 6 February and therefore does not require my right hon. Friend's consent is not clear. That is primarily a matter for the authority itself and for its legal advisers. However, the housing associations concerned also require the Housing Corporation's consent. My Department has just received from the corporation certain documents relating to the scheme at Drayton Bridge road and is studying those. When we have reached a view I shall let my hon. Friends know the outcome.

This is an important Bill. It is not as large as we hoped at one time that it would be, but it will bring important protection to ratepayers and ensure the effective use of public assets. I commend it to the House.

Question put, That the Bill be now read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 259, Noes 196.

Division No. 106] **[10 pm**

AYES

Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, William
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bigge-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Budgen, Nick
Bulmer, Esmond
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Rt Hon Sir Adam
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Hon A. *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Cormack, Patrick
Corrie, John
Couchman, James
Cranborne, Viscount
Critchley, Julian
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
Dunn, Robert
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Sir Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hirst, Michael
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'lford)*
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irving, Charles
Jackson, Robert
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
McCurley, Mrs Anna
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*

Maclean, David John
McNair-Wilson, M. *(N'bury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
McQuarrie, Albert
Major, John
Mellins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mather, Sir Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Morris, M. *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Osborn, Sir John
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patten, J. *(Oxf W & Abgdn)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ryder, Richard
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Scott, Nicholas
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stokes, John
Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M.
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Trotter, Neville
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Waller, Gary
Wallers, Dennis
Watts, John
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Tony Durant and
Mr. Michael Portillo.

NOES

Abse, Leo
Allon, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosemary
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'fermline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Proven)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Buchan, Norman
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Cartwright, John
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clelland, David Gordon
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llan)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Freud, Clement
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Fife Central)*
Hancock, Michael
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley, N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Janner, Hon Greville
Jenkins, Rt Hon Roy *(Hillh'd)*
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
MacKenzie, Rt Hon Gregor
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Martin, Michael
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter
Prescott, John
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shields, Mrs Elizabeth
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R. *(W'hampt'n NE)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Wrigglesworth, Ian
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tony Lloyd and
Mr. Ray Powell.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Rate Support Grants Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Boscawen.]*

LOCAL GOVERNMENT BILL

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Local Government Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any administrative expenses of the Secretary of State incurred in consequence of that Act;

(b) any increase attributable to that Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other enactment.—*[Mr. Boscawen.]*

Rate Support Grants Bill

Not amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Clause 1

EXCLUSION OF ADJUSTMENTS OF BLOCK GRANT BY REFERENCE TO TOTAL EXPENDITURE OR AGGREGATE AMOUNT AVAILABLE

10.15 pm

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): I beg to move amendment No. 4, in page 1, line 24 at end insert—

'(3) If, pursuant to (2) above, the amount of block grant payable out of money provided by Parliament in pursuance of a supplementary report is less than any amount previously calculated as the aggregate amount available for it, the Secretary of State shall publish in a Report to Parliament any information he has received from the local authority associations on the effects of such a reduction in block grant on the services provided by local government.'.

We understand that the Government have decided to limit by statute to two per day the number of amendments to local government law, so we now come to the second one today, which is the Rate Support Grants Bill.

On Second Reading, we drew attention to the overwhelming objection to the Bill, which is the ending of the recycling of rate support grant. In other words, the objection is to the way in which the Treasury will recover money for itself and reduce public expenditure by removing from local authorities sums which they forfeit by means of penalty,—and it is a penalty, no matter how the Government may describe it.

The amendment underlines that objection. Having allocated rate support grant to meet the perceived needs of local authorities, the Government are taking it away through recycling. We do not have any objection to altering the way in which rate support grant is allocated. Indeed, in a discussion paper on the reorganisation of local government finance, we have said that the income levels of those living in a local authority area should be considered as much as the other factors which are at present considered. We have no objection to considering a fresh and more helpful way of allocating central Government assistance for local government functions, but we object to this Bill, which permits the Government to manipulate such factors as slopes, penalties and negative marginal rates in such a way that the coinage of rate support grant is debased and the support given to local government expenditure is diluted and weakened.

The House may want an analogy. Under the Bill, the Minister will be rather like those who visit a patient in hospital with a box of chocolates. They have ostensibly devoted the box of chocolates to the patient, but no sooner do they reach the patient's bed than the box is opened and it is not the patient who gobbles up the goodies but the visitors. The goodies that are gobbled up by the Treasury will be substantial.

If Brent council, the Minister's local authority, spends 5 per cent. above the level of expenditure estimated for it by the Government, it will lose £12 million under the Bill. That is a deprived quasi-inner-city borough. However, it is not just the inner-city deprived boroughs that will lose as a result of the Bill. If local authorities spend more than 5 per cent. above the estimates given to them, even rich, affluent, areas such as Surrey, the home of many Ministers, will lose £14 million. But is that really amazing, when one considers those areas to which resources should be devoted and where the Government ostensibly say that they are trying to help with things such as the inner-city problem? Nevertheless, if Gateshead—an inner-city area—spent more than 5 per cent. above the Government's levels, it would lose £1·6 million in a year. Newcastle would lose £9 million. Liverpool, which is without dispute an area of great deprivation and poverty, would lose £12 million. Birmingham would lose £14 million and Manchester as much as £22 million.

We have made these arguments before. I shall not discuss them at any great length. It is true that we were defeated in Committee, but we seek in this amendment at least to make the Secretary of State own up to the consequences of the cuts that will result from the rate support grant being recycled, not to local authorities but back to the Treasury. We want him to ask local authorities which services should be cut as a result of rate support grant recycling. Let him spell out those authorities—sometimes Tory, shire county education authorities—in which books will not be available for children and those authorities where fire cover will be withdrawn or reduced as a result of the Bill.

Let him spell out the domains, even the Metropolitan police, where less money will be available for fighting crime and for defending people on our streets and those authorities which will find that they have fewer resources to devote to the problem of homelessness and to deal with bed and breakfast and houses in multiple occupation as a result of the Bill.

By this amendment, we would at least compel the Government to translate the loss of grant into the loss of services. Let them own up to the consequences of their act.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): Amendment No. 4 gives me an opportunity to return to the problem of the South Yorkshire fire service. I thank the Minister for the reply that he sent in a letter to me, but I am afraid that I cannot accept it, because it is wrong. The Minister said:

"Lord Caithness explained to the Authority that the Home Secretary considers the expenditure for 1987-88 yielded by the formula approach in the Local Government Finance Bill is adequate to enable the Authority properly to maintain its existing level of services."

The phrase

"to maintain its existing level of services"

is important. However, the budget is not enabling the authority to maintain the level of services that it has at present.

We explained that there was every likelihood that the new training facility that was being provided will remain empty. There is every likelihood that there will be no recruitment of service personnel and that 50 personnel will be made redundant. There is every likelihood that the machine and the appliance time available will have to be extended, which means that appliances that should be off the road will remain on the road and will cost more in the long run.

I am saying that because of the letter from the inspector of fire services in the Home Office. We must bear in mind the fact that we are now talking about the level of services that has already been reduced to what the Home Office said was required. The chief fire officer of the South Yorkshire county council says that it will have to be

[Mr. Allen McKay]

further reduced under the Home Office figures. There is no way that we can retain the service as it is at the present time.

It is not only Members who represent south Yorkshire constituencies, councillors from that area, the residuary body and the fire service trade union, the Fire Brigades Union, but, more importantly, the chief of the fire services, who are going along with what we think. I shall quote from the letter of the inspector of fire services at the Home Office. He says:

"My inspection clearly could not examine in detail all areas of responsibility and activity, but this year I have concentrated on matters relating to training, brigade structure, appliance manning, fire prevention and finance."

He confirms his

"satisfaction with the level of efficiency and management under the leadership of your Chief Fire Officer."

By those few words, he showed that he accepted that we have an excellent chief fire officer.

The inspector continued:

"During the inspection a visit was made to the recently acquired school premises which are to be used as the training centre for the brigade".

That is likely to be closed. He said:

"Although the premises were purchased at a very reasonable cost there is still a good deal of work and money to be applied . . . the full development of the new centre should be carried out as opportunity permits. The operational and financial advantages of a residential facility should not be overlooked and it may be possible to introduce this on a temporary basis".

In other words, the inspector says that the facilities are necessary. But those facilities will not be opened. The inspector continued:

"I am aware that you are considering a reduction in the number of divisions which may enable some managerial resources to be transferred to operational needs."

That has already been done. We have tried to maintain the level of services that the Home Office said should be maintained.

The inspector said:

"Whilst looking at the structure of the brigade . . . the Authority will need to give full consideration to the outcome of your Chief Fire Officer's review into standards of fire cover."

That review has taken place. We are concerned because fire cover will remain inadequate. As the inspector said:

"fire authorities have been requested to review risk categorisation following the publication in 1985 of the Standards of Fire Cover Report".

In the light of the 1985 report, the fire services are already undermanned and there is every indication that they will be further undermanned.

The inspector said:

"The Inspector did however note that the review of the Fire Precautions Act might require a change in emphasis on inspections and re-inspections and has discussed this with the officers concerned."

But if the men who carry out inspections are moved from the managerial side, how will not only fire inspections but re-inspections, which the Home Office requests, be carried out?

The inspector stated:

"expenditure in the current year will enable the brigade to broadly maintain the level of services provided by the previous authority but it is noted that this has only been achieved by the use of economies having a short term effect."

This means that fire services in south Yorkshire, which are already undermanned, will be severely undermanned.

I suggest that all this should be put above board. A meeting has already taken place, but I suggest that there should be a meeting with south Yorkshire Members of Parliament, a person from the Home Office, a person from the office of the Secretary of State, and the chief fire officer. I have already asked the chief fire officer whether he will come. There should be no politicians at local level, although it would be prudent for the council chairman to attend. The chief fire officer, whom the Home Officer has made responsible for the efficiency of the fire service, is worried. May we have a meeting with him over the table to get this matter thrashed out?

The Minister for Local Government (Dr. Rhodes Boyson): I appreciate, although I do not necessarily agree with, the points made by the hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser). A number of images were presented during the short Committee deliberations. Tonight we heard of chocolates being taken to a hospital patient. We were told that, when the patient wanted to eat the chocolates, they were whisked away. They were a mirage. Undoubtedly, there will be more imagery on the next amendment because of the hon. Gentleman's versatility.

Let us say that a person was in hospital for a week last year and he enjoyed 100 chocolates. This year he would have 105¾ chocolates—a 5·75 per cent. increase. Under this year's settlement, everyone will get about 5·75 per cent. more. People will lose no money and will have more chocolates. The lucky ones will have nine more chocolates, so it is more chocolates for all. If they are very greedy, when they see the trolley coming past with other people's chocolates, they all dive on them and eat them up, and they they are taken away. That is good discipline. We are sorry for anyone who has to go into hospital. The strike of fate is an amazing thing. We know that that sort of thing breaks morale, but if any of those hon. Members are going into hospital they should remember that if this year they had 100 chocolates next year they will have 105¾ chocolates. That is a fine discipline.

10.30 pm

Nobody loses money unless he spends more than the settlement level. I shall consider what the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay) has said about a meeting. As he knows, decisions are made in consultation with the lead department, and we are the sweeper-up department in most respects here. I paid attention to what the hon. Gentleman said and will consider a reply. I have already sent him a reply on a previous query.

I do not want people to get swept away with sweetmeats and chocolates. This is a discipline that the Government are placing on all whereby no one loses anything if he spends at that settlement level; if he spends at less than that level, he gets more. By doing it this way, everybody knows from the beginning of the year how much he will get according to how much he spends. This will help self-discipline to advance on every front.

Mr. John Fraser: The Minister has again reinforced our thoughts about the idiocy of the rate support grant system, in which the less one spends on services and the less one cares for the needs of the citizens, the more support one gets. I do not propose to call a Division on this amendment. We should reserve the chance to vote on Third Reading to express our disagreement with the Bill.

Amendment negatived.

Mr. John Fraser: I beg to move amendment No. 6, in page 1, line 26, at end insert—

'(4) Before making assumptions in relation to different authorities or different descriptions of authorities in a Rate Support Grant Report or any supplementary report, the Secretary of State shall specify in an Order the basis on which he proposes to differentiate between authorities or descriptions of authorities.

(5) An Order made under subsection (4) above shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of the House of Commons.'.

The other issue in this Bill is the ability of the Government to subdivide classes of authorities by having a subdivision within a class which will now be known as a description of an authority. By example, the London boroughs can be divided or subdivided by description as between the inner and outer London boroughs. There is some logic in that because the outer London boroughs are education authorities and the inner boroughs are not.

We understand that the Government wish to make such a distinction in classes of authorities for the purpose of making a supplemental or original rate support grant settlement to deal with the increase in teachers' pay. Secondly, we understand that the ability to subdivide might be used to distinguish between rate-capped and non-rate-capped authorities.

What concerns us about the ability to describe or to have descriptions of authorities as well as classes of authorities — the word "class" is used in the Local Government Act 1980—is that the Government may use this power to subdivide and discriminate between one authority and another. Although the Government have given assurances that they will not do this, I ask for those assurances to be repeated on the Floor of the House—that the only authorities that will be described will be those that are rate-capped or those that are education authorities in London, as against those that are not education authorities in London.

I ask for a second confirmation of an assurance given in Committee relating to clause 2 of the Bill. The Government were asked at the end of the Committee proceedings to give an assurance that the sub-division of classes of authorities into descriptions would not be done so as to have any retrospective effect, and that the only purpose of these powers was to deal with the settlement for teachers' pay. May we have that assurance now?

The amendment would at least give some parliamentary control over the assumptions which will be put forward for different descriptions of authorities. We should know that there will be parliamentary scrutiny about assumptions that are made for, say, the outer London education boroughs and the ILEA. We should indeed be annoyed if we found after the passage of the Bill that different assumptions were made for education authorities within the area of the metropolis, with the powers conferred by the measure being exercised in an unexpected way. We are entitled to have the assumptions put before the House, with hon. Members having a chance to negative orders which, put forward those assumptions.

I urge the Government to accept the amendment and so allow a degree of parliamentary scrutiny over assumptions which may be of considerable financial importance to local authorities and to give an assurance that there will be no retrospective use of the powers in the Bill—in other words, that they will not be operated for the current year. May we also be assured that they will be used only to distinguish between inner London non-education authorities and outer London education authorities and that no distinction in assumptions will be made between ILEA and the rest of the London authorities?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Christopher Chope): I explained at some length and in some detail in Committee the purpose of subsection (3), when I sought to reassure Opposition Members that this provision was innocuous, that it had been inserted for proper and sensible reasons which local authorities should be able to accept, and that it could not be used to discriminate against individual authorities' grant entitlements, even if we were minded to do anything of that sort.

It would appear that I was only partially successful. Opposition Members have taken some note of that explanation. They appear at least to acknowledge the genuine reasons why it might be desirable to assume that rate-limited authorities were likely to spend at their designated expenditure levels rather than at the common assumption that we have used next year for all other authorities. They seem to acknowledge also the need to be able to differentiate between different classes of authority in some possible circumstances. But there is clearly a residue of suspicion that the provision as drafted might be used in some less desirable way, although Opposition Members have not been able to offer any convincing ideas about what that might be or how it could come about.

I will not repeat in full the detailed explanation which I gave in Committee. I will simply reiterate that the purpose for which these expenditure assumptions are used here is to set the grant-related poundage for spending at GRE, which is a national figure. By using a different spending assumption for one authority, or for a group of authorities, the national GRP for spending at GRE is affected, but this would not have a differential effect on the grant entitlement of that particular authority or group of authorities.

As I pointed out in Committee, if for some reason we were to make a wildly different spending assumption for one authority, that could alter the national GRP, but the effect on that authority would be minimal and would be the same for all authorities. I would not be possible by this method to discriminate against one or more authorities' grant entitlement.

With this in mind, the degree of protection which the amendment is presumably designed to set up is entirely unnecessary for what is in all conscience a highly technical but entirely innocuous provision. If Opposition Members and their friends in local authorities cannot accept our assurances about the purpose and operation of this provision, they can exercise their right to challenge in the courts any assumption which they feel to be unreasonable.

As for consideration of these matters by the House, all rate support grant reports and supplementary reports are subject to the approval of the House, and I do not think hon. Members would wish needlessly to add to that burden in the manner suggested by the amendment.

We cannot give a categorical assurance that we will use the description of authorities to cover only rate limits and education authorities. We might want to use it in the future to cover authorities carrying out functions which were not covered by the description of classes — that is, if an authority wished to secede from a joint authority such as

[Mr. Christopher Chope]

a fire board. ILEA is already covered as a separate authority in the existing legislation. It is worth emphasising again that clause 2 is not intended to have any retrospective effect in the sense of validating any past decisions or actions.

For those reasons, I hope that the House will reject the amendment.

Amendment negatived.

10.40 pm

Dr. Boyson: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I hope that the House will support Third Reading of the Bill. It is the second of the three local government Bills that are going through this House and another place. The basis of the Bill is to enable each authority to know at the beginning of the year exactly how much money it will have to spend. Under the previous recycling arrangements, local authorities were given more money, or it was taken back, according not to what the individual authority had done but to what all the 485 local authorities did. The amount of money that was received by a local authority depended on the spending habits of the other 484 authorities. If local authorities overspent, money was taken away from them, put in a pool, and then recycled to all the authorities, including the overspenders. They were punished for overspending and then money was given back to them. I do not think that that system can morally be defended.

I remind the House that there has been an increase of 9 per cent.—£1·3 billion—in rate support grant. That is a very generous settlement. According to the formula, the money has been divided between the 485 local authorities and they have been informed of how much money they are to have. If they spend according to the settlement intention, which is 5·25 per cent., they will keep that amount of money. If, for example, £1 million goes to an individual authority, it will keep that sum. If it spends more than 5·25 per cent., it will lose part of the £1 million, but if it spends below 5·25 per cent., it will gain extra money from the Treasury.

I have a chart that shows what this will mean. If all local authorities spend at 3·75 per cent. — the inflation intention as against the settlement intention—they will receive £150 million more from the Treasury. That is an additional £1·35 billion over last year. If, however, they spend more, they will receive less money. If they spend at 8·25 per cent. instead of 5·25 per cent., they will lose £312 million out of an increased settlement of £1·3 billion. They will, therefore, still be £900 million better off. Every local authority will know exactly where it stands and it will be able to work out its budget for the following year.

Under the previous system, local authorities could not do that. Money was taken from them in some years when they had underspent. It could be called decycling. At other times there was recycling. This is a confusing subject, to say the least, and I am trying to explain it in simple terms. I need a blackboard to explain the system. It is almost like taking a sixth form calculus lesson without a blackboard or textbook and nothing to write on. I shall leave it at that in case we get mixed up even further. However, we are certain that this is a better system. It is a more moral system and it encourages greater self-control.

I shall state my case, as on Third Reading I cannot come back. This time last year, reference was made by the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw)—who led for the Opposition on Second Reading—to speeches that I had made in 1974. I quite enjoyed listening to them again. Reference was also made to a recent speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Chope). We were pleased to hear that as well. It is always nice to hear speeches recalled from time to time.

One year ago, the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) made an attack on the recycling system, saying that nobody could budget. I shall read what he said and state my case on that. He said:

"the local government finance system is now much more difficult to understand and predict than before."

That is because of the recycling.

"The figures issued by the Government on the entitlements on individual authorities are misleading, because they ignore the 'close-ending' factor."

The close-ending factor is another form of recycling, as everybody knows, because all hon. Members are nodding in agreement.

"The Secretary of State cleverly made seductive promises this afternoon to right hon. and hon. Members about what their authorities might get. Does he suppose that responsible councils"—

that is the important key here—

"and treasurers can fix budgets and levy rates and precepts on what they might get after close ending? Of course not."

They did not know what they could get.

"He knows that that is a preposterous suggestion. He knows that no responsible local authority would dream of budgeting on that basis." — [*Official Report*, 20 January 1986; Vol. 90, c. 57.]

That is what recycling was. We are bringing reality back to local government so that it knows how much it will get. A local authority will know that it will get more or less according to what it spends, and it is not dependent on what the other 484 authorities do. The statement of the hon. Member for Copeland is as clear and convincing a statement as we heard this evening on the difficulties and uncertainties that are caused by close ending, or grant recycling, why the Bill is necessary and why it will bring positive benefits to local authorities.

In previous years, a borough treasurer or chairman of finance, in the run up to the new year, had to budget without knowing how much he would receive because it was dependent on other authorities, and budgets were changing every day. Imagine the sleepless nights and collapse of many treasurers and chairmen of committees as a result. It must have been intolerable. For the sake of the health of borough treasurers and the chairmen of committees, something had to be done. It would have been ignoble — I use that word very carefully — of any Government to ignore it. They will all be in bed now, at 22.47 hours, because they know exactly how much they have to spend; they will already have made their arrangements for next year. They cannot make any excuses to their wives now for late nights because they are working—that may be a disadvantage in certain cases.

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): The borough treasurer of one of my borough councils, the Glanford borough council, is taking early retirement this year. Presumably, he is retiring in great happiness as a result of the Bill going on to the statute book.

Dr. Boyson: I did not know about that. Everybody in the House who knows him has a high opinion of that gentleman. Undoubtedly, he would have stayed on had he known that he would have to manage such a complicated

system; he would not have wanted to pass it on to somebody else. He can now retire with a degree of personal satisfaction that he would have considered impossible last year. We wish him a happy and long retirement. We wish all the other borough treasurers and chairmen of committees a happy year, knowing that, having made their budgets they have made them firmly. There will be no worry at night, no late nights. The idea is securely before them this year that borough treasurers and chairmen of committees will next year have one long holiday.

10.49 pm

Mr. Michael Hancock (Portsmouth, South): The Minister should be congratulated on having the neck to come here and make that speech in defence of the indefensible. His comments about borough treasurers will not be lost on them, because many of them will have endless sleepless nights trying to interpret his speech and understand the Bill.

At no time during the passage of the Bill have the Government produced a convincing argument that would ensure that the money earmarked for local authorities will end up in their pockets and not those of the Treasury. I am sure that many other hon. Members will agree that the Treasury will be the only beneficiary of the Bill. The Government have said that no authority need lose any grant, but they know that they have set local authority expenditure assumptions unrealistically low, thereby guaranteeing an overshoot in most local authorities, and a subsequent windfall to the Treasury.

I came here hotfoot from Portsmouth, where we set a rate this afternoon. I voted against a rates increase of just under 4 per cent. That was ridiculously low when one takes into account the miserable conditions in which so many of the people are living. The increase took no account of the real priorities in Portsmouth, but the council had no alternative. Already, it had been rate-capped once, and if the rate increase had been set higher, it would have been rate-capped again. To avoid that, many things that needed to be done will be ignored. Once again, the Minister has shown no recognition of that example or of the many that were quoted in Committee.

The Bill, like other local government Bills, will give the Secretary of State more and more powers. The language in the Bill is vague, but it gives the Secretary of State wide powers that have not been properly discussed either here or in Committee. No proper explanation has been given as to why the Secretary of State wanted those powers and how they would be used. The Minister has not clarified why such strong controls are needed. On determining the principles for calculating grant-related poundages, the Secretary of State can make assumptions as he sees fit, once again ignoring many of the real problems with which local authorities have to deal. That is a sinister step in the wrong direction.

The Government in clause 1(3) take powers to distinguish between local authorities, and that is again a dangerous and worrying prospect. Once again, things will happen and different local authorities will be treated differently, and the Government will be able to shift a local authority from one category to another and inflict grievous wounds on its ability to cope with the problems that it has to face. The wide discretion open to the Government could be a good and a bad thing, and that depends on the Government. Local government must know clearly in law what the position is. Despite all the Minister's good intentions, as he attempts to lighten a nightmare of legislation, that position is not properly clarified. Many local authorities will still be in doubt as to exactly what their position is.

The Minister should admit that the Bill is another attempt to tighten the screw on local government by restraining its expenditure. It does not deal with the problems about which the Minister spoke when he introduced the Bill some weeks ago. The inadequate spending provision, coupled with negative marginal grant rates and no grant recycling, amount to a severe and unfair mechanism for restricting local authority spending. The ending of recycling and with it the Government's ignorance and shunning of the need of local authority expenditure leads to yet another extension of centralised control.

Hon. Members do not need me to lecture them on the pressures and difficulties of too much power at the centre. We have had clear examples, because of the difficulties that Ministers have had of explaining to the House the problems associated with the Bill, of the difficulty that local authorities will have in trying to interpret it. That is why the House should reject the Bill.

10.54 pm

Mr. Roland Boyes (Houghton and Washington): I have listened to the Minister and I can only conclude that he must have got his PhD by studying George Orwell. The Minister has said that there will be an end to uncertainty, but the Government are putting us through a nightmare, week in and week out, when we discuss local government Bills. Those Bills have created absolute uncertainty for local government officers and members. I believe that doublespeak underestimates the powers of the Minister.

This evening we have gone from one Bill on local government to another. This Bill is vital, because it is robbing local government of its money. Parliament will vote for local government to be given a certain pool of cash, but through the Bill the Secretary of State is enabled to distribute to local authorities less money than Parliament has decided that they should receive.

If we study invididual local authorities, we can appreciate what that will mean. Let us consider the borough of Sunderland — I make no apology for choosing that borough, as it is the one that I know best. The Minister is correct that the Bill will give local authorities certainty — the certainty of nothing rather than the uncertainty of not being absolutely sure how much they will receive.

Local government will lose approximately £300 million to £400 million, which equates to a 4p or 5p rate increase for all the authorities. No wonder that Jack Layden, chairman of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, said today:

> "Less than a week after the Courts have found Nicholas Ridley guilty of robbing Greenwich of £4m, he is preparing to push a Bill through Parliament to rob local government of up to £400m".

[Laughter.] The hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) may find this amusing, but his council will suffer exactly the same as my council and those of other hon. Members. He will discover that the consequences of this Bill will be that his council will receive less cash than expected from the amount determined by Parliament. That cannot be right.

Dr. Boyson: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. He is always courteous in giving way. I believe that it was rather unfair for the hon. Gentleman to quote the Greenwich case. The basis of the Greenwich case, as I understand it——

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): The Minister always says that.

Dr. Boyson: One has to say that, because local government finance is complicated. *[Interruption.]* At least we have unanimity on that.

I think that it is unfair to say that the Secretary of State robbed Greenwich of £4 million. The allowance of money on the abolition of the Greater London Council was dependent upon who maintained certain roles. A wrong decision was made as to where the money should go, not by the Secretary of State, but by the staff and one authority—*[Interruption.]* I shall continue. A total of 75 km of road was allocated to the south London borough of Bromley.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): Kilometers?

Dr. Boyson: I think that it was kilometers. That is what I read, but I shall check it tomorrow. I wish we had kept our old currency and had kept inches and feet. Is the hon. Gentleman living in the past, or is he living for the present?

Mr. Rooker: We have not got kilometers.

Dr. Boyson: That is the only thing we have not got. If I had my way I would be more traditional than the hon. Gentleman.

No money was given to Bromley for that road, but the money was given elsewhere. The decision was made by the Secretary of State that the money should go to those who needed it. I do not consider that to be robbery. I think that it is unfair on the Secretary of State for the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes) to say that.

Mr. Boyes: The Minister said that he would not have a second opportunity to speak, and that therefore he would say all he wanted to say on his first go. However, he has said more in his intervention than he did in his speech on Third Reading. He has taken the opportunity to try to mislead the House. We are all aware that the Secretary of State for the Environment has been found guilty in the courts on more occasions than any other Secretary of State in modern times.

The effect on Sunderland will be a grant loss of anywhere between £2 million and over £3 million and we have estimated that to be equivalent to a rate overall of 4 or 5p. Sunderland had this year to reduce the rates by 1·5 per cent. It naturally wants to avoid the penalty of being rate-capped and losing control of its own destiny and finances, and it is the objective of this Government to control local government as a whole.

I want the Minister to take note of this. Conservative Members are always saying that high rates lose jobs. I will illustrate the position in Sunderland this year with a few figures.

A large town-centre store will have an annual reduction over 1986-87 of £5,000 and, if we assume a 4 per cent. increase for inflation, that is £19,000. A large factory has an annual reduction of £5,700 for 1986-87, plus 4 per cent., which is £21,000. All companies probably budgeted for a 4 per cent. increase in inflation. I shall be watching very carefully in Sunderland, which is one of the areas of highest unemployment, to see how many new jobs are created as a result of the borough council's keeping the rates low. One could imagine that, given the extra £3 million from grant recycling, even more could have been done by the borough of Sunderland in protecting jobs, services and the environment for the people it represents.

We listened carefully to the Minister's arguments in Committee. We responsibly, as he acknowledged, put forward our arguments on clauses in the Bill and on a series of amendments, and the Minister was unable to accept them. We are concerned about some aspects of the Bill, particularly clause 1(1)*(b)* and (3), which seem to give a special and unlimited panoply of powers to the Secretary of State. But the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) has gone through those, and I do not want to detain the House further.

Our major concern is the vital, essential cash that is due to local authorities. It was determined by Parliament that the local authorities should have it, and through this Bill they are going to be robbed of £400 million. As a consequence, we are forced to divide the House on this issue. We are against this Bill.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 171, Noes 116.

Division No. 106] **[11.02 pm**

AYES

Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Benyon, William
Best, Keith
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Budgen, Nick
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Rt Hon Sir Adam
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Hon A. *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Cranborne, Viscount
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fallon, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Goodlad, Alastair
Gower, Sir Raymond
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Ground, Patrick
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Hicks, Robert
Hirst, Michael
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jackson, Robert
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey

Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knowles, Michael
Lang, Ian
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McQuarrie, Albert
Major, John
Maples, John
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mather, Sir Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Moate, Roger
Morris, M. *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Osborn, Sir John
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patten, J. *(Oxf W & Abgdn)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Rathbone, Tim
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Ryder, Richard
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Stern, Michael
Stokes, John
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Waller, Gary
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wilkinson, John
Wood, Timothy
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Gerald Malone and
Mr. David Lightbown.

NOES

Alton, David
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Paddy
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'rmline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Buchan, Norman
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clelland, David Gordon
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S)*
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Craigen, J. M.
Cunningham, Dr John
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dormand, Jack
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Freud, Clement
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gould, Bryan
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hancock, Michael
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Martin, Michael
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Michie, William
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Redmond, Martin
Robertson, George
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sheerman, Barry
Shields, Mrs Elizabeth
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'ds E)*
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Straw, Jack
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Welsh, Michael
Woodall, Alec
Wrigglesworth, Ian
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Chris Smith.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Takeover Bids

Motion made and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Ryder.]*

11.15 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): This Adjournment debate is about matters that I have been pursuing for some time in connection with the takeover problems that exist in the City. I have two objectives. They are to seek out the truth about the Guinness scandal, and to see that justice is seen to be done. My hon. and learned Friend the Under-Secretary of State will recollect that I raised the question of skulduggery in the City in my Adjournment debate on 25 July 1985. Sadly, the evidence that I presented on that occasion about Ernest Saunders, Guinness and Morgan Grenfell was not acted upon by the Minister responsible, by the takeover panel, or by the guardian of the City's morals, the Bank of England.

The failure to act resulted in the activities which have become known as the Guinness scandal. The reputation of the City and the good name of many City institutions have been damaged by what I have described in earlier speeches as skulduggery, greed and ministerial incompetence. I wish to make clear that I do not include my hon. and learned Friend or his colleagues at the Department in these remarks. He and his team of inspectors are to be congratulated on the way that they have set about clearing up the appalling mess that he inherited.

Unfortunately, in a matter as complex as the Guinness affair, any investigation or inquiry must take many months. While I have no doubt that all those who are guilty of breaking company law or the takeover code will in time be brought to book, the damage that the Guinness affair is doing to the Scotch whisky industry will, if not arrested, be horrendous.

I should like to draw my hon. and learned Friend's attention to the damage that is being done to what used to be Scotland's most efficient and most profitable independent whisky company—Arthur Bell and Sons. It was a fine company which increased sales and profits every year. It never made anyone redundant, and when it opened new modern blending and bottling plants it bussed the workers from Perth to Dunfermline and from Leith to Broxburn. Every employee was a shareholder, and each year shares were issued to all who worked for the company. An equation was used to work out the issue, and, provided the dividend was covered by a multiple which was fixed and agreed, everyone, from the chairman to the girls in the bottling hall, was allocated the same value of shares.

The company won the Queen's award for exports and technology in the year prior to the takeover. It was a slim, highly motivated company with superb management and a highly motivated work force. This was the company that the takeover panel allowed to be described as having "lost its way". If only every company in Scotland could have lost its way like Bells, how happy we would all be and how different would be the industrial and manufacturing prospects in Scotland today.

Ernest Saunders and Guinness acquired that company. To do so they gave certain firm pledges which persuaded the Scottish institutions to accept the Guinness offer and Scottish merchant banks to join Guinness in its takeover attempt. What were these pledges? They are on page 9 of the Guinness offer document dated 27 June 1985. The first pledge says:

"Bells will continue to be managed from Perth as an autonomous company, subject only to overall strategic direction and normal disciplines of financial reporting."

The second pledge says:

"We guarantee that there will be no redundancies within Bells as a consequence of Bell's joining the Guinness Group."

The third pledge says:

"We have given an assurance that the rights of the employees of the Bells Group will be fully safeguarded and that their conditions of employment, including existing pension rights, will not be adversely affected by our acquisition of Bells."

As I said earlier, these were firm offer document pledges. It is not unreasonable to suggest that the failure to honour the pledges, so solemnly undertaken, must be considered to be against the interests of Bell's employees and shareholders and, I suggest, against the public interest.

I shall deal with each pledge in turn. First, Bell's is no longer an autonomous company. The overseas sales department has been moved to Hammersmith in London, The United States sales operation has been closed down, and the promised advertising in the United States has not been implemented. Export staff have been told that they are being moved from Bell's to Dewars. A Bell's brand has been sold to Lonrho. Bell's premium brand is being sold at a discount and is now just one of the many brands in the Guinness stable.

In a letter to me dated 24 February 1987, the new chairman of Guinness, Sir Norman Macfarlane, states:

"Bell's has been well integrated into the beverage group run by Mr. Vic Steel."

So much for Bell's remaining autonomous. Whatever it is today, it most certainly is not an autonomous company. Therefore the first pledge that I mentioned has been broken, and, what is more, broken deliberately. It did not happen accidentally.

The second pledge has also been broken. There have been redundancies, and more are likely to follow if the practice of discounting Bell's premium brand continues. Brand name and reputation are everything in the Scotch whiskey industry. Unlike beer, whisky cannot be offered at a discount to vendors and the public without destroying the reputation and the up-market image of the brand. Years of hard work can be destroyed in a few months. What price job security if the up-market image of Bell's premium brand is destroyed by down-market trading practices? That may turn stock into money in the short term, but it will destroy the brand in the long term. Redundancies in Bell's would then become inevitable and be a direct consequence of Bell's joining the Guinness group.

The third pledge about employee rights has also been broken. As an independent company Bell's issued shares to all employees. The share issue was dependent on the company being able to cover the dividend by an agreed multiple, as I said earlier. Each year every employee was issued with the same value of shares. The chairman and managing director received the same issue as the girls on the bottling line. In today's circumstances, which have been widely reported in the financial press, Guinness may not be able to pay a dividend and certainly it is unlikely to cover the dividend by the agreed multiple. Today *The Scotsman* has a headline which reads:

"City alarm over Guinness profits.".

I shall not bore the House with all the details, but the article clearly states that provisions will have to be made for certain problems. I shall deal with those problems later.

Consequently, the employees of Bell's cannot expect to receive an issue of shares, as they would have expected under their independent management. The problem cannot be blamed on adverse trading conditions. It is the direct consequence of the way in which Guinness has been managing Bell's and the rest of the Guinness empire. More than £200 million has been moved out of the Guinness group of companies on the instructions of the directors.

Possible lawsuits and massive claims for damages are also in the pipeline. Legal opinion in Scotland is now coming round to the view that every shareholder of Guinness, Distillers and Bell's will have grounds to claim against Guinness that their interests have been adversely affected by the Mafia-like manner which has been the Saunders' way of managing Guinness. The mind boggles at the sort of legal nightmare that may be ahead. The lowest claim for the total volume of damages that may be faced by Guinness in cash terms is put at £500 million. That is a conservative claim. I have heard it put as high as £1,000 million in some other quarters.

I remind my hon. and learned Friend the Minister that Bell's did not wish to be taken over. He will also remember that at the time when Bell's was attempting to offset the Guinness efforts to take it over I and other Scottish Members fought vigorously to prevent it, especially the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), who has a long and distinguished record of doing everything he can to protect his constituents who are affected. I remind my hon. and learned Friend that Bell's employee shareholders did not sell out to Guinness. Each and every one refused the Guinness offer, although it could have given them thousands of pounds in their hands. Not for Bell's employees was the quick and easy buck. How different they are to the likes of Ernest Saunders and others who were motivated by greed. Bell's employees wished to remain independent.

What has been the reward for such loyalty? Let me examine the circumstances of the export sales staff. The overseas sales employees are being moved to Distillers, their export organisation in the United States has been scrapped and individuals have been made redundant, contrary to the Guinness pledges. Export and sales executives have had their salaries reduced by 25 per cent. and a new salary has been introduced which requires them to achieve given case sales targets against profitability and personal assessment. They have also had a reduction in the class of travel they enjoy and the quality of hotels used. All that is in contradiction to the firm pledge about conditions of employment.

Is there a message for the Government in all this? I believe that there is. It is that if we, the Government and the Conservative party, are serious in our attempt to persuade firms to issue shares to employees and to introduce share incentive schemes to encourage better production and to improve loyalty to the company, we must also have measures on the statute book which protect employee shareholders from predators like Ernest Saunders, the Guinness directors and merchant banks such as Morgan Grenfell. If we do not have such statutory powers, we must introduce them now.

Part of the message must also be that legislation, such as the Fair Trading Act 1973, must be applied in every possible legal manner to protect the interests of employee shareholders. As Winston Churchill used to prescribe, what is wanted is "action this day". Failure to act will lay the Government open to the charge that the Conservatives can find time to introduce measures to protect employees from unfair trade union activities, but they have neither the time nor the will to implement present legislation or to introduce new measures to protect employee shareholders.

If it was right—I believe that it was—to introduce measures to allow employees the right to work, it must also be right to protect employees from the likes of Ernest Saunders and the other directors of Guinness who have corporate responsibility for what happened when he was in charge.

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Walker: No.

The Guinness family directors and the executive directors appointed by Ernest Saunders should not be allowed to keep the spoils. They sat in the board room and allowed the Guinness affair to happen. If the directors are allowed to retain control of Bell's, the employee shareholders and others whom we may wish also to become employee shareholders cannot be blamed if they decide to have no part in schemes which embrace the issue of shares as part of an employee's working conditions.

My warnings were ignored in July 1985, but I hope that they will not be ignored today. Indeed, in some ways I was treated like a leper, but I was no leper; I saw the leopard's real spots and drew attention to them. Bell's is slowly being killed off by a thousand changes. The company, which was an institution in Perthshire, is disappearing. It was unique in Perthshire. There was no other company in that area like it.

The only way to prevent its destruction is to disinvest it from Guinness and restore it to the former directors and the employee shareholders. I am confident that there would be no problem in raising City finance for such an operation.

On another aspect of this unhappy and sad affair, my hon. and learned Friend the Minister is aware of my quest to find the truth about the Guinness takeover of Bell's. He knows that I have supplied him and his inspectors with all the information that I have. He has received copies of all the correspondence that I have received. Some of the correspondence has been most unflattering to myself, but I have made sure that my hon. and learned Friend and his inspectors received it.

I draw my hon. and learned Friend's attention to my recent correspondence with the present chairman of Guinness, Sir Norman Macfarlane. In particular, I draw his attention to the 14 questions that I put to Sir Norman in my letter of 16 February 1987, and to the questions in my letter of 25 February 1987. I remind my hon. and learned Friend of those questions. In my letter of 16 February I asked Sir Norman:

"1. Why did Mr. Peter Stevenson of Noble Gossart write to you in terms which specifically stated 'that Raymond Miquel and Bell's must not be sold down the river by the General Accident'?

2. Why did Mr. Peter Stevenson, who, I have been advised, may be a business associate of yours, subsequently leave Noble Gossart?

3. Why did you not offer to Raymond Miquel the Bell's Chairman, the chance to put to you a non-executive director of the General Accident the case for Bell's remaining independent? I am advised that you do admit to meeting

[Mr. Walker]

Ernest Saunders a number of times during the takeover, so why did you not give the same even-handed treatment to Bell's?

4. Can you confirm that the Executive at the General Accident responsible for this kind of investment, Mr. Ian Menzies, was on vacation when the decision to sell out to Guinness was implemented?

5. Can you confirm that on the Monday of the last week for acceptance of the Guinness offer, the General Accident sent to Morgan Grenfell their acceptance of the Guinness offer with strict instructions that the acceptance was not to be announced until after the Friday deadline, because the General Accident did not wish to be seen to be 'selling Bell's down the river'?

6. Can you confirm that Andrew Gifford, a former Personal Assistant to the Liberal Leader, Mr. David Steel, M.P. and Mr. Gifford's company, GJW, were advisers to Guinness during the Scotch Whisky takeovers?

7. Can you confirm that you were invited by Ernest Saunders to join the Guinness Board?

8. Can you confirm that Bell's sales and marketing employees have had their mode of travel and accommodation standards reduced and that their salaries have been reduced by 25% and also that the new salaries are dependent on profit achievements, whisky case sales and personnel assessments?

9. Can you confirm that Bell's premium brand is being offered for sale at a discount and that the famous Bell's label may soon be changed?

10. Can you confirm that some of the Bell's Head Office staff will soon be transferred to Dewars and that the promised Bell's sales drive and advertising in the USA has not been implemented? And also that there has been substantial reductions in UK advertising, including the cancelling of solus spots?

11. Can you confirm that the Cherrybank Gardens Trust will continue to enjoy the support of Guinness and that the Chairman of the Trustees will continue to serve in that capacity?

12. Can you also confirm that the Bell's house in Hay Street, which has been used by Perth women who were in difficult circumstances, will continue to allow the women access in the future?

13. Can you confirm that Bell's other good local deeds, such as support for children's parties and activities, will continue?

14. Can you state what the Guinness Board intend to do about the pledge given to myself and other Scottish MPs and also, I understand, to Mr. Peter Tyrie, that the Gleneagles Hotel was to become the flagship of an international group of hotels?"

My two questions in my letter of 25 February were:

"Can I ask you to confirm that you told me 'that Ernest Saunders, whom you described as a liar, had during the Bell's takeover offered you the chairman's post at Bell's?'

Can you also confirm that you said 'that as Bell's were a competitor of your firm's major customer—Distillers—you were unable to accept the offer?'"

Another question which I put to Sir Norman at the meeting with him on 18 February, and which he did not answer, was: if Sir Norman was not involved in the decision by General Accident, why did he write to General Accident requesting that the decision with regard to the Bell's investment should not be taken in his absence? Sir Norman was afraid that he was going to be absent from one of the meetings.

My hon. and learned Friend the Minister is aware that I believe that a concert party was in operation during the Guinness takeover of Bell's. Such a concert party would be against the takeover code. Consequently, Sir Norman's failure to answer my questions is not clever. It will encourage the view that Sir Norman has something to hide, and it would be very sad if that view were encouraged. In view of the track record of senior Guinness officials and appointees, it would be unfortunate if Sir Norman were to be wrongly branded.

Another question which has never been adequately answered is why the leader of the Liberal party—I warned him that I would raise this matter—who had no constituency interest and no knowledge of Bells, should have said that he advised Bells shareholders that

"the best interests of Bell lie in accepting the Guinness bid without delay."

He continued:

"in the interests of the shareholders and of the future security of Bell's trading position, the investors in Bell would do well to accept the Guinness bid without waiting for further damage to be caused by maverick manoeuvres."

I remind my hon. and learned Friend the Minister of the agreement by Guinness to pay the merchant bank advice costs of Bells director, Peter Tyrie. This agreement was made during the takeover and no declaration of that agreement was made by Guinness or Mr. Tyrie during the takeover and the Quayl Monro account was paid. The value of this account was £51,000. It was material to the way that Mr. Tyrie behaved and had an impact on the way in which the institutions reacted to his breaking ranks.

I believe that there is sufficient evidence for my hon. and learned Friend the Minister to declare that the public interest is affected by what happened during the take-over and since. Yesterday, I received a written answer from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to my question asking

"what criteria he uses in deciding the degree to which the public interest is involved in matters falling for decision by him."

He replied:

"There are no absolute criteria. The matters taken into account depend on the circumstances of the case and the relevant legislation."

I love the nice, wide, sweeping choice which is available. I hope that my hon. and learned Friend has noted that the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Wilson) in a ten-minute Bill proposes the setting up of a Scottish takeover panel. That is merely a manifestation of the effect of this matter in Scotland.

I hope that my hon. and learned Friend will respond positively to my speech and will give hope to my constituents who work for Bell's and wish that fine company to be disinvested from Guinness and restored to independence.

11.38 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Michael Howard): My hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) is to be congratulated both on his success in securing this Adjournment debate and on the determination with which he pursues issues such as this which he considers important to his constituents.

My hon. Friend has raised this evening a number of concerns relating to recent takeover activity and my Department's role in monitoring both the conduct and the impact of takeovers. I cannot, as he will appreciate, comment on all the aspects of the particular case which he has mentioned tonight, and which indeed he has raised with me on a number of occasions in the past, for these are still under consideration, but I shall respond to some of the points which he has raised and illustrate some of the

procedures and powers at my Department's disposal for examining takeover bids and any potential public interest effects which they may have.

I do not believe there to be any justification in my hon. Friend's criticism of my predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Sir A. Fletcher), who replied to the debate in 1985. It is impossible to act in circumstances such as these unless there is sufficient evidence on which to act, as I shall demonstrate. I do not believe it would have been appropriate for my hon. Friend to institute an inquiry on the basis of the evidence which was available to him.

The motion on the Order Paper refers to the role of the DTI in monitoring takeover bids. The Department's main role relates to the period before a proposed acquisition takes place. There are well-established procedures for this under the Fair Trading Act 1973. The Act lays down a three-tier procedure, under which the Director General of Fair Trading has a duty to advise my right hon. Friend, in respect of all mergers involving a transfer of assets of at least £30 million, or a market share of at least 25 per cent. whether the merger should be referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. Our policy is that references are made primarily on competition grounds, though the possibility of reference on other public interest grounds is not excluded.

The MMC is required to consider whether the merger is likely to operate against the public interest, and report to the Secretary of State. Only if the MMC reaches an adverse public interest finding does the Secretary of State have discretion to prevent the merger, or take other steps which he considers appropriate to remedy the adverse effects identified by the MMC. In the case of a completed merger, one remedy open to him would be divestment of the merged enterprises.

Hon. Members will also be aware that a review is also under way of the law and policy on mergers and restrictive trade practices. As far as mergers are concerned, the review is focusing on the legislative framework provided by the Fair Trading Act and the policy which is applied within that framework. We have had a large number of submissions to the review and these are being considered carefully. Work on this is continuing; but one thing is already clear—that there are no easy or straightforward answers to the complex issues which have been raised.

As my hon. Friend is aware, power to refer a merger normally lapses six months after the event. If, however, it appears to the Secretary of State that material facts are brought to his notice or made public that were not disclosed at the time, he has a discretion whether to make a reference to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. If the commission makes an adverse finding, the Secretary of State has discretion to remedy or prevent the adverse effects identified by the commission through the normal powers available to him.

My hon. Friend is particularly interested in this provision, and has suggested that it might apply to Guinness's takeover of Bells in 1985. I cannot comment on that or any other particular case, but I must stress that the power has never been used, and before using it my right hon. Friend would need to be satisfied on two counts: first, that "it was or might be the case" that previously undisclosed material facts had been brought to light—that is, facts which were material to the original decision as to reference but which were not disclosed at the time; and, secondly, that there was a genuine public interest issue to be addressed by the MMC. His decision would have to be made in the light of all the circumstances prevailing at the time.

One of the grounds upon which my hon. Friend argued for divestiture was that Guinness had not honoured a number of undertakings in the offer document sent to Bell's shareholders, but departures from undertakings or intentions expressed in an offer document do not necessarily argue for annulment of an offer which succeeded and has been carried into effect.

This is not to say that no consequences should attach to an offer document containing statements which the offeror knows to be false or misleading. Section 13 of the Prevention of Fraud (Investments) Act provides for criminal sanctions in such a case. My hon. Friend will not expect me to comment on the possibility that a particular person or persons may have committed a breach of the criminal law. The inspectors who are already conducting inquiries will be looking into the matters which he has raised.

I hope that—although there is a limit to the extent to which I have been able to comment on the specific case about which I know my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North is concerned — I have been able to demonstrate that we have in place a range of measures to scrutinise both the conduct and the effects of takeovers. We are, however, ready to acknowledge that recent developments—for example, in the volume of mergers and the conduct of takeovers—may be making new demands on our law and policy. For these reasons, we are currently engaged in the review that I have mentioned.

11.44 pm

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): I think my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) was most unfair to Sir Norman Macfarlane and the new management of Guinness, who have set out to develop the whole of the Guinness beverage empire in Perth, to the advantage of that area, and to develop the Scots whisky industry as one would hope. It would be quite unfair that this should go——

The Motion having been made after Ten o'clock and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at sixteen minutes to Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 4 March 1987

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT

Tameside

1. **Mr. Pendry** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will meet a deputation from Tameside district council to discuss the 1987-88 urban programme and Tameside's non-inclusion in the programme to date.

The Minister for Housing, Urban Affairs and Construction (Mr. John Patten): My hon. Friend, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, met the leader of Tameside and others on 9 December 1986 to discuss our proposals to direct urban programme resources to the areas of greatest need, which I confirmed at the end of January 1987. My right hon. Friend has recently written to the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyme (Mr. Sheldon) about this same issue.

Mr. Pendry: Notwithstanding that, will the Minister say that he will meet a deputation? If so, when he meets it will he show an element of flexibility and understanding? Since Tameside was excluded from the urban programme, the situation has become worse in my constituency. Some 400 jobs were lost this week, in an area where the unemployment rate is about 30 per cent. If, after those figures, the Minister is still not convinced, will he read the first chapter of a book that was issued this week entitled "Left Behind", written by David Selbourne, who is not a supporter of the Labour party. He paints a dismal picture of my constituency. If the Minister enters those talks with a fair mind, I believe that he will grant the aid that Tameside richly deserves.

Mr. Patten: All the 1987-88 urban programme moneys are now allocated. The hon. Gentleman's constituents saw my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary to discuss this issue, and we saw delegations from other parts of the country. As a result, some changes were made to the list. The consultation process was extremely useful

Mr. Robert Sheldon: The Minister will recall a brief conversation—very brief, I accept—that I had with him in December 1986, and a further conversation with his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, where I expressed my involvement and intention to seek such a meeting. It is a great pity that the decisions were made before the meeting between the three Members of Parliament and the local authority. Will he reconsider the decision in the light of my representations?

Mr. Patten: The right hon. Gentleman is a right hon. Gentleman, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State would be prepared to see him at any time to discuss these issues. My right hon. Friend is not in a position to make any changes to the urban programme allocations as already given.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Will the Minister explain his decision? Will he accept that on every count of social deprivation Tameside has at least as many problems as the neighbouring authorities of Oldham, Rochdale and Manchester? Surely there is a strong case for bringing aid into Tameside? Do he and his colleagues know where Tameside is? Will he accept that the east side of Manchester has the same problems as are suffered by the surounding towns — declining cotton mills and other problems.

Mr. Patten: The hon. Gentleman is wrong. We are aware of the socio-economic problems that face boroughs around Tameside, and we know exactly where Tameside is. The unemployment level, discounting the additional 400 job losses that were mentioned by the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry), remains about the national average. Most areas that are receiving inner urban programme help have average unemployment of around 18 per cent. We are seeking to concentrate help where it is most needed. That process of concentration has been welcomed by the Opposition Front Bench.

Mr. Pendry: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In view of the unsatisfactory nature of that reply, I give notice that I shall raise this matter at the earliest opportunity on the Adjournment.

Inner City Areas (Housing)

2. **Mr. Simon Hughes** asked the Seecretary of State for the Environment what evidence his Department has on the feasibility of building new houses and renovating old property for housing in inner city areas; and what plans he has to fund such housing initiatives.

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Nicholas Ridley): I have no doubt about the feasibility of housebuilding in the inner cities—private housebuilders are already building about 12,000 homes a year in these areas.

I shall continue to support housing initiatives in inner city areas by using public money to attract substantial amounts of private investment.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I call Mr. Anthony Steen. Oh, we had better have Mr. Hughes first.

Mr. Hughes: I am grateful for your enthusiastic invitation, Mr. Speaker. Has the Secretary of State seen the house price survey by Campaign for Homes in central London which shows that, last year, the average house price in north Southwark was £160,000 Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the real need is for cheap housing to rent and affordable housing to buy, at about £40,000? As we see on today's tapes that house prices have risen by more than 25 per cent. in London during the past year, can he give an assurance to young couples and others that there will be affordable housing for them in our capital city?

Mr. Ridley: Housing is a local authority responsibility. I keep being urged by the Opposition Front Bench not to

take responsibilities from local government, but the hon. Gentleman is trying to involve me in a local authority problem. There are large numbers of empty council houses in London and other parts of the country. If they wished to, local authorities could use those houses to house people whom they cannot house themselves.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am sorry to have whetted the appetite of the hon. Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen), but I think that I shall have to call him later. I call Mr. McLoughlin.

Mr. McLoughlin: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, in view of the huge number of empty houses in some parts of London, legislation is required to force councils to sell houses on a homesteading basis after they have been empty for six months, thus giving people an opportunity to buy houses at prices that they can afford?

Mr. Ridley: My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Pawley) introduced a sensible Bill under the ten minutes rule in that regard and I shall be very tempted to support such a Bill if local authorities do not carry out their statutory function to house people in the capital.

Mr. Raynsford: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the private sector has a great many more empty properties than has the local authority sector, and that the worst offenders are Government Departments, who are the landlords of the highest proportion of vacant property? What action will he take to get his colleagues to put their own house in order?

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Gentleman invites me to take action on all three fronts. He never knows, I might.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels: Is my right hon. Friend aware that in Leicester at the moment there are 947 empty houses of which 77 have been empty for more than one year? Does he agree that even if private investment comes forward, the council is obviously opposed to receiving any help, does not want to build any more council houses and wants to keep tenants in run-down housing? Is that not a disgrace?

Mr. Ridley: It is quite clear that there is no point in building more council houses in areas such as my hon. Friend's constituency where there is already a surplus. If we are as short of land as all hon. Members think and we want to operate a thoroughly restrictive planning policy in the countryside, the consequence must be that we make all available homes available for occupation by people who want them, whether they be in the public or the private sector. That is the only conclusion of a restrictive planning policy.

Dr. Cunningham: May I take up the Secretary of State's suggestion that he would like to act on all three fronts to solve the problems of homelessness — the local government sector, the private sector and where the Government are landlord? If he brings forward comprehensive proposals along those lines, he will have a great deal of support from this side of the House, not least because the growing homelessness in Britain is a social scandal. It is resulting in an economic cost which in 1985-86 in London alone was £26 million for bed-and-breakfast accommodation. The people in such accommodation are getting an appalling deal from the Government and ratepayers and taxpayers are paying through the nose for it. It is a scandal and the right hon. Gentleman ought to act on it.

Mr. Ridley: I am delighted to hear of the hon. Gentleman's apparent last-minute conversion. I look forward to meeting him behind the Speaker's Chair after questions to get his signature on that.

Mr. Hickmet: Does my right hon. Friend think that to have masses, or a large proportion, of the nation's wealth tied up in private housing in inner city areas such as London is a fabulous waste of resources? Does he agree that the amount of rented property available has been reduced from about 40 per cent. of what used to be available to under 10 per cent., and that unless and until he bites the bullet and decides to abolish rent control, that position will continue in inner city areas such as London for years to come?

Mr. Ridley: The private rented sector has declined from about 6 million to about 1·5 million homes. We cannot afford that loss of accommodation if we are to house all those people who are looking for housing. My hon. Friend makes a point upon which I hope we shall come to have unanimity in the House so that we can tackle the problems about which this question asks.

Council House Waiting Lists

3. **Mr. Flannery** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the total number of people on the waiting lists for rented council houses of all types at the end of 1986, together with the numbers for each of the 10 largest cities.

Mr. Ridley: Criteria for including people on waiting lists differ from council to council, but English authorities reported that 1·35 million households were on their lists in April 1986. I am placing the figures for the 10 largest authorities in the Library.

Mr. Flannery: Does the Secretary of State remember that an answer to a question from me a few weeks ago about how many council houses the Government have allowed to be built, showed that the number was 74,000 in 1979 and steadily dropped to only 19,000 last year? The right hon. Gentleman admits that there is a waiting list of, I think, 1·3 million and has said that he will give the actual figures for the 10 largest cities later. There is a massive queue of people and homelessness all over the country, as my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) said. It is insufficient to say that there are plenty of empty houses. Why are the Government not allowing houses to be built not only to provide employment but to provide homes for those who need them?

Mr. Ridley: The waiting list is a notoriously bad measurement of housing need. Many people who are on a list are already housed or just want a transfer. Some are on more than one list, and some apply for council housing as an insurance in case their preferred housing plans fall through. In Sheffield there are currently 8,750 empty houses, 5,500 of them in the private sector and the rest public housing. It makes no sense for the hon. Gentleman to advocate a massive house building programme when there are 8,750 empty houses in his city.

Sir George Young: Would not the number on the waiting lists in London be reduced if the accommodation

that many people were offered was in slightly better condition? What has been the response to my right hon. Friend's Departments' generous offer to local authorities in London for extra funds from his Department to bring back into better use some of the grotty estates in the inner London area?

Mr. Ridley: The estate action programme has received greatly increased resources—£75 million next year—to bring much-needed funds for the repair of the worst council estates, wherever they may be. I regret bitterly to have to tell the House that Brent and Lambeth have refused assistance from that source for the homeless. I hope that all local authorities, including those in London, will avail themselves of the help that the Government have brought.

Mr. O'Brien: Will the Secretary of State investigate the scandalous position that is developing in my constituency in the Rothwell area of Leeds where British Coal has just released an estate where the houses were empty for five years? The houses are now defective and British Coal refused to sell them to tenants. Now they have been sold to a private operator who is asking five times the previous rent but has carried out no structural strengthening of the houses. They are defective. Something should be done to ensure that this racket does not continue. Will the Secretary of State investigate the scandalous position that has developed in my constituency.

Mr. Ridley: I am always happy to investigate any problem which is brought to my attention. Obviously, the hon. Gentleman cannot expect me to know about that matter before I have had a chance to study it. On the general question on British Coal houses, my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing, Urban Affairs and Construction and I have written to all right hon. and hon. Members who have raised the problem and have explained the present position, and I think that that has satisfied them.

Mr. Fallon: Is my right hon. Friend aware that Labour councils in the north-east have some 10,000 empty council houses ready for occupation now and have had for some five years? Will my right hon. Friend be a little more radical and bring forward legislation to allow the homeless to homestead in houses that are difficult to let?

Mr. Ridley: My hon. Friend is right. It is possible for local authorities in housing stress areas to take on empty houses which are ready and available in other parts of the country to house the people whom those authorities cannot house. If local authorities are not going to get their housing act together and house those people and to use their massive resources, I agree with my hon. Friend that more drastic measures will have to be taken in the interests of the homeless.

Mr. John Fraser: Will the Secretary of State stop giving us what is called in the pop record industry a remix of alibis, excuses and gimmicks? Will he admit that the number of homes built to rent last year by local authorities was the lowest in 62 years, that the housing investment programme net of capital receipts was the lowest in real terms since HIPs were invented and that, even during the past three years the number of repair and improvement grants, which would bring some private homes back into use, have dropped by 100,000? Does not the right hon. Gentleman understand that, if the private owner and the local authority are starved of resources, we are left with lengthy queues, homelessness and all the other scandals of poor housing that exist today?

Mr. Ridley: Does the hon. Gentleman realise that there are about 760,000 more homes than there are households? What is the point in the hon. Gentleman getting up day after day and advocating massive council house building when there is a surplus of council housing in many parts of the country? There is a problem in London, but the hon. Gentleman must realise that there is not overall a national problem.

Mr. Gow: Does my right hon. Friend agree that if we could bring into use a majority of the 113,000 empty council houses and flats, it would have a dramatic impact on council house waiting lists? Does my right hon. Friend agree that if we could bring into use private sector properties that are at present underused or unused and which are available, but which the landlord is unwilling to let because of the Rent Acts, we would be able to solve the problem completely?

Mr. Ridley: I agree with my hon. Friend. The Audit Commission estimates that, with streamlined letting procedures, a further 20,000 local authority dwellings could be made available in London. That would be another massive increase in the available stock. Inefficiency in the letting procedures is another reason why there is a housing shortage in London. I repeat: we must tackle the misuse of existing housing stock before we go into the expensive idea of building lots of new houses because we cannot be bothered to let the old ones properly.

Homeless Persons

4. **Mr. Alton** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to increase the availability of hostel accommodation for the homeless.

Mr. John Patten: Finding accommodation for homeless people is primarily the responsibility of local authorities under part III of the Housing Act 1985. The Government are, however, assisting the provision of temporary hostel places for the homeless in various ways, including in particular the widely welcomed new provision through the Housing Corporation.

Mr. Alton: Given that, in reply to an earlier question, the Secretary of State queried the use of waiting lists as a guide to the number of homeless people, will he dispute the figures provided by Shelter that show that up to 100,000 people will present themselves as homeless this year, and that, by summer, no temporary hostel accommodation will be available for homeless people in London? As the Minister just said that he thinks that more temporary accommodation should be made available, what will he do about it? Does he agree that the problem has been compounded by encouraging young people to become a nation of Dick Whittingtons, to leave the great northern cities, to travel to London and find that the streets are not paved with jobs? They end up living in cardboard cities in conditions that are nothing but undignified.

Mr. Patten: We recently announced the funding of a major programme of analysis into the causes of homelessness by the Birmingham university centre for urban and regional studies. It has been widely welcomed by all lobbying bodies involved, including Shelter. That

programme will help to shed some light on the first of the four questions that the hon. Gentleman asked. I shall make a couple of other observations on his other questions if I may.

Mr. Speaker: No.

Mr. Patten: I shall not, in that case.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Minister should answer, but I ask for single questions, otherwise it is unfair to other hon. Members.

Mr. Patten: That is precisely why I asked for your permission, Mr. Speaker, to answer the last three questions. I did not want to see any unfairness to the hon. Gentleman. The hon. Gentleman is well aware that in his own area of Liverpool there is no need for anyone to be homeless because there are about 8,000 empty council properties in Liverpool alone.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Does my hon. Friend accept that the best way to solve the problem of homelessness is not to provide more hostel accommodation—to take up points raised earlier during Question Time — but to bring about amendments to the rent legislation to bring on to the market the private rented units that are currently available but which private landlords cannot afford to put on to the market, and to bring forward public accommodation in the ownership of local authorities which, with rehabilitation, could be made available? Therefore, will he make more money available for the rehabilitation of public housing and amend the rent legislation?

Mr. Patten: My hon. Friend has given us a lot of food for thought. The private rented sector could provide considerable amounts of accommodation through refurbishment to house the homeless. It is exactly co-operation with the private sector, through the Housing Corporation to which we are looking to try to fund additional temporary hostels for the homeless which will be so important in placing people in permanent accommodation.

Mr. Rooker: I reiterate to the Minister the offer made by my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) that if he comprehensively operates in all three areas, we shall do all that we can to facilitate the matter. It is a scandal. Does it worry him that there have been press reports in the past couple of weeks that 40-bedroom hotels in London which changed hands for £750,000 three years ago, are now changing hands for several millions of pounds. It means that the owners can clean up at the expense of the taxpayer and the ratepayer by using three hotels for bed and breakfast accommodation? The Minister cannot ignore that scandal any longer.

Mr. Patten: It is precisley for that reason that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made available to the Housing Corporation enough money to bring in between £50 million and £70 million of investment in hostel accommodation, largely in London, which will make the use of bed and breakfast accommodation unnecessary. That is precisely my right hon. Friend's policy.

Community Charge

5. **Mr. Heathcoat-Amory** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representations he has received about the likely collection costs of the proposed community charge for England and Wales.

The Minister for Local Government (Dr. Rhodes Boyson): We have received a number of representations about the operation of the community charge, including the cost of collection.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Does my hon. Friend agree that domestic rates are a fair way of financing genuinely local services if other items of expenditure such as education are taken out and funded by central taxation? Therefore, will my hon. Friend be cautious before he introduces a community charge, with its rebates, exemptions and collection difficulties?

Dr. Boyson: I have heard what my hon. Friend has said, but there is an overwhelming feeling about rates being unfair to many residents. The great advantage of the community charge is that everybody who is voting is paying something towards the cost, whereas in Lambeth and Liverpool, where there are nonsensical councils, only one voter in five pays anything.

Mr. Park: Will the Minister now answer the question? What are the likely collection costs of the community charge?

Dr. Boyson: We referred to that question in the Green Paper. It is likely that the cost will be double the cost of the collection of rates. However, when people realise that local authorities are spending their money, I believe that local authorities will be much more careful about how they spend that money. There is no doubt that this is one of the best financial bargains for this country.

Mr. Squire: Does my hon. Friend not accept that some very reputable organisations have suggested that the nature of the charge is such that many people who may be assessed will none the less avoid payment, particularly in the inner city areas where they will stay in one place for a mere two or three months? Is my hon. Friend satisfied that it will be possible to recover the community charge as easily as rates?

Dr. Boyson: I welcome my hon. Friend's question so that I can take further the educational course of Opposition Members on the community charge. It is not an annual charge; it is a monthly charge. Most people do not move every month. Some people do not move every year. The head of each household has to list the people who are living in the house and the local authority then has to collect the community charge. I have no doubt that this can be done.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Is the Minister aware that the introduction of the community charge in England, particularly in west Cumbria, will massively increase the amount of money that is paid for what, in effect, is only a substitute for rates? Is he aware that if one compares the figures with those for Scotland, the substitute rate payments by people in Maryport, Workington and other towns of west Cumbria will double and in many cases will triple? Is that what the Government call fairness in local taxation?

Dr. Boyson: I do not quite follow all the hon. Gentleman's comments, or where his figures come from.

If a local authority is spending £2 million a year and raises a proportion of that sum from the rates, it will raise a quarter of its expenditure from the community charge, and that will be the equivalent of the rate income. If the local authority is more careful about its expenditure, the amount that is levied will be less. By spreading this cost more widely many people, including the old-age pensioner and the one-parent family — about whom we have "bleeding hearts" stories from Opposition Members all the time—will be better off than they are under the present system. *[Interruption.]* They will be considerably better off. They will pay only one charge. If they are living in a house with two or three bedrooms, they will be paying two or three times more than that. Those are the mathematics of it.

Mr. Marland: As my hon. Friend is aware, Gloucestershire county council is now under alliance control. Is he aware that for the second year running it has voted for substantial rate increases? Will he introduce the community charge as soon as possible to stop the alliance squandering other people's money?

Dr. Boyson: I believe that the expenditure increase in Gloucestershire over two years is about 41 per cent. That council is under alliance control. Therefore I welcome my hon. Friend's question. We presume that when there is a wider spread of the community charge, fewer people in Gloucestershire will be under alliance control.

Mr. Straw: Is the Minister aware that the Opposition are very grateful to him for his admission, for the first time, that the cost of collecting this bureaucratic poll tax will be double the cost of collecting rates in the long term? Will he confirm the estimate of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy that, in the interim, the cost of collection will be four times the cost of rates? Will he also confirm that his own consultative document on the poll tax says that there will be Orwellian checks on residents before they can use local services? Why did the Minister seek just now to mislead the House as to the burden on one-parent families and old-age pensioners? Is he not aware that at the moment old-age pensioners and one-parent families pay nothing towards the rates but that under this poll tax proposal they will pay a substantial amount?

Dr. Boyson: It is very difficult to catch up with all the questions that have been asked. There has been no attempt to mislead. The Green Paper gave the figures. The position is the same as in Scotland: it will be about twice the present cost. The basis of the community charge is to ensure that those who are using the services are paying something towards the cost of those services. That will end the nonsense from the hard Left in so many councils in London.

Mr. Rathbone: Whatever the advantages in budgetary terms or in terms of local government finance, would not my hon. Friend accept that there are strong electoral disadvantages in bringing into taxation people who are as yet not in taxation by spreading that sort of tax across the whole population in the way that the Government plan?

Dr. Boyson: I do not go along with my hon Friend's view. I am working through my mind exactly what he is saying. My own view, and the view of the Government of which I am part, is quite clear. One of the problems around the country now is that a smaller and smaller proportion of those who vote are voting to spend other people's money. In places such as Manchester and Liverpool only two out of every nine are paying. The other seven are voting to spend the money of those two. That is why there is nonsense expenditure and nonsense in the councils there.

Land Use (Circular)

6. **Mr. Andy Stewart** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will meet members of the Nature Conservancy Council to discuss the draft circular on planning and agricultural land.

11. **Mr. Adley** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many representations he has received about his new draft planning circular; and if he will make a statement.

15. **Mr. Pawsey** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what response he has received from the Countryside Commission to his draft circular on planning and agricultural land.

The Minister for Environment, Countryside and Planning (Mr. William Waldegrave): The Countryside Commission welcomed the draft planning circular in a press release of 11 February; the chairman of the Nature Conservancy Council welcomed the package of measures, including the extension of environmentally sensitive areas and farm, forestry, which my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food announced at the same time. The formal consultation period on the circular continues until 10 April.

Mr. Stewart: I welcome my hon. Friend's answer. Will he say that, when he meets the Nature Conservancy Council, he will reassure it that there will be no change in the Government's green belt policy?

Mr. Waldegrave: Yes. My right hon. Friend and I have been making that crystal clear in recent days to the Nature Conservancy Council, the Countryside Commission and anybody else who may ask. Since the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) is present in the Chamber, I should say that I have seen another report today in the *Daily Telegraph* saying

"Labour will build in Green Belt."

My hon. Friend should be addressing his question to the Opposition, who are clearly proposing encroachment on the green belt.

Mr. Adley: Is my hon. Friend aware that overdevelopment is the overriding political concern of most of my constituents, certainly, most of those who live in south-east Dorset? Is he aware that the test of the Government's intention will not be speeches and ministerial directives, welcome as they are, from my hon. Friend and his colleagues, but the contents of the circular? Will he give an assurance that the changed policy will provide unequivocal legal guidance to inspectors in his Department to give environmental consideration the highest priority when determining appeals?

Mr. Waldegrave: Yes. I am delighted to reassure my hon. Friend, who has a great interest in these matters, that my right hon. Friend's draft circular says, for the first time, that the overriding privilege given to agricultural land as productive agricultural land now has to be replaced by a balance between the needs of the economy and the needs of the environment itself. Surely, in modern times, that is

the correct balance. It is difficult to deal with such casually, badly edited and misleading comments as were heard, for example, on the introduction to the Nick Ross phone-in on BBC Radio 4 yesterday, which was a completely misleading and shoddy account.

Mr. Pawsey: Is my hon. Friend aware that the circular will be regarded as a major step forward, particularly in rural areas? For the first time it establishes the primacy of the environment, which will do a great deal to reassure small companies and businesses that are being set up in some of our rural areas, specifically within former farm buildings that are no longer required.

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is right. His point of view is echoed by the chairman of the Countryside Commission, who made the same point in a press release. We have to look at the economic health of the villages and small towns and at the conservation of the environment. That is the balance we need to keep.

Mr. Hardy: Since the principal motivator of change was supposed to be the agriculture surplus, particularly the cereal surplus, will the Minister discuss with the Nature Conservancy Council the weakness in the Government's position, which is demonstrated by their apparently complete disregard of grade 1 and grade 2 agricultural areas, where the surplus is produced, and where the landscape features and hedgerows have been largely obliterated?

Mr. Waldegrave: I think that the hon. Gentleman is a little out of date. My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has completely changed the whole grant structure in those regions. Grants can now be obtained, for example, for the replacement of traditional hedgerows and so forth. My right hon. Friend is now developing schemes for the planting of farm woodlands. Those proposals must be welcomed by the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) and other hon. Members.

Mr. Livsey: When will the Minister be able to make a more detailed statement on agricultural land and planning? What is he doing to safeguard the position of county structure plans?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman may not be aware of the procedure. Under the procedure, a draft circular is produced for comment. If the hon. Gentleman would like to read the draft circular he will find all the detail that he needs and perhaps he might then like to comment on it.

Dr. David Clark: In his discussions with the Nature Conservancy Council on the proposed draft circular, will the Minister take the opportunity to raise the threat to the site of special scientific interest in the Black Mountains which is currently threatened by the spraying of herbicides? Does that not prove the point that it is more important to get our present land use system in operation correctly rather than to rush ahead recklessly with further threats to the countryside?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman's point is a long way from the draft planning circular. However, under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 proper procedures are in place for the protection of SSSIs, which I know that the hon. Gentleman supports. There is no question of our recklessly charging ahead. The hon. Gentleman would be rightly critical of the Government if, against the changes in the agricultural needs in the country, we did not bring forward sensible policies for alternative land use and for the health of the rural communities. He would be right to criticise us if we did not do that.

Mr. Ralph Howell: Is my hon. Friend aware that the Norwich health authority has turned down four possible sites for the new hospital on the grounds that the sites are of high agricultural value? Is that not an absurdity?

Mr. Waldegrave: It is impossible for me to comment on a particular application from the Dispatch Box. However, the point of my right hon. Friend's draft circular is that we must now balance the needs of the environment for its own sake against the needs for particular development and not give overriding and automatic privileges to agricultural production.

Bathing Beaches

7. **Mrs. Clwyd** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what responses he has received to his announcement of 3 February in respect of new bathing beach designations.

Mr. William Waldegrave: There has been a generally favourable response from water authorities, the press and interested parties.

Mrs. Clwyd: As the Minister knows, many of the beaches are filthy and do not conform to EEC standards. What is the estimated cost of bringing them up to EEC standards? Are the Government to make the money available and if so, when?

Mr. Waldegrave: First, the water authorities are self-financing and this must be something for water consumers to pay in their charges. The hon. Lady has asked about the time scale. We have just less than £300 million in the programme until 1990. I suspect that if we continue to spend at about that rate the programme will be finished towards the end of the century. That is a reasonable spreading of the programme so that there is not too much burden on water consumers in the short term.

Mr. Steen: Although the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. Hamilton) may not be aware of this, three of the most beautiful beaches in the west country are in South Hams. They are also the most heavily polluted, because raw sewage comes straight out of a pipe that was built before the war right under the beach. Will my hon. Friend the Minister comment on that because it is seriously affecting tourism and the South-West water authority has said that it can do nothing about it?

Mr. Waldegrave: I was aware of that, as my hon. Friend constantly tells me about the beauty of the South Hams beaches. He has made a serious point about the resources involved and that must be for discussion within the context of the corporate plans of the various water authorities. It is worth my hon. Friend remembering that we have just now managed to restore the real terms cuts made by the Labour Government when the country surrendered control of its investment programmes to the IMF in 1976. We have just got back in real terms to the investment level of 1976.

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton: Is the Minister aware that I am looking forward very much to fighting the hon.

Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) on those beaches, and that the House is glad to see the hon. Gentleman here more than it used to?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman has already started his campaign, using some of the effluent matter, which is probably how he will continue.

Mr. Terlezki: Does my hon. Friend agree that Wales depends a great deal on tourism? Since about 20 million British people will be taking their holidays abroad, is it not imperative to spend more cash to ensure that Welsh beaches are up to European standard, so that we can attract more tourism to the Principality?

Mr. Waldegrave: Indeed. I paid a very enjoyable visit to my hon. Friend's constituency last week and the point was made about the importance of tourism and of the beaches to tourism. The programme is steadily under way. Often, the investment is big, takes a long time and must secure planning permission; it cannot just be rushed through. A solid programme is under way.

Mr. Hancock: Does the Minister recognise that many water authorities are totally inadequately funded and do not have the resources, and that to wait until the next century to clean up those beaches is an indictment of the Government? Will he consider giving resources to improve the south coast beaches, especially in south Hampshire? Would it not be more appropriate to give some of that money to local authorities to do it now rather than to wait? Will the Minister confirm that his Department will consider the problem seriously and will not leave the under-funded water authorities to deal with it?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman has got it a bit back to front. Southern Water was one of the water authorities which most strongly welcomed my recent announcement on this. Resources cannot be conjured up magically. This must be paid for by someone, and there must be a reasonable programme so that it does not cost too much in the short term. They are often big investment projects that cannot be conjured out of the air.

Mr. Boyes: Is the Minister really telling the people of Britain that they have to swim in raw or macerated sewage until the end of this century? The World Health Organisation, the European Community and the United States Environment Protection Agency have said that there is a potential health risk in swimming in sea water contaminated by raw sewage. Why do the Government continually ignore the standards that they have set? How can the Minister take such a negative, uncaring, irresponsible and parsimonious attitude? It is no wonder that the EC is taking the Government to court over their attitude.

Mr. Waldegrave: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman should have fallen victim to understatement in this matter. The truth is that well before the end of this century, all our principal beaches will be clean. More than half of our 380 bathing beaches already meet European and World Health Organisation standards. There is no health risk, and the hon. Gentleman does a disservice to the House by using such scare tactics.

Homelessness

8. **Mr. Patchett** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his latest estimate of the number of homeless persons in England.

12. **Mr. Dubs** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the number of homeless single people in London; and how many of these are estimated to be sleeping rough.

Mr. Ridley: In the year ending 30 September 1986, local authorities in England accepted responsibility for 101,280 formerly homeless households, and found them accommodation.

I am concerned that a number of people are sleeping rough in London. But as they do not qualify under the homelessness legislation, there are no soundly based figures on their numbers, nor on the number of homeless single people.

Mr. Patchett: Does the Secretary of State recognise that the lining of the pockets of landlords and hoteliers is not the answer to this problem? Does he not think that it would be better to give the money to local authorities to build homes? does he recognise that the Government's policies on the homeless merely exacerbate the problem?

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Gentleman has not quite got it right. Half of those who are accepted as homeless are put into permanent local authority housing immediately. For the rest, a very large amount of empty local authority housing could be used if only authorities would manage it efficiently. I agree that there is a problem while people who are accepted as homeless must be put into temporary accommodation until permanent accommodation can be found. We have produced extra resources for the Housing Corporation to try to assist in the stress areas.

Mr. Dubs: May I put it to the Secretary of State that in London many single people can neither afford to buy nor to pay private sector rents and that as they are being completely missed out by local authorities, especially by Tory-controlled Wandsworth, they have no alternative but to sleep rough or to find somebody else's floor to sleep on? Is it right that a whole generation of single people should be left out of the housing market altogether, with no prospects for the future?

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Gentleman knows that most such people would be eligible for housing benefit, so it is not a question of not being able to afford the rent. He also knows that, as I have said, there are about 750,000 more houses in this country than there are households.

Mr. Dubs: Not in London.

Mr. Ridley: It may conceivably be a good idea for such people to go to somewhere where there is a home, rather than to sleep rough in London.

Mr. Hill: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the whole problem started with the well-intentioned private Member's Bill, introduced by the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Ross), the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977, in which it was visualised that we could provide homes for everyone who cared to move to another area? Has that not created a vast problem? Does he have in mind any way in which that Act could be reviewed because it promises too much and creates terrible problems for local authorities, especially in the south?

Mr. Ridley: I do not think that any quarter of the House feels that the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act should be repealed. It makes it clear that it is those who have a local residence qualification to whom the local authority has an obligation, if they are accepted as

homeless. However, there is a great deal of acceptance of people who do not have the proper residence qualification and that is making the problem worse in those scarcity areas.

Mr. Greenway: Is my right hon. Friend aware that his comments are absolutely right and that in Ealing the 50 homeless families on the list which the new hard-left council inherited from the previous Conservative council last May at a cost of £300,000 a year have now been swamped by 500, who have been drawn on to the list by the abolition of residence points? That means that local people have no chance at all and that people are sucked on to the list from all over the country and the world. That list is expected to number 1,000 next May, at a cost of £5 million. Is that not ridiculous?

Mr. Ridley: I am sure that my hon. Friend's figures are correct, although I have no confirmation of them here. May I add that if such councils spent less money on nonsensical and irresponsible things—heavens knows they are charging high enough rates—they could afford to house their own people. They should stop wasting money on nuclear-free zones, gays and lesbians and such things.

Dr. Cunningham: Can we have less of the crass and insensitive stupidity of the Secretary of State for the Environment? Should people who are without work take the advice of the chairman of the Conservative party and go looking for jobs, or take his advice and go elsewhere looking for homes? Are the Government so incompetent that they cannot give people decent houses and the opportunity of a job?

Mr. Ridley: It is crass and incompetent of the hon. Gentleman not to realise that it is better to find a home where one is empty, than to sleep out on the pavement if one does not have to. Housing is the responsibility of councils. In London, where the Labour party is running so many councils inefficiently, the Audit Commission has stated that about £20 million a year is wasted on totally frivolous national issues and spending of the sort that I have mentioned. That £20 million a year would easily solve the problem of London's homeless if those councils got their priorities right.

Mr. Meadowcroft: Will the Secretary of State accept that no Member of this House wants to keep a single house empty for a moment longer than is necessary, but that that will not necessarily do much to help the problem of homelessness? In the borough of Tower Hamlets the officers estimate that one fifth of the amount that is allowed under rate capping must be spent on the homeless, because of the mismatch of the empty properties with the needs of the homeless.

Mr. Ridley: Why does the borough of Tower Hamlets have six mini town halls, six town clerks, six sets of administrators, and six lots of bureaucrats? If it had spent all that money on housing the homeless, it might have got somewhere.

New Building

10. **Mr. Andrew MacKay** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of new building took place on recycled or derelict land in 1986; and what is his Department's estimate as to whether that proportion will rise or fall.

Mr. Ridley: In 1985, the most recent year for which figures are available, 47 per cent. of land used for development had previously been developed or was vacant land in urban areas. I hope that that proportion will remain substantial.

Mr. MacKay: Does my right hon. Friend agree that there will be far less pressure for development on greenfield sites in my constituency and elsewhere if more derelict land in inner cities is brought to market? Has he thought of introducing some sort of land value taxation which would encourage this land to be brought to market as soon as possible?

Mr. Ridley: I agree. The figure of 47 per cent. is by far the best that we have ever achieved and I hope that it will get better still. Rather than tax unused, derelict land in inner cities, the Government are subsidising it. It is being brought back into use through the derelict land grant, the urban programme and now the urban development corporations in the relevant areas. We are much more likely to get a quick and ready take-up of, and useful employment for, that land if we make it available in good condition and cheaply rather than if we simply tax it.

Mr. Rooker: Does the Secretary of State think that it is as unrealistic to claim that all inner city derelict sites should be built on as it would be to say that all new build should be on greenfield sites? When he approves derelict land grants will he bear in mind that in my constituency builders were forced by a scarcity of land to consider digging 10 acres of tipped waste which was 15-years-old—no one knew what was there—with massive potential environmental damage? They have pulled back from that, but builders and developers should not be placed in that position. That is why the matter must be considered with greater sensitivity.

Mr. Ridley: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. In some parts of the northern industrial areas where, unfortunately, there is a massive decline in population, there will be room for increased green space above what there has been previously. I have asked the new urban development corporations to take that into account where they can do so. In some of the bustling, overcrowded cities of the south it will not be easy to accommodate all the people whom we have been talking about at Question Time today and to provide increased green space.

Estuaries (Conservation)

13. **Mr. Kenneth Carlisle** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will establish a register of the current development proposals which affect conservation interests in the estuaries of Great Britain; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: No, Sir. My Department is aware of a number of proposals, some of which would seem to have major impacts on ecologically important estuaries; others less so. Each individual proposal would have to be assessed on its merits at the time.

Mr. Carlisle: Is my hon. Friend aware that our estuaries are threatened by development as never before? Does he accept that 90 per cent. of the birds that overwinter here do so in 37 estuaries and that most of those 37 estuaries are now subject to development proposals? In view of that

massive threat to wildlife in our estuaries and because of our duties under the Ramsar convention will he undertake an urgent review?

Mr. Waldegrave: I shall certainly bear my hon. Friend's suggestion in mind because what he says is important and true and many proposals seem to be coming forward at present. Some do not have such dire effects as my hon. Friend suggests, but others are serious. It is open to an inspector or a planning committee to consider the cumulative effect of the developments and it is important that they do so in due course.

Mr. Allan Roberts: Is the Minister aware that one development on the Mersey estuary involves a sewage plant which will, for the first time, take raw sewage from the Liverpool area and treat it so that it is not pushed into the Mersey? That treatment is only a primary treatment, so that solids do not go on to Blackpool beach, but other pollutants will. If the water authorities are self-financing, as the Minister said earlier, will he release them from public sector borrowing requirement restrictions and allow them to borrow the money to do the job properly, so that when Mr. and Mrs. Ramsbottom do not take Albert to the zoo, where he would be eaten by a lion, but take him instead to swim on the beach, he will not get poisoned by pollution?

Mr. Waldegrave: At Question Time today we have already considered the brass neck that is necessary for the Labour party to talk about investment in the water industry because it slashed the industry to pieces. I am sure that the scheme which the North-West water authority is introducing will have proper environmental consequences and will be properly designed.

London Marathon (County Hall)

14. **Mr. Canavan** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had about the continued use of county hall for the London marathon.

Dr. Boyson: My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State with responsibility for sport met a delegation of hon. Members and the race director, led by the hon. Member on 14 July last year.

Mr. Canavan: Is the Minister aware that if the marathon organisers are prevented from using county hall, the finishing line for the race will have to be switched and, in terms of participation, the event will be downgraded from its international status? Will the Minister use his influence with the London residuary body to try to ensure that any future occupant of county hall agrees to give the marathon organisers the continued use of county hall for just one weekend in the year?

Dr. Boyson: I know that many hon. Members feel strongly about the marathon finish remaining at the building erstwhile called county hall. We have no locus in this matter, but we have spoken to the residuary body and it will speak to any prospective buyers pointing out the advantage of the marathon continuing to end at county hall because of the nearness of Westminster bridge and Big Ben and because of the publicity that finishing spot brings and will continue to bring to anybody who buys county hall.

Mr. Harrison *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Is this a point of order?

Mr. Harrison: I want to speak on this subject.

Mr. Speaker: Bad luck.

Mr. Harrison *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman knows that Question Time ends at 3.30 and that it is now 3.31.

Written Answers

3.32 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I think it is well known in the House that written answers are getting printed in *Hansard* a little late at the moment. There is a backlog and they are often up to two days behind. This has concerned quite a lot of hon. Members throughout the House, but one of the things that has puzzled me of late is the fact that certain answers are able to appear in *Hansard* ahead of the sequence of written answers.

I take for example the issue of *Hansard* dated Wednesday, 25 February. The written answers in that issue are dated 23 February, but at the end of them there is one page on which there appears one answer from the Secretary of State for Education and Science announcing the membership of a committee which appears to me to be an inspired question. It gets the full-page treatment and will be printed, no doubt, again at a later date. I understand the practice is that it will be subsequently printed at a later date.

The same thing occurs in the issue of 4 February, where again the answers are for 3 February except for one, a reply from the Minister of Transport, which again is a lengthy statement which is singled out and printed ahead of the other answers.

I took this up with the Editor of the *Official Report* and, after explaining at some length the problems that he believes are causing the delay of written answers in general, he says that the question and answer I referred to

"were printed out of sequence because I have instructed that 'topical' questions resulting in 'policy' statements should be given priority, that being intended to be generally convenient."

Who decides which is a policy statement which should have this topical treatment? Does it not open up the possibility that those answers which the Government wish to be seen are printed on the day in question, particularly those to which they wish to attach press releases and circulate around, whereas those which the Government would find embarrassing are buried two or three days later in the written answers?

It may be, Mr. Speaker, that it is envisaged that all hon. Members should have access to this procedure and should be able to say, "My question is extremely topical and the statement, or the reply that it will evoke is an important matter of policy". If there is to be such a procedure could we all know what it is and be quite sure that it is not accessible to the Government alone?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member raises an important matter. I was not aware of the matter, but I shall certainly look into it and communicate with him.

Taxis (Members' Entrance)

3.34 pm

Mr. Eric Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): I should like to ask for your guidance and assistance, Mr. Speaker. The Select Committee on House of Commons (Services) has issued its report on minutes of proceedings for Tuesday, 17 February 1987. In that report item 3 relates to, "Taxis at Members' Entrance".

It states:

"That the privilege of queueing for taxis at Members' Entrance should be restricted to Members, Peers, Officers of the House and the spouses of Members and Peers if accompanied by the Member or Peer in question".

That means the end of the practice that has been accepted in this House ever since I have been here—that staff other than Officers of the House and Members, have the right to queue and that journalists and other people have the right to queue. I am asking for an opportunity to discuss this pompous asses' decision, because that is what it is.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not think that such an experienced hon. Gentleman should call other Members of the House, who are members of the Select Committee, pompous asses. I hope that he will withdraw that remark.

Mr. Heffer: If I am not allowed to call them pompous asses, I shall not. Without consulting the trade unions, hon. Members or anyone else, the Select Committee has arrived at a decision that, frankly, is absolutely ridiculous. I want to know when and how we can discuss the matter and what we can do to change this absolutely ridiculous decision.

Mr. Speaker: Obviously, the hon. Gentleman feels very strongly about this. The Leader of the House has heard his question today. If the hon. Gentleman catches my eye tomorrow, he may put his question to the Leader of the House, who doubtless will by then have had time to think of a response.

BALLOT FOR NOTICES OF MOTIONS FOR FRIDAY 20 MARCH 1987

Members successful in the ballot were:

Mr. Iain Mills
Mr. Michael Foot
Mr. William Shelton

IMMIGRATION (CARRIERS' LIABILITY)

Mr. Secretary Hurd, supported by the Prime Minister, Secretary Sir Geoffrey Howe, Mr. Secretary Edwards, Mr. Secretary Rifkind, Mr. Secretary Moore and Mr. David Waddington, presented a Bill to require carriers to make payments to the Secretary of State in respect of passengers brought by them to the United Kingdom without proper documents: And the same was read the First time, and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 97].

Disabled Persons' Rights

3.37 pm

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to outlaw discrimination against disabled people on the grounds of their disability.

Since I introduced the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons (Amendment) Bill over three years ago there has been more irrefutable evidence of widespread discrimination against disabled people. A number of reports have given further witness to the problem. Two years ago there was the report of the British Deaf Association, and in the summer of last year the Spastics Society report, "An equal chance for disabled people: A study of discrimination in employment", gave hard statistical evidence of the disadvantages faced by handicapped people in the labour market. Incidentally, it should be noted that in the *Official Report* of yesterday—column 721—the Under-Secretary of State for Employment said that in 1985 the unemployment rate among those whose work would be limited by disability was 23·4 per cent. That is over double the rate of 10·6 per cent. for all other persons.

I was pleased to see today in a news release from the Spastics Society that it is giving full endorsement to my Bill. I have the overwhelming support of the public and of disabled people's organisations. In response to the report of the Government-sponsored National Advisory Council on Employment of Disabled People, the Spastics Society stated:

"The fundamental justification for helping disabled people lies in their right to real equality of opportunity, which at a minimum means ending direct and indirect discrimination . . . The Society is very disappointed that the report has not chosen to look at the problem in terms of these more fundamental concepts and can only assume that this arises from opposition to anti-discrimination legislation."

That Government's opposition has been maintained despite an increasing amount of anecdotal evidence. I can name a few instances over the past few years. The football teams of my city have come to regard Wembley as their home. It is always difficult to get a cup final ticket, and usually when somebody receives one, he rejoices. However, a number of disabled constituents in Liverpool have been faced with another problem, that of being unable to gain access to Wembley. For them the problem is not just getting the ticket but having to go to Members of Parliament to press that they be able to use that ticket equally with other fans.

Recently, an American company advertised for 37 workers for various jobs in Portmadoc in Wales. The *Cambrian News* of 15 August 1986 carried the advertisement which, among other things, said:

"All persons applying must . . . have no physical disability."

I had a letter only yesterday from a young lady who is 23 years of age and lives in Runcorn and who suffers from a congenital deformity and ataxia-type cerebral palsy. According to her letter, it affects her very mildly, and it is worth listening to what she says:

"I walk unaided if a little slow and unsteady, I can manage stairs and drive my own automatic car . . . I am proficient at typewriting, and plan to use a micro-writer for written note-taking in court . . . I take no medication at all . . . I have never attended a 'special' school, I achieved an upper second class degree in Sociology and Psychology from Lancaster University in 1985 . . . I spent ten months as a Community Service Volunteer working full time and living in Southwood Probation Hostel in Liverpool, where I took part in every aspect of residential work without any problems at all—indeed I loved the work. I left the Hostel to take up the full-time post of Volunteer Co-ordinator at Halton General Hospital".

That young lady was accepted for a course next September at Nottingham university to study for a certificate of qualification in social work, but so that she could go on from there into the probation service, she needed to be sponsored by the Home Office. The Home Office has turned her down on what it calls medical grounds after a perfunctory 15-minute medical. That is atrocious. It displays the sort of discrimination which I tried to eradicate in my Bill three years ago.

My Bill would apply not only to employment, serious as that is, but to all aspects of life, including education, housing, recreation, insurance, transport and membership of associations where one sees ample evidence of discrimination. The Bill would give basic human rights to all those who are disabled, whether physically, mentally or sensorily, and it would be reinforced by a commission, which would be able to tackle some of the problems on their behalf and which would include representatives of the disabled. Problems such as the pedestrianisation of many of our shopping areas in the city centres make no-go areas for many of our disabled citizens. That needs to be tackled.

When refuting the need for legislation, the Minister for Health, the hon. Member for Braintree (Mr. Newton), put the Government's emphasis on

"bringing about an increased understanding of disabled people's needs and promoting a spirit of positive co-operation in dealing with them. That approach has manifestly paid off."
—[*Official Report*, 18 November 1983; Vol. 48, c. 1126.]

Tell that to the disabled football fans. Tell that to the disabled people who are looking for work in Portmadoc. Tell that to the young lady in Runcorn.

This is the fourth attempt in four years to get anti-discrimination legislation, and my second attempt. The Bill has wide support. It is time that we changed the legislation, because so far the Government have treated the disabled shabbily in terms of discrimination. They have sought to hide behind the cloak of manoeuvre and procedure. They used the closure to defeat the measure last time. In the other place they have voted on Second Reading of a Bill such as this. This is an opportunity for the Government to stand up and be counted. They cannot hide behind the closure on a ten-minute rule Bill. I call for the wholehearted support of decent people and I say to the Tories that people of conscience——

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): That excludes the Tories.

Mr. Wareing: I hope that it will not exclude them today. I hope that the Bill will be allowed to go forward and the arguments heard in the House so that there can be a vote on Second Reading, and that we do not have to wait for Conservative Members, sitting in on a Friday afternoon, to destroy it with the word "Object". The country is looking today to see who is and who is no prepared to support this important measure on human rights.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Robert N. Wareing, Mr. Alfred Morris, Mr. Jack Ashley, Mr. Lewis Carter-Jones, Mr. Laurie Pavitt, Mr. Tom Clarke, Mr. Sean Hughes, Mr. Harry Cohen, Mr. Derek Fatchett and Mr. George Howarth.

DISABLED PERSONS' RIGHTS

Mr. Robert N. Wareing accordingly presented a Bill to outlaw discrimination against disabled people on the grounds of their disability: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 3 April and to be printed. [Bill 99.]

ABOLITION OF DOMESTIC RATES ETC. (SCOTLAND) BILL *[MONEY]* (No. 2)

Queen's Recommendation having been signified——

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc. (Scotland) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of payments to local authorities of subsidies—

(a) relating to the making by these authorities of rebates in respect of payments made under that Act by persons to whom are let or sub-let or who occupy or are resident in premises in respect of which any community charge is payable, being payments to persons liable to pay that charge; and

(b) calculated by reference to such factors as are specified in or under the Social Security Act 1986 as modified by regulations made by the Secretary of State.—*[Mr. Ancram.]*

ABOLITION OF DOMESTIC RATES ETC. (SCOTLAND) BILL (ALLOCATION OF TIME)

Resolved,

That the Reports [25th February and 3rd March] from the Business Committee be now considered.—*[Mr. Ryder.]*

Question, That this House doth agree with the Committee in their resolution, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 80 (Business Committee)* — *[Mr. Ryder]*—*and agreed to.*

Following is the Report of the Business Committee:

Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc. (Scotland) Bill (Business Committee),—The Chairman of Ways and Means reported from the Business Committee, That it had to come to a Resolution in respect of the Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc. (Scotland) Bill, which it had directed him to report to the House:

That—

(1) the order in which proceedings on consideration are taken shall be new Clauses; Amendments to Clauses Nos. 1 and 2, Schedule No. 1, Clauses Nos. 3 to 23, Schedule No. 2, Clause No. 24, Schedule No. 3, Clause No. 25, Schedule No. 4, Clauses Nos. 26 and 27, Schedule No. 5, Clauses Nos. 28 to 33, Schedule No. 6, Clause No. 34; and new Schedules;

(2) the allotted days which under the Order [11th February] are to be given to the proceedings on consideration and Third Reading shall be allotted in the manner shown in the Table set out below and, subject to the provisions of that Order, each part of those proceedings shall be brought to a conclusion at the time specified in the third column of that Table.

TABLE

Allotted days	*Proceedings*	*Time for Conclusion of Proceedings*
First day	New Clauses	7.30 p.m.
	Amendments up to the end of Clause No. 8	9.30 p.m.
	Amendments up to the end of Clause No. 22	Midnight
Second day	Remaining proceedings on consideration	8.15 p.m.
	Third Reading	10 p.m.

That the Resolution of the Committee reported to the House on 25th February be varied by substituting the following provisions for those in the Table at the end of that Resolution:—

TABLE

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	Third Reading	10 p.m.

Orders of the Day

Abolition of Domestic Rates etc. (Scotland) Bill

[1ST ALLOTTED DAY]

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

3.50 pm

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Amendment No. 178, which deals with the charge for sports grounds, is printed on the Amendment Paper before the Opposition's amendment No. 31, so why has amendment No. 31 been selected in favour of amendment No. 178?

Mr. Speaker: I have explained to the House that that was a printer's error. Amendment No. 178 was submitted after amendment No. 31, as I think the hon. Gentleman knows.

Mr. Allan Stewart (Eastwood): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wish to raise a different but related matter. We have agreed the allocation of time motion and I am not in any way critising that. It is possible that the rating of sports clubs might not be reached. If there is any possibility of that happening, can the House, by agreement, move certain clauses in a later debate?

Mr. Speaker: That is not possible. The hon. Gentleman has been here before. If we get on, we may reach the amendment to which he refers.

New Clause

COMMUNITY CHARGE

'In the financial year 1989-90 no domestic rate shall be levied in one district authority to be specified by the Secretary of State and:

(a) the community charge shall be levied only in that authority,

(b) an independent commission shall be appointed consisting of representatives from Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, Scottish Office, Scottish Trades Union Congress, Valuation Assessors, Law Society to survey the operation of the Community Charge.

(c) the Commission shall report to the Secretary of State at the end of that year and he shall be bound to consider its findings before introducing the community charge in any other local authority if the Secretary of State decides to proceed with full implementation, it shall be completed by 31st March 1992.'.—*[Mr. Dewar].*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Speaker: With this it may be convenient to take the following amendments to the new clause: Amendment (a), in line 3, after 'authority', insert

'the said authority having volunteered itself to the Secretary of State or, in the absence of such a volunteer, the authority shall be determined by the Secretary of State.'.

Amendment (b), in line 6, after 'Law Society', insert

'the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy and the Institute of Local Government.'.

Mr. Dewar: I assure Conservative Members that we, too, are interested in what the Government will announce with regard to sports clubs. We assume that it will be something positive. I hope that we are not disappointed. The pre-publicity, the briefings and the desire of Conservative Members to be in on the act presumably means that they are in the know. We await developments with interest. I expect that they are telephoning their local newspapers.

New clause 1 is a simple idea and extremely sensible. The two proposed amendments are unexceptionable. Indeed, they are helpful, and if they are acceptable to the Government, I would not object to their being made.

Although the essence of the clause is simple, there will inevitably be drafting difficulties with it and the Government will have to take it away and possibly reintroduce it in another place. We have no objection to withdrawing it if the Minister says that the principle finds favour with him.

We are simply suggesting that it would be common sense and that there would be a great deal of merit in the Government accepting that such a complicated, controversial and difficult reform should be tried in a selected area of Scotland. I shall leave aside for the moment our view that the Government's proposal is essentially unjust. We have suggested a district council area, but if the Government suggested one of the smaller regions, we would not want to be difficult.

There should be an area in which we can monitor the practicalities and workability of the scheme which has been so heavily criticised. The assessment could help the House and the Government to reach a decision on whether the scheme should be introduced across the country.

We suggest that the monitoring should be assisted by an independent commission, the composition of which is suggested in the new clause. That may be the subject of some comment by the Minister, who is not noted for his charity when it comes to passing judgment on the efforts of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the Scottish Trades Union Congress or other organisations which represent genuine parts of Scottish opinion.

Of course we would be prepared to be helpful about that—ours is just a simple, straightforward suggestion that monitoring should be part of the programme. At the end of it, the Secretary of State and the Government will be able to make up their mind. I hope that the views of the commission and the experiences of the test area during the experiment would be highly persuasive on the final decision. I hope that I have advanced that argument clearly and fairly.

I should set out one or two of the reasons why we believe that the clause should find favour with the House. I should concede that I would not normally be in favour of the legislative equivalent of sale by sample. I accept that Governments normally legislate and normally produce plans, and if they find favour, and carry a majority with them, as Government plans have a habit of doing, they are implemented. If there is a debate it is in a public form and ultimately there may be repeal or modification in later years in the light of experience.

I am making a sensible suggestion, about a measure that is unusual. Because the poll tax scheme is so radical and so fundamental—many Labour Members would say that it was fundamentally wrong. We are suggesting this approach.

Everyone who has watched or taken part in this debate is aware that the poll tax proposals have been attacked, root and branch, by almost everybody which has

[Mr. Dewar]

experience in the field, whether it be a local authority body per se or some other outside organisation which has an interest in community politics or representation within Scotland.

One or two groups have supported the reorganisation. I say that with no particular malice because it is fair comment. They have a clear financial interest in reorganisation and think that their membership will specifically benefit and that they will be among the minority who will win out of the reorganisation. Apart from those groups there has been almost no support for the scheme that is being proposed.

What is particularly important is that, apart from the reservations in principle which have been seen on every side, there is a genuine question mark of a sort that I have seldom seen before about the very practicality of the scheme. There are many people, officials and others, who will say, and are on record as saying, that the scheme will not work, that it will bring great chaos and confusion in its wake and that it has been totally misconceived by those who have drawn it up.

In those circumstances, we are in the rather special position where we can ask the House to pause and consider whether something of the kind that we are suggesting would not be sensible. The Government may object and say "Well, after all, there is an election coming up." It may be that this whole debate will be academic because, clearly, there is every possibility that this Government will lose office and will be swept away at the coming election. *[Interruption.]* I shall not make a great point of that. I am merely saying that that is a possibility. None of us know what will happen. We have our own feelings. *[Interruption.]* The Secretary of State knows that. Given his position in Scottish politics he should perhaps take a rather lower profile in this matter.

I must make it clear that everything that I say is said on the basis that the Government somehow manage to implement the scheme. That is the only basis on which we can sensibly debate the propositions. At this point I wish to make it clear—I would be failing in my duty if I did not—that that is not an assumption that I expect and it is certainly not an assumption that I accept. If we are to suspend reality and assume that the scheme will be pressed ahead, the first point that I would make—it would have widespread support on both sides of the House—is that the people of Scotland, the electorate, the unfortunate people who will have to pay the new poll tax have a right to know exactly how it will work. That is not the position at the moment. They have been presented with a series of slogans and a series of arguments by assertion. The credit that the Government are looking for is the bonus for having acted, but they are extremely anxious to avoid the discord that I think will come when people begin to realise exactly how the scheme will operate in practice.

Mr. Barry Henderson (Fife, North-East): Does the hon. Gentleman feel that that is something of a condemnation of the Labour Members who served on the Committee, that after about 1,200 columns of *Hansard* they have not asked the right questions to elicit exactly how this scheme will operate?

Mr. Dewar: I recognise that in the portion of Fife that is represented by the hon. Gentleman no doubt all the electorate read *Hansard*, and particularly Committee *Hansard*. They may well have been reading the hon. Gentleman's speeches, which says something about the reasons for his rather poor prospects electorally.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): He did not make any speeches.

Mr. Dewar: I am assured that the hon. Gentleman made no speeches. I cannot help that. In the past we have had at times a rather bad-tempered debate on this Bill. The hon. Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Henderson) is being a little silly. People do not follow these debates in detail. There is no great knowledge of exactly how the various practical difficulties will be overcome. That is a simple point which I should have thought was not particularly contentious.

4 pm

Another general argument concerns constitutional matters. The Secretary of State would be well advised to think about, if not building a basis of agreement on the scheme, at least reassuring people that every effort is being made to remove, whenever possible, its practical difficulties and obnoxious features. The right hon. and learned Gentleman is well aware that he represents a small minority of opinion in Scotland. He is fond of quoting *Radical Scotland*, and he did so on the timetable motion. I read the interview which he gave to *Radical Scotland* the other day and was glad to find that his ambition is becoming more realistic. He says that his aim—presumably, it is optimistic—is to attract about 30 per cent. of the Scottish vote to the Conservative party, and no more than that. I do not think that there is any real prospect of achieving that, but I have made that point because it shows the right hon. and learned Gentleman's recognition of the fact that the Rifkind factor has not had quite the exciting impact on Scottish politics that the Conservative party hoped when he was catapulted into his present job.

Mr. Donald Stewart (Western Isles): Will the hon. Gentleman take note of the excellent point made by the Secretary of State when he said that the issue was between Unionists of all parties and the Scottish Nationalists?

Mr. Dewar: I like a little excitement in my politics. If it is to be a contest between the Nationalists and the Conservative party, I am afraid that it is going to be a pushover. I should not like to accept that as a genuine contest or to ally myself with the unlikely people who have been invited to take part.

There is a problem in Scotland for the Government. They should show a little restraint. There should be recognition of the Government's essential weaknesses. The Government should welcome any machinery which the new clause proposes that would allow time for the Government to pause, consider, test and, if necessary, modify the Bill in the light of public opinion in Scotland. The Government will not be able by that process to remove the essential error of the legislation. They will not be able to produce consent, but they might achieve slightly less grudging acceptance. If they do not do that, there is a danger that they will be seen to be imposing an unwanted system on the Scottish people, and it may become an issue in a way that no Government would welcome. I hope that the Secretary of State will carefully consider that constitutional and practical argument.

Mr. Michael Forsyth (Stirling): On the hon. Gentleman's point about acquiring consent, does he believe that he would give consent to the Labour party's proposals to introduce regular revaluations based on capital values and to impose rating on agricultural land and buildings in Scotland after the row that we had about the last revaluation?

Mr. Dewar: I must confess that I would be rather more confident about introducing my proposals knowing that I had the support of about 50 per cent. of the Scottish electorate in a four-party system than I would be about the measures of a group of Ministers who control a separate legislative system within the United Kingdom but who cannot claim to have any broad-based support in Scotland. That is a different base from which to operate and it colours the argument of the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth).

This is not an occasion when we should rehearse at great length the arguments about the scheme's virtues. Conservative Members will be uncomfortably aware that the scheme appeared from nowhere. Its parentage is largely unknown, despite our energetic attempts, rather unfairly, to lump them on the slim shoulders of the hon. Member for Stirling. The scheme must have more respectable antecedents than that. It is clear that the scheme is totally counter to the 1981 Green Paper, "Alternatives to Domestic Rates", which argued persuasively against a poll tax. It is incompatible with the Government's White Paper in the autumn of 1983 which, as everyone remembers, discovered that the rating system was "fundamentally sound." After that, there was a sudden retreat and expediency and opportunism overwhelmed the type of measured logic and investigation which had led to the earlier conclusion.

The results are extremely unfortunate. Taking one district authority in Scotland and experimenting to see how the scheme works in practice would help to overcome many of the difficulties which we expect, and it would be of enormous help to public opinion in deciding on the competing claims for the fairness or otherwise of the scheme. We have alleged—I say "alleged" because it has been challenged and, therefore, I cannot say that it is fact, although it is well based on local government research—and we certainly hold, to use a more neutral term, that there will be a substantial shift between those areas within a local government unit which are already high amenity areas and advantaged and those which are not and are disadvantaged. There have been many examples of that based on calculations on what will happen in Newlands, Cathcart and various parts of Edinburgh such as the Edinburgh, Pentlands and Edinburgh, South constituencies.

We have been met with a pained expression from the Government, who say that we have not fully taken the rebate system into account. It is difficult to take it into account because the details have not been announced, but I understand their point. People in Scotland may well be confused about who has the better argument. I do not think that they will have any doubt if they look at the evidence. But the best way of establishing what will happen is to try the scheme, and that is where we come to the proposals in the new clause which would do a great deal to underline the incompatibilities and the confusion in the Government's argument.

The Government are in an odd position. If we say that there is to be a shift against the battered inner cities and against the peripheral housing schemes, Ministers say, "It will not happen because of the rebate factor." The Government are so keen on the scheme because they hold that the rates system is "corrupt", and they have used exactly that term. Ministers say that the rates system is maintained by corrupt politicians who are interested only in giving an unfair advantage to certain groups such as the people who live in Pilton, Drumchapel or the battered inner cities. They say that it is a corrupt system giving a corrupt advantage and that the payload is votes for the Labour party. It has been said as crudely as that, even by the Secretary of State for Scotland.

If that is the position, surely it is impossible at the same time to argue that there is not going to be a shift. The whole point of bringing in this scheme is to create a shift. Ministers should not be saying that my constituents in the battered peripheral housing schemes or the constituents of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) in an older city area will not be adversely affected. The logic of their position is to say, "Those people will be adversely affected, but so they should be, because we want to help the hard-pressed inhabitants of Eastwood or of Bearsden. We are going to bring about that shift and defend it." The essential dishonesty in the Government's opinion is that they pretend that the shift will not take place. They talk essentially with a double meaning. If there were a reasonably balanced area in which the test could be carried out, we would have the proof of the pudding, people would be able to judge and I believe that they would find on our side of the argument. I hope that they would have a substantial influence on how other people see the extension of the experiment. An important point of principle is involved. Enormous practical matters would be ironed out if there were the dry run or the test to which I have referred.

The practical points are so numerous that it is difficult to know which to pick out. For example, we would have some experience in organising the register and we would know whether it was practical or impractical, as we fear. There is no argument about the fact that, in a year, there is a turnover of about 25 per cent. of people on the electoral register. The complications of running a rolling register, keeping track of people who move from house to house—for example, 18-year-olds perhaps moving from different flats with friends or different members of their families — and apportioning their poll tax will be a nightmare.

We know that almost everyone in local government is suspicious of the cost implications of the £17 million to £22 million in a full year of operation, of the £9 million that it will cost to compile the register, and knows how impractical it will be to have feet pounding the streets to make sure that the register is accurate and up to date.

In the memorandum attached to the original copy of the Bill there is no firm assessment of staffing consequences. We know that enforcement procedures will be a nightmare. There are still major queries from the legal world about how one can catch up with someone who hops across a local government boundary perhaps, best of all, for the most innocent of purposes. There are queries about how, when one catches up with him to gain entry, if he has not paid his proportion of poll tax in his area, one can identify the goods that one impounds, how to organise the sale of such goods, and how to cope with what many

[Mr. Dewar]

experts in the legal field and in the sheriff's office believe will be about a four or five times increase in the number of actions that will be taken. Those points throw a shadow on the practicality of the scheme. If we had a test, we could iron out the problems. Even if, in our view, it were an unjustified experiment — a piece of regressive social engineering — at least it might be possible to get a scheme that will work if it is introduced on a wider scale.

I hope that my points will commend themselves to the House and even to Ministers. We shall canvass some points later in the two-day debate in the final Commons stage of the Bill. I am anxious that we should give the unfortunate people who are threatened by the scheme, in terms of having to operate it, every chance to get the right answers. We should not stampede them into confusion and chaos. The simple, academic difficulties that we are discussing, will, if the Government have their way, become practical difficulties that will snag, foul up, trip up and disorganise what, at the moment, is a local revenue-raising scheme which, in practical terms, has many advantages.

There is concern—the Minister must recognise this—right across the spectrum of opinion, and certainly across informed opinion in Scotland. In today's mail, Opposition Members received institutional concern from COSLA. I know that the Minister considers COSLA to be a hostile and, in some way, almost sinister organisation, but it reflects the way in which the people of Scotland vote, and that is why the hon. Member for Stirling does not like it. Also, the Association of Metropolitan Authorities in England, and the Association of County Councils in England wrote to Opposition Members today. As I understand it, those associations are not under Conservative control. We received — the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) will recognise this—a letter from a lady in Perthshire, reflecting the proper concerns of the Methodist church in Scotland. I mention her only because her letter was in today's mail, but her case could be mirrored. Other examples of social concern have been found in the mailbag almost every day since the debate started.

The new clause is a practical contribution to the debate. We are trying to mitigate or avoid a disaster that we believe will certainly occur. There is virtue in test runs. They may be on a rather different scale. Again, by coincidence, in today's mail there was a Scottish Office news release referring to the next census—a complicated operation, it was said, but it is simplicity itself compared with the remodelling that we are looking at in local government finance.

As the Minister will be aware, we shall run a voluntary census test, taking Ross and Cromarty, Angus and the city of Dundee, or parts of them, as the test bed, to try to work out the gremlins and get rid of the faults and difficulties, so that when the all-Scotland experience occurs and when the sweep across the country is required, we shall be in a better position. It is exactly the same sensible principle, and I hope that the Government will not dismiss it and consider it to be some sort of attempt to wreck the scheme. It is a way of saying that we do not like it. It will give public opinion a practical chance, before we are irreversibly committed, to test the various claims that are made, but, most important of all, it is an effort to make sure that, when we move towards some form of reform, if the Government have their way, at least it will be a practical scheme that will not disgrace or embarrass us all.

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): I carefully listened to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar). I make it abundantly clear that I would be the last person to believe that COSLA is a sinister organisation, unless one were to wish to use the word sinister in its original Latin sense, in which case it might indeed be a fairly appropriate description.

With regard to the general theme of the hon. Gentleman's contribution to the debate, at one stage he got into rather dangerous waters. He implied that the Government's attitude towards rate reform in Scotland should be influenced by the degree of political support that the Government, or indeed any political party, has in Scotland at present. I can understand that argument coming from the right hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Stewart). He started from a clear, simple position that is consistent with the argument of the mandate that we often hear from Opposition Members. The right hon. Gentleman would be the last person to feel comfortable using that argument.

4.15 pm

It is indeed the case that, since 1951, only one Conservative Government has had a majority of hon. Members from Scotland. It also happens to be the case that, since 1951, only one Labour Government has had a majority of hon. Members from England. I am not conscious of the hon. Member for Garscadden or other Opposition Members ever having suggested that the opportunity or the right—indeed, the propriety—of a United Kingdom Government to vote on English domestic issues, despite not holding a majority of seats in England, should in any way, either in the past or in the future, be restrained.

Mr. Dewar: I did not and would not challenge the right of the United Kingdom Government, but propriety is another matter. As the right hon. and learned Gentleman is well aware, Opposition Members are strongly committed to a system that would have a directly elected assembly in Edinburgh, which would be responsible for internal legislative matters that affect Scotland, and which are presently under his remit as Secretary of State. Given the overwhelming consensus in Scotland for such reform, it would be highly inappropriate for the Government to barge on and totally ignore Scottish opinion and put in a scheme that few of us want in that part of the world.

Mr. Rifkind: As the hon. Gentleman has raised that matter, he must realise that he is exposed to the hollowness of his position. The proposals that he put forward on the wider issues would result in an even graver aggravation of the point that I have just made. In future he and I, if we were still hon. Members, would vote on English domestic issues in a way that might not represent the views of the majority of hon. Members from south of the border. The hon. Gentleman raised the matter in his opening comments. It is acceptable and understandable for the right hon. Member for Western Isles and his political colleagues to use arguments about the relative political strengths of parties in Scotland, but if no Labour Government bar one has had a majority in England since 1951 — that corresponds to the position of the

Conservative party in Scotland — the hon. Gentleman must apply his new, curious constitutional principle throughout the spectrum of government or cease to use such arguments.

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): The Secretary of State is self-critical, which certainly is most refreshing. Equally, his criticism of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) is much to be welcomed by my party. Does he agree that he is talking about electoral reform?

Mr. Rifkind: As 85 per cent. of the people of Scotland vote for the unionist parties and realise that the outcome of a general election is a United Kingdom Government, and as at any one moment there can be only one United Kingdom Government, clearly it is that party which commands the majority in this House that will be the body that is responsible for legislation.

Mr. Henderson: Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): Order. Both Front Benches have referred to the issue that is now before the House, but I think that we might now drop it and get on with consideration of the clause.

Mr. Henderson: Is not the logic of what the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) says that a Labour Government——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I thought that I had made it clear to the House that we must not pursue this matter. Let us get on with the clause.

Mr. Rifkind: Another suggestion by the hon. Member for Garscadden was that public opinion in Scotland is hostile to the Bill, and he produced evidence in support of that allegation. He will know that the majority of people in Scotland, if the polls are anything to go by, are hostile to the domestic rating system. Despite that, the Labour party has felt perfectly free to make proposals in the last few days that would involve the continuation of that system.

Mr. Dewar: What polls?

Mr. Rifkind: Numerous polls have suggested that the majority of people in Scotland believe that the domestic rating system is unfair and would prefer an alternative system. People have put up various alternatives, including members of the Liberal and the Scottish Nationalist parties. However, the hon. Member for Garscadden will be aware that his party is the only one that is still thirled to the domestic rating system in Scotland. He will also be aware that his party received only one third of Scottish votes at the last general election. He must take that fact into account, too, if he wishes to adopt such an approach.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): As to the evidence about the popularity or otherwise of the Government's poll tax proposals, is the right hon. and learned Gentleman not aware of the opinion poll that was conducted by Systems Three in November that made it clear that 86 per cent. of the Scottish people believe that local taxation should be based upon ability to pay? If, therefore, a poll tax that was unrelated to ability to pay was levied on every taxpayer, regardless of income, it would be plainly and overwhelmingly unpopular in Scotland.

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman is distorting the outcome of that opinion poll. He is well aware that a significant proportion of the Scottish adult population will probably be entitled to rebates under the Government's proposals. Therefore, ability to pay will be taken into account in the case of the unemployed and those on very low incomes. We are entitled to say, on precisely that basis, that these considerations have been understood and that we have responded to them.

The hon. Member for Garscadden said that the effects of the Government's proposals would lead to a major shift from one section of the community to another. He chose very selective examples. For example, he could have said that the Government's proposals would lead to a major shift in favour of widows.

Mr. Dewar: No.

Mr. Rifkind: They most certainly will. They will also lead to a shift in favour of single parents and of mothers who are left alone to bring up children by themselves.

Mr. Maxton: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Rifkind: No. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will contain himself for a moment.

Compared with the domestic rating system, some 80 per cent. of widows or widowers will benefit considerably from the community charge proposals. The same applies — perhaps to an even greater extent — to an adult, usually a mother who is left to bring up her children alone because her husband has died but who is bearing the same rates burden as the family of working adults who live next door.

The proposals also demonstrate a shift away from the arbitrary consideration of whether an adult is the occupier of rateable property and towards the consideration that all adults who benefit from local services should make a contribution towards the cost of those services.

Neither today nor on any previous occasion has the hon. Gentleman or any of his hon. Friends sought to justify the basic iniquity of the present system under which 20 per cent. of the adult population of Scotland, who are neither ratepayers nor the spouses of ratepayers, make not a penny contribution towards the revenue that is raised by local authorities. It is particularly reprehensible that, even though the Labour party has now come forward with what it chooses to call a new deal for the ratepayer, it still does not meet that basic injustice.

Mr. Dewar: Why did the Government of which the right hon. and learned Gentleman was a member come to the positive conclusion in August 1983 that the rating system was fundamentally sound?

Mr. Rifkind: We do not now take that view. We have given further consideration to the matter and we have identified an alternative that we believe to be infinitely preferable. The hon. Gentleman has considered this matter for the last year and a half and now he produces alternative proposals that do not meet by a single iota the basic injustice of the existing system. Under his alternative proposals, the widow would still pay the same as the family of working adults living next door. Furthermore, 20 per cent. of adults who are not ratepayers would not make a penny contribution to the community, despite the fact that they are in work and despite the level of their income, whereas others who might be on smaller incomes would continue to pay a heavy and an increasing rates burden.

[Mr. Rifkind]

The hon. Gentleman is content with that and he is prepared to defend it because he believes that it is entirely acceptable.

Today we have the privilege of a new clause being put before the House that the House is asked to consider. I agree with one point that the hon. Member for Garscadden made when he introduced it. He described it as a very simple clause. I happily identify with that description. It is a very simple, absurd, proposition that I cannot believe the hon. Gentleman or anybody else expects us to take seriously. When asked for his view on the subject, the president of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities said:

"Despite some technicalities, it is a suggestion worthy of further consideration".

That is a polite way of saying that Councillor Fagan, the president of COSLA, thinks that it is as much of a nonsense as most of us do.

The way in which the hon. Gentleman would like this experiment to operate would have some curious consequences. We are told that an independent commission would be appointed to scrutinise the effects of the community charge in one particular local authority and to report within a year, and that the Secretary of State would be bound to consider its findings before introducing the community charge elsewhere. We are entitled to ask to what extent we could be satisfied about the independence of the commission that the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues are proposing.

Mr. Dewar: The responsibility would be on COSLA.

Mr. Rifkind: No, it is not just COSLA. A number of organisations are mentioned here. As the hon. Gentleman mentioned COSLA, he may take the view that COSLA would start off with a completely open mind on the subject. He might believe that COSLA is not parti pris and that it would be prepared to look at this question entirely objectively. I have no doubt that Councillor Fagan would say that he would be prepared to put aside all past ideas, prejudices and political affiliation and examine the matter with the total independence that one would expect from a boundaries commission. *[Interruption.]* No, not like I do. I fully accept that my political views are relevant to the proposals that I put forward, but in the new clause we are dealing with an independent commission, not a political commission.

Therefore, we are entitled to ask whether the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities has operated as an independent, non-political organisation in the last few years. But other organisations are included — for example, the Scottish Trades Union Congress. The Scottish TUC has a legitimate role to play in Scottish public life, and I have never suggested otherwise, but I find it difficult to understand exactly why it should be picked from all the organisations in Scottish public life because it is thought to be a body that is particularly appropriate to express an independent view on the desirability of the community charge.

I can assume only that it would be expected, at least for the time being, to forget that it is affiliated to the Labour party. That would clearly be of no relevance. We are asked to believe that the fact that most members of the STUC are affiliated to the Labour party would have no effect on its independent assessment of the merits of the proposals. It was wicked of me to suggest otherwise. I fully appreciate that.

4.30 pm

What is interesting is not just the organisations included on the body but the ones not included. One might have thought that the Federation of Scottish Ratepayers, for example, would not have been an entirely irrelevant body to assess the effects of a new system of local government finance. After all, it represents the people who pay under the present system. However, it is suggested that it should have no role on such an independent commission at a time when COSLA and the STUC are to be involved.

The hon. Member for Garscadden put that forward——

Mr. Bruce Millan (Glasgow, Govan): The right hon. and learned Gentleman is wasting time.

Mr. Rifkind: Wasting time is a good description of this new clause.

Mr. Millan: Stop wasting time with this ridiculous filibuster.

Mr. Rifkind: What an extraordinary proposition. His hon. Friend the Member for Garscadden tabled a new clause and spoke to it. I am speaking to it now and unless the right hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Millan) agrees that it is an absurd new clause and is not put forward as a serious contribution to the debate, I suggest that he rises or remains silent.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: If the right hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Millan) wants to intervene, he should do so in the proper way.

Mr. Henderson: In his brief opening remarks, following the 25-minute speech of the hon. Member for Garscadden, does my right hon. and learned Friend feel that it would be more understandable if one of the independent bodies put on the commission proposed by the Opposition was the Scottish Co-operative Society, which has obviously found great difficulty in paying its rates to Fife regional council?

Mr. Rifkind: It may be that that would be another sort of independent advice and would be able to make a useful contribution. I am quite happy to accept the advice of the right hon. Member for Govan. He is right to say that this new clause does not require a lengthy response. One simply has to refer to considerations such as those I have raised to demonstrate that it is not put forward as a serious proposal but as an opportunity for some interesting comments by the hon. Member for Garscadden.

Over the past few months, the Government have illustrated not only the advantages of our proposals for the community charge, but have met many of the comments that have been made with regard to some of the serious points raised by outside bodies in respect of administrative details. The hon. Member for Garscadden commented substantially on what he thought to be the administrative problems. I should say to him, for example, that we have received recently a letter from the Rating and Valuation Association. The honorary secretary of the association said that he had been

"asked by the President of the Scottish Branch of the Association to express to you how welcome to our practitioner members involved in the rating system your recent announcement that there will be no transitional period

. . . Clearly, this will ease the implementation making the specification of computer systems, administration etc. that much simpler.

The announcement came at quite an appropriate moment . . . the National President . . . was able to convey the news which was very warmly welcomed to a number of practitioners who were attending a seminar that day."

Mr. Maxton: Read the whole thing.

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman can read the whole thing. He will see that there is no suggestion that what remains is totally unworkable or impossible or any of the other things suggested by the hon. Gentleman.

We have responded to many of the detailed points made by non-political organisations that have no political axe to grind and pointed out ways in which the administration of the Bill could be improved. The hon. Member for Garscadden knows that our announcement last week was warmly welcomed throughout Scotland as representing a major improvement with regard to the administration of the Bill.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West) *rose*——

Mr. Rifkind: Therefore, the hon. Member for Garscadden should acknowledge that the Government are prepared to listen to genuine suggestions for the improved administration of our proposals, but not to those that are essentially politically motivated.

Mr. Maclennan: This Government, above all, ought to put forward their proposals for the reform of local taxation with a degree of modesty flowing from the experience that Parliament and the country have had of the errors they have made in the past, which have resulted in taxation being levied without proper authority and retrospective legislation having to be introduced to set it right.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) has moved an important clause which should have the support of the House, as it would enable the practicality of the Government's proposal for the implementation of a poll tax in Scotland to be tested. I do not understand why the Secretary of State has set his face against the idea of having a test of the scheme because, in a sense, the whole Bill is a test. Scotland is the test bed of a scheme being tried out for the whole of the United Kingdom. If the Secretary of State for the Environment is prepared to treat Scotland as a test bed for the United Kingdom, I see no reason why the Secretary of State for Scotland should not treat a single local authority area, no doubt one chosen with its agreement, as a suitable test bed for the Scottish scheme.

The Secretary of State has been cavalier in his treatment of the constitutional issues raised by the hon. Member for Garscadden. It is not a matter of whether he and his party enjoy majority support in Scotland. However, it is well known that it has not had that support for some time and that it will not have it for some time. The important issue is that when major changes are made to constitutional relationships and institutions within this country, if they are to last, they should enjoy broad-based support drawn from political parties across the spectrum. In the past, there have been special arrangements when an issue of constitutional importance was at stake to ensure that such broad-based support existed. There were special arrangements for a referendum in the case of our adhesion to the European Community and there were special arrangements for consulting Scottish opinion after the implementation of the Scotland Act 1978 to set up a Scottish Assembly.

This is a constitutional measure of major importance, altering, as it does, the relationship between local authorities in Scotland and central Government and drawing from local authority independence of spending power, reducing their control over local taxation to a mere 13 per cent. and removing local accountability. It is not simply a redistributive or regressive measure bearing hardly upon those least able to pay in the community, but a measure designed to draw control over local government decision making into central Government. As such, it ought to be seen to enjoy broad support, or not be implemented.

In Committee, alliance amendments were tabled to ensure that it would not be implemented until after a second general election had taken place to show that there was a settled view in Scotland in favour of thechange proposed by the Government. As the Secretary of State knows, the alliance does not favour this change, although it is firmly of the view that the rating system no longer enjoys the sort of support that ought to lead to its being retained.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Maclennan: This is a short debate and has been guillotined by a decision of the Government. Therefore, I will not give way to interventions by the hon. Gentleman.

The Government have never faced up to the fact that they have performed a volte-face. As recently as 1983, they were commending the system of local taxation which they are now seeking to toss aside after 200 years. That system, for all its anomalies, faults and inequities, to which attention has been drawn by the alliance parties, has enjoyed support over a long period and the Government have no right to bring forward for implementation a set of proposals which enjoy so little support and which have been subjected to the criticisms that have been made by all those who will be responsible for its implementation. There have been criticisms of its practicality, of the difficulty of drawing up registers of those who will be liable to pay the poll tax and of the enforcement procedures, made by all those connected with the legal profession, such as sheriff officers and the like.

There have been doubts about the power contained in the schedule, which merely permits local authorities to enforce the taxation but does not require them to do so. There have been doubts about whether local authorities can therefore opt out of the taxation and, by their decision, exempt those less-favoured members of the community. Those are some of the reasons why it is right that the new clause should be adopted by the House. It would be right to make an objective appraisal of how the system can be made to work in practice before implementing it.

The two amendments tabled by the alliance parties are designed to increase the authority of the report that would be produced by the commission on its operations by introducing into the commission further elements of expertise. The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy has done extremely good work in analysing local taxation and the institute of local government studies attached to the university of Birmingham has made special

[Mr. Maclennan]

studies of Scottish finance which suit that body to be considered among those bodies appropriate to view and analyse the impact of the tax scheme in practice.

Amendment *(a)* is designed to ensure that the implementation of the test is not forced upon an unwilling authority—if there is an authority in Scotland willing to take on the job. I am glad that the hon. Member for Garscadden welcomes and accepts the two modest amendments proposed by the alliance parties to give greater weight to the experiment that he has suggested.

The Secretary of State must appreciate that, because of the electoral unpopularity of his party due to the row that broke out in Scotland over revaluation, the people of Scotland will take very unkindly to having foisted upon them a system of taxation of local government that is intended to last for many years. They will not take kindly to a device that is intended to get him out of a temporary difficulty, to help him over a difficult party conference, which has the potential for causing great damage to the authority of local government in Scotland.

The right hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Millan) was right. The Secretary of State's predecessor was responsible for taking a decision which we might have thought would have been a reason for the present Secretary of State distancing himself from such a patently dotty scheme as that which is being put before the electorate. However, the Secretary of State must take into account the fact that the Scottish people are not so foolish as to accept the idea that they should buy this policy now and pay later.

The Scottish people want to know how the scheme will work out in practice and how it will affect the burdens on the poor and the capacity of local government to deliver the services which Parliament has entrusted it to provide. They want to know how it will affect the relationship between central and local government and they want to understand whether, as appears to be the case, the scheme is simply a means of further reducing the discretion of local authorities over public spending. They want to know whether it is designed to draw into the centre all decision-making power over local spending. That is what the Bill is about and the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland who was in charge of the Bill in Committee made it quite plain that that is what the Bill is all about. That is why the new clause should be accepted and I hope that the House will accept it.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I want to comment on one or two of the points raised by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) who introduced the new clause. Before I do that, in response to the comments made by the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan), who said that this was a constitutional issue, I hope that he will follow through his arguments in relation to the presentation of SDP and Liberal party policy on this issue. No doubt we will receive very detailed proposals from the hon. Gentleman that local income tax will be preceded by a referendum and an experimental year in Caithness and Sutherland.

I also noted with some interest that the list of hon. Members who tabled the SDP and Liberal amendment is headed by the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen). The people of Scotland will be interested to know that on detailed matters of local government finance the right hon. Gentleman takes clear precedence over the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Steel), the leader of the Liberal party. I also noticed that the right hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Jenkins) has not added his name in support of the amendment, presumably because he is too busy in Oxford.

4.45 pm

I want to consider some of the points raised by the hon. Member for Garscadden in relation to Eastwood. The hon. Gentleman did not pay sufficient heed to the key argument in favour of going ahead with the community charge as quickly and as clearly as possible. He has not paid sufficient heed to the accountability argument. That argument was absolutely established in Committee and was accepted by the Opposition without any doubt. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) said in column 274:

> "Yes, all tax systems are more accountable if more people pay taxes." — [*Official Report, First Scottish Standing Committee*, 15 January 1987; c. 274.]

He repeated that point later. The key argument for the community charge as against domestic rates is the need to ensure that local government in Scotland is more accountable as quickly as possible. That argument has been highlighted by the recent proposed rate rises, especially in Strathclyde and Lothian.

I believe that the Strathclyde proposals are particularly iniquitous. The proposal is for a 20 per cent. increase in rates, despite the very low rate of inflation and despite the fact that the Government's grant to Strathclyde has been increased by 9 per cent. The rise is proposed even though Fife regional council is imposing a rate increase as low as 6·5 per cent.—although I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Henderson) rightly concludes that that is too high.

The accountability argument is highlighted by the way in which Strathclyde has admitted that the unjustified rate increase will cost jobs. Indeed, I understand that at the statutory consultation meeting with non-domestic ratepayers, the leader of Strathclyde council justified the increase by saying that the council was there to implement Socialism.

Mr. Maxton: Would the hon. Gentleman say that Bill Anderson of the National Federation of the Self-Employed and Small Businesses was a member of the Labour party and a Socialist? Mr. Anderson happens to have congratulated Strathclyde region on the way in which it undertook its consultation with him and other businesses.

Mr. Stewart: Mr. Bill Anderson is, of course, a Liberal. There is no doubt about that and it is not surprising that he has had the wool pulled over his eyes by Strathclyde region.

The hon. Member for Garscadden referred to my constituents and the redistribution towards them. In answer to that, I want to quote from a letter that I received this morning from the Mearns community council. The chairman and the council rightly point out:

> "the inhabitants of Mearns are pretty representative of the ordinary hard working Scot in their range of both political affiliations and activities and they have the same problems as everyone else in obtaining jobs, educating children and generally making ends meet."

They object to the wholly unjustified rates increase by Strathclyde and the diversion by Strathclyde region of facilities which could go to my constituency into other parts of Strathclyde.

The hon. Member for Garscadden paid no attention to the fact that three quarters of all households will either be better off or will lose less than £1 a week under these proposals, and that single pensioner households and one-parent families will do well.

There is an overriding need to ensure better accountability for local government in Scotland at the earliest opportunity. There is no case for delaying the Bill, and I am delighted that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State has said that he will not accept the new clause.

Mr. Douglas: I did not take part in the Second Reading debate because I was on other House of Commons business, and I was not a member of the Committee, but I have an unfortunate habit of taking the Secretary of State at his word. On 9 December, he said:

"I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time."

That was a truthful sentence, but the next sentence was riddled with what I would not call lies, but certainly great exaggerations. He said:

"The Bill is a radical and reforming measure which will abolish a discredited and unpopular local tax."—[*Official Report*, 9 December 1986; Vol. 107, c. 200.]

Of course, it does not abolish the rates as a whole.

Mr. Rifkind: It abolishes domestic rates.

Mr. Douglas: The Secretary of State should contain himself. He knows that the Bill does not completely abolish a discredited and unpopular tax. It tries to abolish domestic rates.

The Secretary of State's argument throughout the debate has centred on accountability. If he is so sure of his ground, it would be a modest concession to embark upon the experiment or sample period that is proposed in the new clause. But he is never sure of his ground. He puts up Aunt Sallys about opposition to his views and then, with his usual verbal skill, knocks them down.

Why do we have a crisis with the rates? It is not because the rates are an unaccountable tax. It is because they are an unpopular tax, as are nearly all taxes. But they are the most politically accountable tax because people can see the imposition of the tax in total. If we want to move from a system of taxation that is directly politically accountable towards a system that provides reasonable flexibility in accountability, we should move from direct to indirect taxation. I do not argue that the poll tax will be unaccountable. Of course, because it is a regressive tax and because of how it is paid, it will be reasonably politically accountable. But that does not mean that it will be fair.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that he is arguing that rates should be perceptible, not that they should be accountable?

Mr. Douglas: That is a distinction without a difference. People see rates, so they are politically accountable.

The Secretary of State gives the impression that only Tory Members of Parliament come face to face, in surgeries or elsewhere, with local electors and local opinion. That is not true. District and regional councillors also have direct contact with local electors and must be accountable to them for the provision of services. If they transgress, are profligate in the provision of services or misuse their resources, they will pay the penalty at the next election. According to the Secretary of State, the Conservatives object to the fact that some people benefit from services in a local authority area but do not pay for them. But many people who live in Edinburgh benefit from services in Fife. It is preposterous to say that some people notionally benefit from services but do not pay, and that we should try to alter boundaries to overcome that difficulty.

If the Secretary of State is as sure of his ground as he suggested, there would be no harm and much good in embarking cautiously on a period of experiment, using one region or district to analyse the effects of the change—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth) does not like anything relating to taxation that does not bear the imprimatur of the market. I understand his position, but I have heard him say that, although every system of taxation is wrong, he wants the benefits of public expenditure for his constituency. I have never heard him say that the roads in his constituency should be financed by tolls. That is a clear case of people who do not pay benefiting from a system.

We all know the difficulties involved in central Government raising taxation. People do not like paying tax, but they like the benefits that flow from public expenditure. We must try to devise a system of taxation that will accommodate people's ability to pay. Throughout the argument, the Secretary of State has said that rates are an unfair tax, but he has not assessed the impact of taxation as a whole. If we had the opportunity to examine the new system in a district or region, we could reasonably analytically—we could not be 100 per cent. exact—see where the burden of taxation fell and where it was passed on. We could see whether the poll tax placed the burden of taxation on the individuals in a household or whether it was passed on.

One difficulty of rating commercial premises is that the small business man cannot always pass on taxation. It is complete nonsense to suggest that industrial concerns pay rates. Their customers pay the rates indirectly. The problem for a small business man, which will largely remain under the proposed system, is that he cannot pass on the burden because of the competition for customers. The Bill accepts that that will be unavoidable.

I plead with the Secretary of State to get away from the attitude of a famous football player, who was so good that he thought that if he was chocolate he would eat himself.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): He was not at Rangers.

Mr. Douglas: Yes, he was, and still is at Rangers.

The Secretary of State seems to think that everything that he has thought of is good and that anybody who opposes it, whether the Scottish Trades Union Council, COSLA, or anybody else, is wrong, because the Secretary of State has had a conversion from what he thought in 1983 to what he thinks in 1987. That is understandable, because we all change our minds and can be persuaded. However, it is only he, and some of his supporters, who have been persuaded. The people of Scotland have not been persuaded. If one is to persuade them that this is an acceptable reform and that it is so radical and of such magnitude that great benefits will flow from it, we should at least have a little pause and experiment to see whether

[Mr. Douglas]

it works administratively in terms of the burden of taxation as a whole. Therefore, we should accept the new clause of the hon. Member for Garscadden.

5 pm

Sir Hector Monro: The burden of the speech by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) is "Delay and delay because I want to keep the present iniquitous system." That is certainly not what the majority want. I am delighted that my right hon. Friend is bringing the system into operation in 1989. That gives local authorities two years to prepare, and they should manage to do that quite easily.

I wish to comment on the strange new doctrine of the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) that any controversial legislation should be followed by a referendum. Every Labour Government—sometimes supported by the Liberal party—since 1950 have maintained their majority because of the Scottish Labour Members, so we would have had a referendum in England on almost every Bill. His idea that a referendum should follow legislation could not possibly be sustained.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) spent much of his speech telling the country how the new clause would affect Scotland. However, he was most unfair—as one would naturally expect—because he left out all the important aspects that the people of Scotland want to know about. They want to know that there will be no further revaluation of domestic properties and that they can improve and add garages, porches and other assets to their houses without having the rating valuation of their property increased.

The business community will be very pleased to know that their rates cannot be increased by more than the rate of inflation, or by a formula that is tied to inflation. I shall comment later on the dramatic increases that they faced under Labour administrations in the current year. The Government are providing valuable assistance to students by raising their grants, and the collection of the community charge on properties with non-permanent residents will be particularly helpful. We shall also update the rolling register. There will be the right of appeal on any infringements. Three quarters of all householders will either be better off or will pay only about £1 a week extra. Single pensioners will do especially well, and 85 per cent. of them will gain. About 80 per cent. of single adult householders—especially one-parent families—will also gain.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland) *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Before the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) intervenes, if the hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) gives way, I remind the hon. Member for Dumfries that he should relate what he is saying to the new clause, which deals with an experiment in a particular district.

Sir Hector Monro: Yes. I am following the hon. Member for Garscadden who pointed out how the legislation would be detrimental throughout Scotland. I say that throughout Scotland it will be advantageous. Therefore, there is certainly no need to carry out any experiments in any region.

Mr. Wallace: I am interested to know when the hon. Gentleman's conversion to the poll tax took place. I seem to remember that as a true and loyal supporter of his party he backed the conclusion of the 1983 White Paper that the present rating system was fine. Perhaps he would date his conversion. Does it stem from the statement by Sir James Goold who, prior to last year's Green Paper, told all Conservative Members to back it, whatever it contained?

Sir Hector Monro: What a pathetic intervention. I am only surprised that the hon. Gentleman did not delve into local income tax or something ineffective, or planning on agricultural land, which seem to be so important to the Liberal party.

There is the important issue of accountability which, whether applicable to a particular district or the whole of Scotland, has been brought out so well by my right hon. Friend. In the same way, the importance of this to Scotland and the reason why we do not want to have any attachment to a district experiment is that the Labour party intends to rate agricultural land and buildings, which are presently exempt.—*[Interruption.]* One reason why we do not want experiments is that we do not want to see some of those Labour party proposals brought into effect.

We want to get on with the legislation and introduce it in its entirety in 1989 because it would be so much more fair to the vast majority of people in Scotland, especially when one considers the position of the business ratepayers in Scotland at present, and also that of domestic ratepayers. We see swingeing increases in Socialist-dominated authorities of anything between 10 and 34 per cent. That will directly damage jobs, especially in Strathclyde and Lothian. I do not see people living in those areas wanting experiments to retain the existing situation, especially those that at present come under a Labour-controlled authority.

One only has to look in the Sunday Post—I am sure that all Opposition Members read it religiously every Sunday—to see that a continuation, by experiment, of the ideas of the Labour party as contained in the new clause would have a damaging effect and lead to an enormous loss of jobs by an incredible increase in rates in the Labour-controlled areas of Scotland. It is especially worrying to see that that has happened when certain district councils will be able to reduce their rate levy this year, provide the same services and even improve their sport and recreational facilities.

All in all, I hope that my right hon. Friend will resist the new clause and highlight again the importance of getting on with a fair and just new system of rating valuation. That is what we all want and I hope that that will take place as soon as possible.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Stirling is a university town. I might be tempted to give the new clause some consideration if I believed for a minute that Stirling might be the area where the experiment would be held. However, I have to say that, thanks to the amendment that has been accepted by the Labour party and that which was proposed by the so-called alliance, that would depend on the local authority deciding to be such a pilot scheme area. Knowing how it has soaked business and domestic rate payers—to their considerable cost—I hardly think it likely that Stirling district council, or any other Labour-controlled district council in Scotland, would suddenly cut itself off from the supply of money without accountability, which it has had for so long, and which lies behind the Labour party's last desperate attempts to keep the rating system in at least one part of Scotland.

Mr. Wallace *rose*——

Mr. Forsyth: I may give way to the hon. Gentleman later, if he will allow me to make my point.

Stirling is a university town. However, the last book shop in Stirling closed the other day because of the rates. The toy shop to which I used to take my children also closed the other day—again because of the rates. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) who has moved the new clause is suggesting that there should be one area in Scotland where there is an experiment. His hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) told the Committee that rates and the success of businesses were not connected. He told the Committee that rates did not have an effect on businesses. I find it staggering to have lectures from the Labour party on what the people of Scotland think and what is happening in Scotland when it believes that rates do not have an effect on businesses.

I can only speak for Stirling, and thank goodness for that.

Mr. Maxton: Not for long.

Mr. Forsyth: While the Labour party presents people who are responsible for high rates, which destroy not only businesses, but families who must sell their homes because they cannot pay their rates, the hon. Gentleman may well have to wait a long time for the new dawn that he sees.

The fact that the Labour party has tabled this new clause tells me that it has already accepted that it will lose the general election. If it thought that it would win, the new clause would not be necessary. It can see the writing on the wall, so the hon. Gentleman must not be so confident.

Mr. Wallace: Does the fact that the hon. Gentleman is bemoaning the inclusion of a "volunteer" local authority not imply that he has little confidence of the Conservatives winning control of Stirling district council? Obviously, if they won in 1988, they would have plenty of time to volunteer before 1989-90.

Mr. Forsyth: I have every confidence that if we have a community charge, where everyone who casts a vote in these elections knows that he will have to pay something towards services, the present administration of Stirling district council will be thrown out of office. That is why I passionately support the introduction of this Bill and why I am opposed to there being an experiment. The experiment would certainly not include Stirling because the Labour administration in Stirling knows that if it were made accountable, it would be out on its neck.

We should consider the new clause on its merits, but reject the idea of an experiment. I find one aspect interesting. Whichever area of Scotland is lucky enough to be the experimental area for the introduction of a community charge, what will happen there? First, business men will fall over themselves to set up in business in that area because they can plan ahead, knowing that they will not face a substantial rate increase. They will not face the 16 per cent. rate increase that Central region will impose.

Mr. Maxton: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Forsyth: If the hon. Gentleman will let me finish my point, I shall gladly give way.

The businesses will know that they can escape the Central region rate increase of 16·6 per cent. That has been reduced from a 20 per cent. increase, proposed at a time when its rate support grant has been increased by 10 per cent. They can escape the rate increases in Strathclyde and rate increases of 30 per cent. or more in Lothian.

Mr. Maxton: I wish the hon. Gentleman would read the new clause, which makes no reference to non-domestic rates. It relates to the abolition of domestic rates in one district and the introduction of a community charge. I do not quite understand how the hon. Gentleman can, therefore, make points about businesses in relation to the new clause.

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman's whole problem is that he does not quite understand. If he looks at the Labour party's amendments, he will find that his party has tabled an amendment later to get rid of clause 4 which deals with non-domestic rates because it wishes to remove that protection entirely. He must not anticipate the decisions of the House.

If we have an experimental area, businesses will rush into it, secure in the knowledge that they can plan ahead and will not be faced with severe, sudden, unexpected rate increases which have destroyed, not only businesses throughout Scotland, but jobs. Young couples seeking housing will know that they can buy a house in that area and not be subjected to sudden, unexpected costs on top of their mortgage payments, for which they have not budgeted.

Distortions would be created which would ultimately be reflected in house and business prices. Presumably, the distortions would be reversed suddenly if the experiment were extended to cover the whole of Scotland. That would undoubtedly cause great hardship and difficulty to those who live in the area and on its boundaries. Therefore, the proposition is not practicable, but it would certainly display the advantage of a community charge.

5.15 pm

I am surprised at the alliance amendment to the new clause. I expected the alliance to suggest having an experimental area for local income tax. Even at this late stage——

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): It would not have been in order.

Mr. Forsyth: The alliance had an opportunity on Second Reading to do that when, during a half hour speech, the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) told us that he was just going to deal with local income tax, but never got there. We had to listen to the hon. Gentleman for goodness knows how many hours in Committee and he was asked goodness knows how many times to outline the alliance's local income tax scheme, but he never got there.

Sir Alex Fletcher (Edinburgh, Central): The hon. Gentleman refused.

Mr. Forsyth: Indeed, as my hon. Friend reminds me, the hon. Gentleman refused. Today the House has been treated to another speech from the hon. Gentleman in which he criticised the Government for not explaining in detail what their policy involves and for not having a consensus of support for their policy in Scotland which is necessary to bring forward any proposition. The hon. Gentleman and his party have used the slogan "local income tax" without defining it and giving the people of Scotland the opportunity to see what sort of system they propose.

Sir Alex Fletcher: I think the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) wants my hon. Friend to give way to him.

Mr. Forsyth: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman if he will tell us how his local income tax system will work. No, I thought not.

Sir Alex Fletcher: Wait for it.

Mr. Forsyth: I shall gladly give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Maclennan: The alliance will be delighted that the decision about the form of taxation for local government is to be left to the Scottish people to decide at the election. Our system will be related to the ability to pay; it will enhance local accountability and will be a local income tax.

Mr. Forsyth: That sounds rather like the Labour party's recent policy document in which it committed itself to ending war. The hon. Gentleman defined the characteristics of the system but was unable to say how it would work or what the system would be. How the Scottish people are expected to vote on a system which remains somewhere in the air and in the planning system of the alliance, I know not.

Mr. Henderson: Does my hon. Friend agree that the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) sounded more like the alliance candidate who, when asked what time it was, said "What time would you like it to be, dear fellow?"

Mr. Forsyth: My hon. Friend must not tempt me to stray. It is hard to be nasty to Liberals. A Liberal has been defined as someone who is so nice that he finds it difficult to——

Sir Russell Johnston: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Alex Fletcher: Here is a nice Liberal.

Sir Russell Johnston: The answer to the question of the hon. Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Henderson) is that it is time the hon. Gentleman sat down.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is also time that we returned to the new clause.

Mr. Forsyth: I shall not go further down that road, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The fact that the Labour party has tabled the new clause is significant, not only because it concedes the fact that the Labour party does not expect to win the general election, but because it is a change in the Labour party's position hitherto. At first, the community charge was completely unfair and unworkable. Having lost that argument in Committee, Labour Members are now asking to see how it works in practice and wondering how they can criticise it. It is odd that we have not heard much from the Labour party about how its rating system, with its proposed capital values and the rating of agricultural land and buildings, will work in practice. It is not clear from the clause whether the Labour party proposes that we should have this experiment in one area and in the rest of Scotland implement other Labour policies. If that happened, it would be interesting to see the effects. The rating of agricultural land and buildings would destroy jobs in the rural areas on a catastrophic scale.

The effect of introducing capital values for assessing rateable values would penalise the pensioners whom the Labour party has dismissed. Labour would bar them from benefiting under the community charge because pensioners are not significant in terms of total population. For the same reason Labour has dismissed the single-parent families who would benefit.

Those who suffer from capital valuation are the elderly living in homes which they have had for years and which have suddenly acquired an increased value. First-time buyers would also suffer. They would find that not only were they saddled with high mortgage payments but with high rate payments, which would be reflected in the value of the house they were trying to buy. Ironically, the people who would benefit from capital values are those who are earning good salaries and whose children have left the household. Those people would be better off, and they are not the sort of people that the Labour party usually champions.

The reason the Opposition favour capital values and rates is because it is a corrupt system from which they benefit. That is at the root of it all. They want capital values because they believe in a wealth tax and it suits the spite and envy that is central to their philosophy to implement such a system. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) is nodding. The hon. Gentleman may take pleasure in opinion polls. I remind him that during the revaluation crisis the BBC held a television phone-in. He may remember that. There was a row about the programme. The three systems were explained, but obviously the hon. Gentleman did not watch the programme. The systems were: local income tax, the rating system and the poll tax, as it was described. The people of Scotland phoned in to such an extent that they blew up the switchboard at Newton Stewart. I think it was about 60 per cent., but certainly the vast majority of people favoured the poll tax and the least popular system was the rating system which the hon. Gentleman espouses.

We should reject this new clause, just as the people of Scotland will reject the Labour party when they are given the opportunity and when accountability is brought back to local government.

Mr. Jim Craigen (Glasgow, Maryhill): I do not know why the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth) is so truculent about the proposition for an experiment in one local authority area in Scotland. His party wants to hold an experiment in 65 local authority areas. Therefore, why is he so excited about the prospect of one area which may want to volunteer for this new tax? I am sorry to hear that the last book shop in Stirling has closed, but I am puzzled about how this legislation will preserve book shops in Scotland, because it does not alter the revaluation system in the non-domestic sector. It does not guarantee that rates will not go up, whether they are in the form of a poll tax or under the present property system.

The hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) talked about accountability. Accountability to whom? Will local authorities end up being more accountable to Government rather than to the people whom they are elected to serve? Under the Government's proposals more of the local authority income will be determined not by the poll tax ratepayers but by Ministers. They will decide matters relating to the uniform business rate, and will determine

the revenue support grant. At the end of the day the poll tax or community charge—call it what we will—will raise less money proportionately for the local authorities.

The real problem is not that local authorities will be made more accountable, for I am in favour of accountability, but that over the last six or seven years the Government have shown that they want to be less accountable for the cost of providing local authority services. That is why rates in many areas have gone up so significantly. It is a result of the continual retrenchment by the Government in paying their share of local authority services. Do not let us kid ourselves. The facts are all in *Hansard* in the parliamentary questions.

The hon. Member for Stirling talked about first-time buyers. It is important that they should be encouraged, but he did not dwell long on the transformation that will take place in the housing market if this poll tax is introduced. In time it will be easier for people who already have houses to move up-market. Oh for the castles; Fordell Castle. It will be much better to live there than in a wee gate house. The poll tax will have an impact on first-time buyers, too, and will make it more difficult for some of them to get into the housing market, because property values will be distorted.

One of the problems about the community charge or the poll tax is that we are dealing with it now only in theory. We are merely discussing it and people have not yet had a demand notice through the letter box, often telling them that they may have to pay a lot more. The hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) said that three quarters of the people would be better off even though they are £1 a week worse off. When I heard the hon. Gentleman say that I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Lambie), "What primary school did he go to?"

The figures in the Green Paper show that a majority of people will be worse off under this system. The hon. Member for Dumfries tells us that even though some people will be £1 a week worse off they will really be better off. That is part of the Government's twisted logic over this whole business. I do not know why the Secretary of State is getting so excited about the prospect of one local authority in Scotland wanting to attempt this scheme which the Secretary of State now thinks is so marvellous. Three years ago he had a different tune because he was only an Under-Secretary then.

I purposely did not sit on the Committee, even though that meant that I missed the entertainment of seeing the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Ancram) stand on his head. I was not prepared to spend hours listening to Ministers reading out speeches when three years ago when we dealt with the Rating and Valuation (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill they said it could not be done. All this has changed because the civil servants in the Box have changed, and the speeches are different.

This scheme is as nonsensical now as it was when it was rejected in the Green Paper published by the Government three years' ago. As I said, I do not know why the Secretary of State is getting all worked up about the new clause. If it is such a good thing, he should not be worried about trying it out in one area.

Mr. Henderson: I am glad to follow the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mr. Craigen). If he had been a member of the Committee, he would have been struck by the extent to which this measure stood up to parliamentary scrutiny. My right hon. and learned Friend introduced the Bill to the House in an encouraging way. Those of us who recognise the difficulties of producing a substantial and radical measure to change the basis of local authority finance for years ahead clearly understood that it would run risks in standing up to parliamentary scrutiny. It is easier to defend even the indefensible status quo, such as the Labour party is doing with rating, than it is to put forward a radical new proposal.

The first and most striking aspect of the Bill is the way that in Committee it stood up not only to parliamentary scrutiny but was shown to contain proposals that the Government had thought through much more clearly than the Opposition were able to do. The muddle in which the Opposition find themselves is clearly illustrated by the fact that the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) has explained to the House that the new clause is not what it purports to be, but that it suggests an experiment in the Government's proposals. In answer to a question from one of my hon. Friends I thought that I understood the hon. Gentleman to say that it was only a partial experiment. That illustrates the muddle and confusion among the Opposition parties during the Committee proceedings.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary on the way in which he has consistently shown that the proposals have been thoroughly well thought out——

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): Why are there so many amendments?

5.30 pm

Mr. Henderson: I do not believe that any experiment, total or partial, should be undertaken before the scheme is carried out.

I am grateful to my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench for changing the implementation programme of the Bill. That change has met one of the objections causing some anxiety to local authorities.

Mr. Maxton: As the hon. Gentleman has made attacks on the Opposition and has claimed that we are confused, can he explain why, if I remember rightly, when we made the proposal in Committee he voted against it?

Mr. Henderson: Which proposal is the hon. Gentleman talking about?

Mr. Maxton: To do away with the phasing out.

Mr. Henderson: I am sorry, but the hon. Gentleman has once again illustrated my argument. I suggest he studies the Committee proceedings, for he will discover that he is, yet again, wrong.

When Fife regional council discovered that COSLA was feeding information only to the Labour party in Committee it briefed me on a number of matters of concern to it. One thing that was especially emphasised by the council was the phasing in of the programme. It felt that there would be some difficulty in running the two systems side by side and getting the systems ready for the start of the operation.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is a complete misrepresentation to suggest that we were opposed to introducing the system more rapidly? On the contrary, many of us spoke in favour of rapid

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implementation. Certainly one of our worries was that the amendment drafted by COSLA might not be technically effective.

Mr. Henderson: As I would expect, my hon. Friend's recollections are much more precise than those of the hon. Member for Cathcart.

I believe that the change in the implementation programme will assist local authorities in their planning and preparation for the changes that will take place. At the same time, it will enable the benefits to reach domestic ratepayers in Scotland as quickly as practicable. I believe that the change will be welcomed by Fife regional council and Labour local authorities.

I welcome the fact that, during the interim phase, the rate increases that can be dumped on non-domestic ratepayers will be limited to the rise in the retail price index. Recently I tabled a parliamentary question to my right hon. and learned Friend to establish the cost of rate increases on health boards. The answer gave some extraordinary figures. Over the past 10 years, the amount of payment made by Scottish health boards, in lieu of rates on hospital premises, has risen from £8,393,000 in 1976-77 to £38·5 million in 1985-86. That is the type of burden that has been placed on vital health services in 10 years as a result of excessive rate increases by local authorities. I welcome the fact that there will be some limitation on the type of excessive increases that may be imposed on vital services for the community. There will also be a limitation on local authorities.

I am astonished that the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan), who has been so coy in putting forward proposals for a local income tax, has not suggested in his amendment to the Labour party's new clause that there should be a local income tax experiment. The alliance says that it wishes to get rid of domestic rates, unlike the Labour party, and it has suggested how that might be done. I would have thought it reasonable for the alliance to put forward a proposal on how to try out local income tax, but no such proposal has been made. Certainly no proposal has been made for testing local income tax in the areas that the alliance represents. When my hon. Friend replies perhaps he will give us some idea of the cost to different category taxpayers of a local income tax in the areas represented by the alliance.

Mr. Maclennan: Whereas the poll tax is a tax that has not been tried in any other modern country and was probably operated only in the most primitive societies——

Mr. Michael Forsyth: What about Japan?

Mr. Maclennan: It is not operated in Japan. The hon. Gentleman is well aware that Japan has a system of rebated taxation and that is similar to a local income tax. Local income tax is a system of local taxation that operates in many countries and there is no need for experimentation.

Mr. Henderson: In that case I am even more surprised that the hon. Gentleman has been unable to explain that system either to the Committee or to the House this afternoon.

I encourage my right hon. and hon. Friends to proceed as speedily as possible with the proposals. In time I believe that they will prove of benefit to all Scottish people.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Michael Ancram): I shall reply briefly to the debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Henderson) was accused by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) of having voted against the amendment to

"leave out 1992-93 and insert 1989-90".

The amendment was described by the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) as a probing amendment. The final part of that debate ends with the words:

"Mr. Maxton: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment." — [*Official Report, First Scottish Standing Committee*, 15 January 1987; c. 280, 294.]

I do not believe that my hon. Friend the Member for Fife, North-East was far out in what he said about the Opposition's confusion.

Some hon. Members have been shouting about all the amendments down on the Notice Paper. I believe that such amendments are a sign that the Bill has been well scrutinised in Committee. As a result of the Committee proceedings, we have come forward with amendments to the Bill that are designed to improve it, in line with discussions in Committee. I am rather surprised to discover that Opposition Members feel that that is the wrong way to proceed. It gives a strange view of the Opposition's interpretation of what a Committee stage is all about.

With regard to the general points raised in the debate, I have some difficulty with the speech of the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) because, effectively, he said nothing. On this occasion, he did not even say it very well. In his intervention on my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth) he gave us a great insight into the policies of the alliance regarding local government finance. He confirmed that the alliance was in favour of a local income tax. He then said that he did not wish to give further details because the alliance wanted the Scottish people to decide what type of local taxation they wanted. However, he went on to say that, once the Scottish people had decided, they would get a local income tax system whether they liked it or not. I rather suspect that the reason why the hon. Gentleman takes refuge in such comments is that he knows as well as I that, if he studies how local income tax works in practice, he will see that those to whom his party is aiming its propaganda would pay far more under that system than they would under a community charge system. Now is not the occasion to deal with those figures, but perhaps, during the course of the two days' debate, we will have the opportunity to consider them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) rightly referred to the present and proposed level of rate increase. One of the best justifications for introducing the community charge as soon as possible is that increases of the type that we are now witnessing would become less likely were there greater accountability.

It is legitimate to ask, in looking at the proposed rate increases that we are seeing reported in the papers, of 30 per cent. or 19 per cent., whether local authorities would have proposed such increases if they had known that, instead of just a minority of the electorate being required to pay for these decisions, the totality of their electorate

would have to pay. My judgment is that if that were the case, we would not see such increases. That underlines the need to introduce the new system as soon as possible.

Equally, in the situation that the Bill will create, where over a period the existing system begins to disappear whereby the non-domestics pay £2 for every £1 paid by the domestics, it is legitimate to ask whether local authorities would be prepared to put the total burden of their excess expenditure over assessed need on to the totality of their electorate. Again, I very much doubt whether they would.

If ever there has been a justification for what is taking place in the Bill, it is the type of rate increases that we are seeing and that are being announced in certain areas of Scotland. It is all very well for Labour Members to say that this is all to do with the rate support grant. This year, there has been a generous rate support settlement. If the argument that Opposition Members have adduced time after time during rate support grant debates have been correct, we would have expected low rate increases across Scotland, if any increase at all.

Mr. Maxton: We have had them.

Mr. Ancram: The hon. Gentleman should visit Lothian, Edinburgh and Stirling to see whether that is the view of the ratepayers.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood is right to point to these increases as justification for not having any unnecessary delay in the implementation of the community charge. I listened with some care to the argument put forward by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas). At one stage, he said that rates were a politically accountable tax. That is a fascinating statement.

Mr. Douglas: The Minister just said that.

Mr. Ancram: If the hon. Gentleman reads my speech, he will see that I referred to the accountability that will be created by a community charge, and made the point that, when only a minority have to bear the burden of local authority expenditure decisions, there is no accountability.

In a system such as the present rate system, where only 29 per cent. of the electorate pay full rates and only another 10 per cent. of the electorate make any contribution to rates, can Opposition Members suggest that that is an accountable system?

Mr. Home Robertson: We have a problem here. The Minister thinks that if he can get away with telling half the truth often enough, someone will believe it. I refer to a written answer that he gave me, in which he said:

"Of the 4 million people eligible to vote in the 1986 regional and islands council elections, 49 per cent. were domestic ratepayers and 30 per cent. were spouses of domestic ratepayers."—[*Official Report*, 27 January 1987; Vol. 109, c. 180.]

That comes to 79 per cent. Is that a minority?

Mr. Ancram: The hon. Gentleman said that 49 per cent. were ratepayers. He is right. I spoke of 39 per cent., which is the percentage that pays rates. Another 10 per cent. pay but are fully rebated and pay no rates. Is a system accountable in which just over one third of the electorate have to pay for spending decisions of authorities?

I ask the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West again whether a system which demands £2 from the non-domestic ratepayer with no vote for every £1 from the domestic ratepayer who at least has a vote can be described as accountable. I find that hard to believe. It explains the Labour party's views of accountability in democracy, which we had so much difficulty in trying to understand in Committee.

Mr. Douglas: I would not, and I should have thought that the Minister would not, rest an argument for accountability only, or even in some cases mainly, on voting patterns. An important element of accountability is what discussions about the system take place in the media and elsewhere. One of the reasons why we have had these changes is that the media and other organs of public opinion have raised this important issue in politically accountable terms. Perhaps the Minister does not like a free press.

Mr. Ancram: I am grateful to the media for pointing out some of the excesses taking place in local government. I am sure that that is good for the democratic process. No system of democracy is accountable under which those who are deciding what should be spent and raised can ignore the effect that it will have on those who will pay because they are a minority.

5.45 pm

Mr. Maclennan: Will the Minister address himself to the point which he at no time answered in Committee? By his own figures, local authorities in Scotland, if the Bill goes through, will have control over only 13 per cent.—a marginal amount — of the expenditure of local authorities. How can the Minister say that that is enhancing local authority accountability?

Mr. Ancram: I have been fascinated by this argument, which the hon. Gentleman put forward in Committee. He knows as well as I do that the only area of direct contact between an elector — a local taxpayer — and a local authority where accountability can be created is within the 13 per cent. He suggests that there is greater accountability in raising taxes from non-domestic ratepayers who have no vote. In any argument on democracy, that would be a hard line to pursue.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) was right to say that the new clause is a delaying tactic and that the people in Scotland now want to know when the new system is coming in. They believe that it is a good system and that we need to get on with its introduction. That is what we shall be discussing when we come to the first set of amendments on the first few clauses. I welcome the support that my hon. Friend has given.

I am grateful to my hon. Friends the Members for Stirling and for Fife, North-East for referring to the effect that rates have on jobs. It is often forgotten in these debates, when we are talking about the individual local taxpayer, that rates have a severe economic effect, and we shall be seeing that economic effect in certain parts of Scotland over the next few months. It is part of the debate and a justification for introducing the new system which we shall do as soon as possible.

Like my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State, I believe that the new clause is simply unworkable. If the hon. Member for Cathcart considered what would be created by his new clause, for which he made great claims, he might agree that it would be unworkable. First, it cannot simply be left to industry. The system proposed under the Bill would necessitate close involvement by the appropriate regional council because the regions are the

[Mr. Ancram]

levying authorities for the community charge. The region would have the complex task of levying and collecting the community charge in one district, while having to collect rates in the others. Given the arguments put forward by the hon. Member for Cathcart about the difficulty of running two systems in tandem, I should have thought that that was a serious objection to the new clause.

It is also difficult to see how this would make it possible for anything worth while to emerge from the pilot scheme. The results would be seriously distorted, depending on the areas in which it took place in Scotland and what was happening next door. Nor is it clear on what basis the region would be able to decide the level of the community charge that it wished to set for the district in question, and the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) did not address himself to that point. Moreover, it would be impossible for the pilot scheme as proposed to test adequately the new grant arrangements in the Bill or the new basis for paying for water and sewerage. It may have been a hook on which to hang a debate, but as a proposal that could be put into action, it is unworkable.

The new clause is based on the principle of experimentation. I am surprised that this has suddenly become an element of Opposition thinking. If they introduced a new tax, would they do so on an experimental basis in one area?

Mr. Maxton: Wealth tax.

Mr. Ancram: If a future Labour Government were to introduce a wealth tax, would they do it only in the Berwickshire district to see whether they could catch the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson)? It is nonsense to suggest that a general tax can be introduced on an experimental basis in one area, and I am sure that all right hon. and hon. Members understand that.

The new clause is about procrastination and delay. Opposition Members have not been able, on Second Reading, in Committee or in this debate, to get to grips with anything that they can say is wrong with the Bill. That is why they seek to delay it and why I ask my hon. Friends to resist the new clause.

Mr. Maxton: In the last two minutes of the Minister's speech, we at long last heard something about the new clause. Every other Conservative Member ranged widely over the whole Bill, and, to some extent, they were right to do so. The experiment would show how the Bill would work and would give us a chance to reinforce the many arguments that we advanced in Committee. It would demonstrate the absolute failure of the Government to justify what they are doing on any grounds. Instead, they have resorted to telling half-truths and mistruths—I am not allowed to use stronger language in the Chamber—to get their case across.

I shall start with the issue of accountability and the 29 per cent. of people who pay rates.

Mr. Ancram: Full rates.

Mr. Maxton: The Minister now says full rates. I shall deal with the matter bit by bit.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) referred to an answer from the Minister which stated that 49 per cent. of people were liable to pay rates and that another 30 per cent. were the spouses of those who pay rates. That makes 79 per cent.— *[Interruption.]* The Minister claims that 49 per cent. is a minority. However, clause 10 (6) states:

"Persons married to each other shall be jointly and severally liable for the personal community charges for which they are liable."

In other words, if my wife is not employed, I have to pay her community charge. What is the difference between that and saying that my wife bears some responsibility for paying my rates? The two arguments are the same.

The fact is that 79 per cent. of people are liable to pay rates now. Certainly there are rebates—some people receive a total rebate—but how will the Government bring about that accountability? How will they make large numbers of widows, single parents and so on accountable? How will they increase the number of people to be made accountable, to use their phrase? Of course, they will do so by ensuring that everyone in the country over the age of 18, whatever his income and however poor he is, will pay at least 20 per cent.

The Minister has never told us how many people would pay the poll tax in full if non-working wives, whose husbands pay it for them, and those who now receive full and partial rebates were excluded. I do not believe that that would amount to a majority of people who would be eligible to pay the poll tax. The Minister has consistently fudged that issue and told half-truths, mistruths and untruths about it. If I were in another debating chamber with different rules, that is not the language that I would use to describe what the Minister has been doing.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I am trying to follow the hon. Gentleman's argument. He seems to be complaining that husbands and wives are jointly and severally liable to pay the community charge, but he moved the amendment in Committee that provided for precisely that.

Mr. Maxton: The hon. Gentleman is being his usual pathetic self. He cannot follow an argument and is incapable of seeing the logic in anything that anyone says. He always twists the logic to fit his distorted views.

I made no attempt to suggest that joint and several liability was wrong. I said that the same rules apply under the present rating system as will apply under the new system. That is right now and will be right then, but that does not detract from my argument. The hon. Gentleman should listen for a change, instead of having his mind full of his normal stupid undemocratic prejudices.

The proposals are not entirely the brainchild of the hon. Gentleman—that is a misuse of the term brain—but they are to some extend his child. The reason why the hon. Member for Stirling has consistently put forward this idea is that he does not believe in democracy. He does not believe in the democratic process working in Scotland. The local authority in his constituency is Labour controlled. He loathes Stirling district council and Central regional council and he will do anything to take them out of the control of the Labour party, including introducing this unfair tax.

In putting forward this idea, the Conservative party is showing its arrogance. Although the Government do not have a majority in Scotland, they have brought forward the proposals as if they had the support of the Scottish people. I see that the Secretary of State is smiling. Unlike other hon. Members I have consistently supported devolution, and I am not prepared to sell my principles for high office. That is exactly what the Secretary of State did:

he resigned from a post of junior spokesman over devolution, but when real power came along he was into the Scottish Office before his feet could touch the ground. He would do anything for high office.

Mr. Henderson *rose*——

Mr. Maxton: I shall not give way because this is a short debate.

Mr. Henderson: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Gentleman has suggested that Conservative Members are undemocratic, but it was a Labour Member who used undemocratic means to stop the Committee going about its business, even though he was not a member of it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Matters of this kind are not for me.

Mr. Maxton: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The fact is that the Conservative party has not had a majority in Scotland since 1964, but it has ruled without one since 1979. As my hon. Friend the Member for Garscadden said, we are not even using the mandate argument. We are simply asking the Government to take that into account when they use Scotland as a test bed for the rest of the country. That is why we are suggesting that there should be an experiment in only one part of Scotland. The Government have no support there and will have even less after the next general election. In that regard, the silliest speech that I have heard in a long time was made by the Secretary of State last weekend.

We have heard a great deal about how this is a fairer tax. Whether or not that is so will emerge from the experiment. The only way in which the Government can possibly claim that widows, single parents on supplementary benefit—either now or in the future—or single old-age pensioners will benefit is by comparing what will happen in 1989 with what happens in 1988. A widow living on supplementary benefit or a widow's pension, or an old-age pensioner or a young single unemployed person, or a single parent will all be worse off.

At present, none of them pays rates, because they are all fully rebated. It is the Government's miserable scheme under the Social Security Act to make them pay that 20 per cent. that allows the Government to claim that those people will be better off. That is the only way that the Government can do it. But those people will not be better off, and the people of Scotland had better be aware of that. They should ask themselves, "Will I, as a single, old-age pensioner living alone in a council house in Castlemilk, be better off in 1989 than I am in 1987?" The answer, of course, will be, "No. At present I pay nothing; in 1989 I shall be paying £1 a week in poll tax."

Only yesterday, I received a letter from a constituent living in Clarkston road. It was very well written; the writer obviously has an income and pays rates. She lives in a room with a kitchen and an outside toilet, and at present she is a single householder—probably an elderly lady, although she does not say so. She currently pays £106 in rates, but under the community charge she will pay £276. She receives no rebate on the rates, and we must assume that she will not receive any on the community charge either. Fewer people are likely to be rebated on the community charge than at present, because that is the effect of the Social Security Act.

One of the constant cries—we have heard it again from the Secretary of State—has been that it is unfair that a widow living alone in a big house left to her by her husband, whose family has gone away, has to pay the same rates as a family of five working adults living down the road. Let me give an example. I asked the regional council to give me some figures for the rateable values in Quadrant road in my constituency. It is a good area, with nice houses and high rateable values. In that short road I found two people living alone in big houses and two other houses with five people in each. It was interesting to discover that last year a widow living in one of those houses paid £1,520 in rates—an enormous burden for a single person—while five people living in a house just down the road paid almost exactly the same amount. The sums were marginally different because the rateable values differed slightly.

What would happen if a poll tax were introduced in that area? We would assume that the widow paying £1,520 a year would be considerably better off: she would pay only £276, and therefore save £24 a week. If the Government's argument is right, that saving should be paid for by the five working people in the other house. However, if we multiply £276 by five, that totals only £1,380, so that household will also be saving money. Those five working people will be better off under the poll tax.

Who then will be paying that £24 a week? Other widows in Castlemilk will be paying it; the poor will be paying it, not the rich. The poll tax is not about helping single people, but about helping people who are already well off with good salaries and wages.

An experiment would be very worth while. It would allow us to see exactly how the system would work, and would illustrate the unfairness of someone in Castlemilk paying exactly the same as someone living in Newlands. It would show the nonsense of the administrative arrangements, and we could see whether registration would work.

I feel that there may be flaws in the system. If the Minister had felt able to say, "We agree with the notion of an experiment, in principle" — incidentally, the Secretary of State did not even mention that in his speech —we should be prepared to withdraw the new clause. We consider it essential that such an experiment should take place in one area so that we can show what nonsense the system will be.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 185, Noes 246.

Division No. 187] [8.05 pm

AYES

Abse, Leo	Bray, Dr Jeremy
Allen, David	Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*
Anderson, Donald	Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Archer, Rt Hon Peter	Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Ashdown, Paddy	Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack	Bruce, Malcolm
Ashton, Joe	Buchan, Norman
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*	Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.	Campbell-Savours, Dale
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*	Carlile, Alexander *(Monig'y)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosemary	Carter-Jones, Lewis
Barron, Kevin	Cartwright, John
Beckett, Mrs Margaret	Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Beith, A. J.	Clay, Robert
Bell, Stuart	Clelland, David Gordon
Benn, Rt Hon Tony	Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*	Cohen, Harry
Bidwell, Sydney	Coleman, Donald
Blair, Anthony	Conlan, Bernard
Boothroyd, Miss Betty	Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Boyes, Roland	Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*

Corbyn, Jeremy
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Cunningham, Dr John
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(L'lli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freud, Clement
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Fife Central)*
Hancock, Michael
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley, N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Janner, Hon Greville
Jenkins, Rt Hon Roy *(Hillh'd)*
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
Maclennan, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Martin, Michael
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pike, Peter
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shields, Mrs Elizabeth
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C.*(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stewart, Rt Hon D. *(W Isles)*
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wainwright, R.
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ray Powell and
Mr. Lawrence Cunliffe.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Ancram, Michael
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Best, Keith
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Carttiss, Michael
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Cranborne, Viscount
Critchley, Julian
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dykes, Hugh
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fletcher, Sir Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John S
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harvey, Robert
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(N'folk SW)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Irving, Charles
Jackson, Robert
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
McCrindle, Robert
McCurley, Mrs Anna
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, M. *(N'bury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
Madel, David
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Mather, Sir Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Morris, M. *(N'hampton S)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Osborn, Sir John
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Patten, J. *(Oxf W & Abgdn)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Portillo, Michael
Powley, John

Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertf'dshire N)*
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'lch N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Michael Neubert and
Mr. Tony Durant.

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 2

EMPLOYEES IN TIED ACCOMMODATION

'All public authorities concerned with the employment of employees in tied accommodation, including statutory wages councils, shall increase the minimum rate of wages for employees who live in tied accommodation in 1989 and in subsequent years by an amount that is sufficient to compensate the average employee's household for their liability for the average level of community charge in Scotland for the year in question, in addition to any other increase that the Board may determine.'.—*[Mr. Home Robertson]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Home Robertson: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take new clause 8—*Community Charge exemption or reduction for special cases*—

'No one in any of the following categories shall be obliged to pay more to any local authority under the Community Charge System than what they would have to pay under the rating system in force immediately prior to the enactment of this Act.

(1) Recipients of supplementary benefit or supplementary pension.
(2) Recipients of family income supplement.
(3) Full time students, including student nurses.'.

6.15 pm

Mr. Home Robertson: We did not have an opportunity to debate this new clause in Committee because of the guillotine, so I welcome the fact that I can say something about this important issue.

A substantial number of people will be made worse off by the introduction of this poll tax. As my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) pointed out at the conclusion of the last debate, a significant number of people will be better off—many of whom are in the same circumstances as some hon. Members—but it is worth highlighting the fact that a significant number of people will be penalised by this tax. It is important to dwell on the categories of people who might fall into this trap.

This new clause is designed to highlight the extra impact of the tax on people who live in various forms of tied housing. I shall concentrate, initially, on agricultural tied houses, which are now almost unique to Scotland. The agricultural tied housing system was effectively dismantled for England and Wales by the last Labour Government, and it will be a high priority for the next Labour Administration to undertake a similar reform of this pernicious system in Scotland.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mr. MacKay), who has responsibility for agriculture—who was muttering under his breath just now—told me on 13 January, in a written reply, that it is estimated that out of 21,000 regular hired workers in Scottish agriculture about 14,000 occupied tied cottages, of whom 11,000 have their rates paid by the farmers.

There are therefore 11,000 households scattered through rural Scotland whose rates are paid as a business expense by the employer. The Bill would transform that property tax into a personal tax relating to the occupiers of those houses. Farm workers and their families will have to cope with a cost which they have not experienced before. It might be £500 for a couple and £1,000 or more for a couple with children over 18.

We are talking about some of the lower-paid people in Scotland. The average earnings of farm workers in the United Kingdom during 1986, according to the current annual review of agriculture, was estimated to be only £139·70 for a 46·3 hour week. That average conceals a significant number of even more lowly paid people. The current Scottish Agricultural Wages Board Wages Order says that the minimum wage for a tractor man can be as low as £104·65 for an employee over the age of 20—and only £84·92 for an employee aged 18—for a 40-hour week. The order also says that up to 93p per week can be deducted from those basic rates when a tied house is provided.

People on very low incomes who live in rural areas where the cost of living tends to be high could not afford to pay this extra tax unless their wages were increased accordingly. The new clause would require the Scottish Agricultural Wages Board to increase the basic wages of people concerned to compensate workers for the effect of the tax. We believe that that is the right approach.

The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Corrie) who, like me, is a farmer said in Committee that he would pay his employees' poll tax for them. I read a report in a fascinating newspaper called *Big Farm Weekly* of 19 February which implied that farmers would be expected to pay their employees' poll tax directly, just as

[Mr. Home Robertson]

they now pay their rates. That raises several questions. How many of the household would be covered? If an employee has several people aged over 18 living in a tied house, would the employer be required to pay for all of them? Would the arrangement take account of eligibility for rebates?

The Scottish Office is quoted in the same article as having told the National Farmers Union of Scotland that the employer would become the responsible person, presumably under clause 19, but that clause makes the farmer responsible for furnishing information to the registration officer rather than for paying the tax. The same report conveys the alarm of farmers in Scotland at the prospect of having to pay £16 million for employees' poll tax instead £4·6 million which is what they are paying now for rates on farm cottages.

I fear that some unscrupulous employers will accept the abolition of domestic rates as a windfall, reduce their costs accordingly and leave their employees to pay the new tax. It is possible with the poll tax that employees on relatively low wages and who have grown up children living with them could pay more tax to the local authority than their employers.

The change will have a bearing on many long-standing employment contracts and no less a body than the Scottish Landowners' Federation has raised another interesting facet of the problem. It says in its submission:

"The present Bill has important implications for occupiers of tied housing and their employers. Currently it is normal practice for employers to pay the rates for tied houses occupied by their employees. Such people will become personally liable for the proposed Community Charge, but, so that their financial position will not be prejudiced, they will expect their employers to pay the Charge."

So far, so good. The federation continues:

"The danger here would be that this payment, if made by the employer, might be treated as a benefit in kind by the Inland Revenue and therefore taxable. Rates now paid by employers in such situations are not so treated by virtue of Section 33(4) of the Finance Act, 1977. Ministers must be urged to give the necessary assurances that similar tax arrangements will be applied in respect of the Community Charge."

I am a litle less concerned about the liability of landowners to tax than I am about the effect of these proposals on farm workers' incomes. The Government ought to respond to that.

I invite the Minister to explain the Government's intentions with regard to farm workers and employees in other industries or services which still have the tied housing system. We are considering a wide range of activities, including school caretakers, ministers of religion, lighthouse keepers, coast guards and a host of others. It has, unfortunately, not been possible to deal on Report with the Bill's effect on crofters,, but we know that 13,600 crofters are to lose long-standing tax relief. We deplore that.

Another group of people will find themselves brought into the new poll tax net although they have not previously paid local taxation. I refer to personnel in the armed forces resident in barracks and other military premises in Scotland. The Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces gave me an interesting written reply yesterday in which he said:

"Contributions in lieu of rates are made in respect of property deemed to be in the occupation of the Crown. Such payments are the responsibility of the rating of Government Property department. Approximately 14,550 service and 500 Ministry of Defence civilian personnel are living in such property in Scotland."—[*Official Report*, 3 March 1987.]

It emerges that 15,050 service men, excluding the Americans at Holy loch—who also will have to pay—will find that they have to pay poll tax of £250 a year. This raises the interesting prospect of the community charge registration officer having to locate, register and publish a rolling register of every service man in every military base in Scotland. Such a public register is likely to contain some interesting classified material which might well be of interest to foreign powers. I wonder whether the Minister has had an opportunity to think about that aspect of this curious Bill.

What about compensating service men for the extra cost, which will apply only to those who are serving in Scotland? In reply to a question which I tabled on Monday 23 February, the Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces said:

"The implications of the proposed community charge for service personnel in Scotland are currently under consideration by my Department. I will write to the hon. Member as soon as we have reached a conclusion."—[*Official Report*, 23 February 1987; Vol. 111, c. *150*.]

I suspect that 15,050 service men will be interested to know what will happen.

The examples that I have given reveal the lack of thought and preparation that characterises the Bill. It is essential to recognise the special effect of the poll tax on people who live in tied accommodation.

Sir Hector Monro: This is an important issue. I should have thought that service men would be covered by some form of block arrangement for each military establishment.

Mr. Home Robertson: Is it?

Sir Hector Monro: I should think so.

Mr. Home Robertson: It is not.

Sir Hector Monro: I am entitled to my view and I think that I am right.

The more important part of new clause 2 concerns tied cottages. There are swings and roundabouts. Most modernised cottages — I hope that most are now modernised—will pay between £200 and £400 in rates. In Dumfries and Galloway, we anticipate a community charge of about £175. The present level of rates is therefore not so far removed from two community charges. I should have thought that most farmers would anticipate paying two community charges for a tied house and that a working third or more person should pay the community charge himself. We will have the rebate system for people who are not working.

The hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) will, I suspect, find that most farmhouses pay less under the present scheme than they would in two community charges, and that charges on farmhouses and farm cottages balance out. I appreciate that some people, perhaps those in Berwickshire, will be vastly better off, but others who have more humble farmhouses in my part of the country will find that the charge for the farmhouse and that for each farm cottage on two community charges will about balance out. If the tax arrangement can be clarified, by and large agricultural communities should have no great worries over the introduction of a community charge.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): I support new clause 2 but wish to concentrate my remarks on new clause 8, standing in my name on the Notice Paper. I am absolutely opposed to this poll tax nonsense because it is an unfair tax. It is an unfair tax because it is a regressive tax.

6.30 pm

A poor widow living in a council house, for example, could find herself having to pay as much as a millionaire living in his castle. That is unfair by anyone's standards.

Sir Hector Monro: The hon. Gentleman will pay less.

Mr. Canavan: It is about time that the Government started admitting that the majority of people in Scotland will be worse off. Even the Government admit that the majority of households—52 per cent.—will be worse off. If we translate that into numbers of people, the percentage who will be worse off is considerably more than 52 per cent. Among that 52 per cent. of households will be the special categories that were mentioned specifically in my new clause such as people on low incomes, pensioners on supplementary pension and other people who receive a supplementary benefit, such as the long-term unemployed and students and student nurses, who are on very low grants, or who, in some cases, receive no grant from the Government. At present many of those people pay no local tax. They pay no rates to any local authority, either because they are not the owners or tenants of any eligible properties, such as many students and student nurses, or because, in other cases, they recieve 100 per cent. rate rebate.

The Government will apparently eventually come out with some rebate scheme under this poll tax system, but they are being secretive about it. The details of the rebate scheme seem to be as big a secret as Zircon. I understand that the Department of Health and Social Security will be responsible for laying the appropriate statutory instrument, or whatever, to give full details of the rebate scheme.

However, whatever scheme the Government have up their sleeves, it seems that everyone will have to pay something and that no one will receive 100 per cent. poll tax rebate. The minimum percentage payment will be 20 per cent. I would be grateful if the Minister would confirm that. In other words, the maximum rebate that anyone can get from paying poll tax would amount to 80 per cent.

The Scottish Office figures — which some hon. Members may believe and some may not—state what the poll tax would be in various areas. I notice that in Falkirk district, part of which I represent, the proposed poll tax would be £190 per year, according to the Government figures. That means that a full-time student, for example, at Falkirk college of technology or a student nurse at Falkirk royal infirmary or a pensioner on supplementary pension eking out a living, who perhaps at present receives 100 per cent. rate rebate, will find himself or herself having to pay at least £38 per year. I suppose that that is not much to the heir to the Marquis of Lothian, but to a poor student or to a poor pensioner £38 per year is a considerable sum.

Is it fair to levy that additional tax on people such as pensioners, the long-term unemployed on supplementary benefit and students? We have seen a 20 per cent. reduction in real terms in student grants since the Government took power, and the abolition of the minimum grant means that many students receive no grant. Therefore, they will have to pay at least £38 per year if they happen to be resident in Falkirk district. In many other areas they will pay considerably more.

I ask the House to support my new clause. The poll tax is an attack on the living standards of many people on low incomes, including those in the special categories that are mentioned in my new clause. It is unfair to levy this additional tax burden on low income groups to assist the Government to give what, in effect, is a tax handout to rich people living in big houses.

My amendment will give some protection to those low income groups. What my new clause boils down to is that, under the new system of poll tax, the people in those special categories would not have to pay any more than what they are at present paying under the rating system. In other words, if they receive 100 per cent. rate rebate, they will pay nothing. If they pay no rates because they do not own or lease property, people in these special categories will continue to pay nothing under the poll tax system. If at present they receive a 50 per cent. rate rebate, they will simply pay the equivalent amount in poll tax. Therefore, my new clause would at least be a damage limitation exercise in that it would be of considerable benefit to many people on low incomes.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): My hon. Friend is talking about a considerable number of people. In my constituency alone about 17,000 people are receiving supplementary benefit. Therefore, he is talking about a massive number of people, is he not?

Mr. Canavan: My hon. Friend is quite right. Perhaps the Government statisticians could give us a fairly accurate estimate of the number of people who would be affected, but many people in Scotland will be affected. The high unemployment caused by this Government means that there is a high number of people on supplementary benefit. There is also a large number of pensioners on supplementary pension. The Government are always boasting that there are more students in full-time education than there have ever been in Scotland's history, but that is a fat lot of good if the Government are taking more money out of their pockets, and that is precisely what they are proposing to do under the Bill. Therefore, my new clause would be of considerable benefit to old-age pensioners, to the long-term unemployed and their families and also to students. I ask the House to support me.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): The hon. Member for Falkirk, West, (Mr. Canavan) chooses to ignore the fact that provision will be made for all of those whom he has listed in his new clause. On first examination his new clause is tempting. It makes one think that perhaps no provision has been made in the legislation, but of course he knows that that is not so. However, there is also the aspect that perhaps people in all of those categories should become much more aware, in some way or other, of what is happening at local government level and take some real interest in it. Perhaps this measure will have some impact on the numbers who vote at local elections.

If we can encourage an increase in the present ghastly low turnout, by whatever means, even if it is simply by a tax, it will mean that a change in the system is making those individuals begin to take note of what is happening in local government. Perhaps that will be the positive side to this.

Mr. Canavan: The hon. Gentleman is being insulting to many people, such as old-age pensioners on supplementary benefit, who take an active interest in what is happening in local government and who do turn out at the ballot box. Thankfully, very few of them will vote for the hon. Gentleman when they do.

Mr. Walker: The hon. Gentleman, as ever, is jumping in with his feet in a manner that shows that he was not listening to what I was saying. I never specifically sorted out any particular group to suggest that they did not vote. I said that the derisory turnout at local government elections was such that anything that made individuals take at least more note of what was happening at local government level and take a real interest in it must benefit democracy. The hon. Gentleman will please not put into my mouth words that were not there.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) said that £38 was a great deal of money to many people, and he was right. Will my hon. Friend comment on the fact that the difference between the community charge for Falkirk and that for Stirling would be rather more than £38 because of the high-spending policies of Stirling district council?

Mr. Walker: I thank my hon. Friend for that helpful intervention. If one has no money, £38 is a fortune. If one has £38, one wants to hold on to it and not give it away. Unfortunately, some local authorities are determined to take away £38, or a lot more. I hope that that will change because, for the first time in a long time, local government finance is being carefully considered.

New clause 2 is about workers in tied accommodation. It is right that that aspect should be considered in relation to local authority finance. Of course, one would be worried if all people were to be substantially worse off, but my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) explained that there would be swings and roundabouts. Most of the people concerned would be living in modernised accommodation. I certainly hope that farm workers in tied cottages live in modernised premises, given the substantial public funds which have been poured into bringing those cottages up to date. I hope that everyone will take advantage of that. I have not found one cottage for farmworkers in my constituency that has not been modernised, although they may exist somewhere. There will be a benefit to some from this measure and a substantial benefit to those in high rates areas.

The hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) said that about 16,000 people in the services in Scotland are affected by the legislation. If the hon. Gentleman had ever attempted to study what goes on in the services, he would know that they are accustomed to local compensation being provided wherever people are posted. It used to be called the local overseas allowance and other names, depending on where the posting was. *[Interruption.]* One can always tell those individuals who have never been in the services because they laugh at things that make no sense to them. I assure them that it was never funny if one was living in a part of the world where costs were high. The services have always taken those costs into account.

Dr. Godman: Speaking as a former service man, I ask the hon. Gentleman whether he would expect service men who were transferred to Scotland from a base in, say, the south of England to receive from the Army, Navy or Royal Air Force a supplementary allowance to pay the community charge.

Mr. Walker: I should not wish to pre-judge that issue. *[Interruption.]* I should not. It may be done on a block basis. That is the only reason why I should not like to pre-judge it. This is always amusing to some hon. Members, but the service men are a large proportion of the voting electorate.

Dr. Godman: Hence my question.

Mr. Walker: I am coming to the answer. But I am referring also to some of the rather amusing asides by the hon. Gentleman's colleagues. The services could use allowances as one means of compensating service men. The hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) will be pleased to know that there are precedents for that. The services are accustomed to dealing with these matters. They have the machinery and the methods to deal with them, and I am confident that they will find the right answers.

If service men, whoever they are and wherever they are, are using local facilities, it is right that they should be aware that it is paid for, however that is done. That assists with accountability., For that reason, I hope that service men will all vote in local elections.

The two new clauses are unnecessary because provision has already been made in the Bill to take care of these matters. I am confident that they will not be accepted by the Government.

6.45 pm

Mr. Ancram: This has been a short but useful debate. I listened carefully to the arguments in support of some form of special arrangement to meet the position whereby workers living in tied houses, who at present have their accommodation provided rent and rates free, will be faced with liability for the personal community charge. I remind the House that the personal community charge is, as we have debated at some length in Committee, a personal liability rather than a liability tied to the occupation of a particular property. Each individual will therefore be expected to meet his or her personal community charge bill. Of course, there is nothing in the system to prevent anyone from paying another person's personal community charge liability on his or her behalf, but that is in no sense part of the formal system as we envisage it, and we propose that, in the interests of perceptibility of personal community charge payments, individual demand notices should be sent to all those liable.

It will therefore be for employers, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) pointed out, to decide whether to take any account of the personal community charge liability of workers in tied houses in considering the minimum wage that they set for 1989-90 and subsequent years. I should, however, point out that any such arrangements would by no means be straightforward. If an argument is to be developed that employers should thus meet the personal community charge liability of their employees living in tied accommodation, I can only envisage that they may also come under pressure to make similar arrangements in relation to employees who do not live in tied accommodation but who will nevertheless equally find themselves with a new personal community charge

liability. Furthermore, it is difficult to see how far any such compensation would go. The new clause suggests that "the average employee's household" should be compensated, but does that include adult children who may have jobs entirely unconnected with their parents' work? That is a valid question.

Service men were mentioned in this debate and in Committee. If registration would cause a security risk—this point was raised by the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson)—service men could be exempted under clause 30. We debated this at some length during the latter stages of the Committee deliberations, and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman has happy recollections of that. Clause 30(2) says that persons who are

"within such class or classes of person as may be prescribed"

shall be exempt from liability. Obviously, that power would be available if a security risk were involved.

Mr. Home Robertson: The Minister says that there is scope under subsection (2) for certain categories of people to be left out of the tax altogether. That is a rather curious principle. If it were used for service men, 15,000 people could be lifted out of liability. On the security point, would it not make more sense simply to ensure that these people are left off the public register but are still charged the tax?

Mr. Ancram: The hon. Gentleman must decide what his line is. He suggested earlier that registration of service men and the fact that service men would become liable to pay the community charge could, in certain circumstances, create a security risk. If that were the case, there is provision in the legislation to exempt such service men for what I presume would be a very good reason under the terms which the hon. Gentleman has described. I know that we are not in Committee now, but the hon. Gentleman must decide, on certain occasions at least, when he gets the answer which he appears to be seeking, to appear gracious rather than to change direction immediately and to avoid the argument that he originally put.

As for service men in general, the extension of the new burden will depend on what service men pay for accommodation now. The Ministry of Defence will have to look at this as it considers the new scheme's implications.

Mr. Douglas: The Minister is trying to be helpful. Will he clarify the position as to representations by the Scottish Office to the Ministry of Defence on, for instance, accommodation in the Dunfermline area, where there are many married quarters? The hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) made the point that the Ministry of Defence is well used to paying local overseas allowances and so on. The passage of the Bill is well advanced. It is important to district councils such as Dunfermline and regional councils such as Fife to ascertain what is likely to be done. At present, personnel quite rightly use the available education services and so on in their areas. How are local authorities and service men to be compensated?

Mr. Ancram: At the risk of going into some of the more detailed parts of the Bill, I shall explain the procedures as they might be likely to operate. First, the registration officer must decide who is solely or mainly resident at an address. In the case of service men, that decision may not always be straightforward. By the nature of their jobs, service men tend to move around. That will always be a matter of fact and circumstance. The extent of liability cannot be judged at this distance. It will be a matter of the judgment of the registration officer, subject, obviously, to appeal to the sheriff about who is solely or mainly resident and therefore should be liable to a community charge.

I cannot answer the hon. Gentleman's second point for the Ministry of Defence. It is for the Ministry of Defence to decide, in the light of all the circumstances, what it wishes to do about its payments to service men. Again, the Ministry of Defence will wish to consider that matter.

Dr. Godman *rose*——

Mr. Ancram: If the hon. Gentleman will allow me to continue, the Ministry of Defence will wish to consider that matter in the light of the circumstances at the time. Obviously, one matter that it will wish to take into account is its payments to local authorities in lieu of rates. The extent of that payment and how much it will be in future will depend on what parts of the services' property remain in the non-domestic area rather than the domestic area, which will fall out of the argument. It is impossible to give the hon. Gentleman a definite answer until the circumstances of each case have been examined.

Mr. Douglas: I ask the Minister to consider the example of someone engaged in the Polaris fleet, who is out on patrol for 18 months but is still resident in Rosyth. Such complications should have been analysed by the Scottish Office and the Ministry of Defence. How far have they gone? The Minister has said that nothing has been done.

Mr. Ancram: The hon. Gentleman must accept that the fairest way in which liability to pay a charge that depends on residence is to consider the circumstances in each case. I argued in Committee—I believe that it is a correct argument—that it would be totally wrong for us to set down hard and fast rules about who should be regarded as solely or mainly resident. It will be for the registration officer to examine the position of the hon. Gentleman's submariner constituent and to decide whether the length of time that he is away effectively means that he cannot be called solely or mainly resident at his postal address. The registration officer will wish to consider that matter. It is not a matter on which I wish to pre-empt his judgment.

Dr. Godman *rose*——

Mr. Ancram: I hope the hon. Gentleman will allow me to continue. Many points have been raised. I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman, but I shall give way to him one more time.

Dr. Godman: The Minister referred to clause 30 and to service men's possible exemption from the charge. Do I take it that service men, but not members of their families, will be exempt from the tax?

Mr. Ancram: If the hon. Gentleman reads clause 30, he will note that it refers to persons solely or mainly resident on Crown land. He must accept that the provision for exemption will obviously depend on the facts and circumstances at the time. That point was raised by the hon. Member for East Lothian, not by myself. I merely said that the circumstances that he raised could find an answer in subsection (2) of clause 30. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is reassured.

Mr. Home Robertson: So far, so good. It is interesting to hear the Minister suggest that it may be the Government's intention to get around the problem by

[Mr. Home Robertson]

exempting people under that subsection. If that exception were to be used, will the Government compensate local authorities for the loss of revenue?

Mr. Ancram: As I said earlier, at the moment there is a payment in lieu of rates on Crown properties. The extent of that payment will depend, obviously, on an adjustment between the part which, in a sense, now holds the community charge payers within it and the parts which do not. Obviously, if an exemption of that kind is made, it will be taken into account in terms of payment in lieu.

I now refer to agricultural workers. This matter is the basis of the hon. Gentleman's new clause. It was certainly the basis of the one that he tabled in Committee, but it was not reached. He knows the background to the farm workers' position—in fact, he gave some figures. About 6,000 workers in the category of farm workers do not live in tied houses. About 14,000 live in tied houses, of whom about 3,000 pay their own rates. If wages were upped right across the board, about 9,000 workers would stand to benefit for no justifiable reason—effectively, a windfall. However, a great majority of farm workers—about 90 per cent.—receive wages in excess of the minimum. The average premium for all workers is £12·62 over the minimum. If the adjustment is made only to the minimum, the figures suggest that only about 1,400 workers—7 per cent.—will be directly affected in the wages determination that the amendment seeks to provide.

Again, the hon. Gentleman perhaps has not thought through the full effect of his amendment. I am sure that, were he to do so, he would be as concerned about windfall benefits going to those who do not need them as is Brian Wilson, whom I suspect is a friend of the hon. Gentleman. He writes for *West Highland Free Press*. On 27 February, with reference to the crofters amendment — it was discussed in Committee, but the principle is the same as that which I now bring forward — and, having congratulated the hon. Member for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Brown) on the arguments that he put forward, Mr. Wilson stated:

> "It is simply not on to introduce in 1987 a new scheme which gives the well-paid school teacher with crofting status a 25 per cent. rebate while the pensioner next door in a non-crofting house is hit for the full whack."

Obviously, if we are not careful in the circumstances of the amendment, the same situation could be created and the same objection could rightly be taken to it.

Mr. Wallace *rose*——

Mr. Ancram: I shall not give way. I am watching the time. Other hon. Members wish to raise matters, and I do not wish to prevent them if I can help it.

Therefore, if public bodies such as the Scottish Agricultural Wages Board, whose position was raised in the debate on an earlier clause, wish to go down this route, many practical details of the arrangement will have to be established. It will not be sensible for the Bill to lay a duty on such bodies in advance of their consideration of the matter.

Under the national taxation system, the position of payments made by employers to employees, whatever the circumstances, is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. I doubt, given the present reasons for benefits for tied cottages, that they would naturally carry over to the community charge. It is therefore highly unlikely that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer would be willing to consider a tax concession of the kind mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries. Of course, I shall draw to his attention the arguments put forward by my hon. Friends.

New clause 8 which was tabled by the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) would have the perverse effect of limiting the community charge liability of certain individuals to the amount that they paid in rates before the new system was introduced. That produces a series of glaring anomalies. For instance, some people who pay no rates now would be exempt from paying a community charge if they fell into the categories covered by the new clause, whereas others who are not in those categories would not be exempt. That would indeed extend the local tax base, which is one of the objectives of the Bill, but it would extend it in the most arbitrary and unfair way possible.

7 pm

Similarly, the clause makes no provision for people's circumstances changing after the Bill is enacted. What happens, for instance, in the case of a student whose liability is restricted, or who is exempted by this clause, but who subsequently graduates and obtains a well-paid job? Again, as the clause is framed, that would freeze the payments made by the groups it covers at the point when the Bill is enacted, making no provision for subsequent changes in local authority spending or other circumstances.

I am sure that the hon. Member for Falkirk, West did not intend to say that if a student happens to be exempt and is not paying rates today he should never be required to pay the community charge in perpetuity, even if he became the chairman of a major international or multinational company. However, that is the effect of the hon. Gentleman's new clause. That is why his original suggestion that it is a good clause may lead him, on reflection, to realise that that is not entirely so.

It can be argued that the hon. Gentleman's intention was to explore the position of certain particularly deserving groups under the community charge system. I should explain quite clearly, as we explained again and again in Committee and as my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) made clear in his valuable contribution, that the system we propose will make adequate provision for people on low incomes who would find it difficult to meet their full personal community charge liability. Those who at present qualify for social security benefits will be eligible for consideration for rebates under the scheme that we propose to bring in under clause 26. Contrary to the impression that the hon. Gentleman tried to give, that was fully explained in Committee. We admitted that the final figures could not be included because we do not know what the levels of expenditure will be when the scheme comes into operation in 1989.

Equally, there is the question of the minimum contribution. That will be in line with what is to be proposed under the housing benefits system, which will be made known shortly. It is right to try to keep the two schemes running along the same lines so that people will be able to understand them. We shall return to the rebate scheme tomorrow. However, the figures that we have produced are fairly detailed as to what, according to current assumptions, the actual rebate will be for various

categories of persons. Like the housing benefit scheme that will be brought into force in 1988, our proposed scheme will provide for all those who are liable for local taxation payments to make a minimum contribution towards their liability.

The position of students is slightly different. The Government intend that in the longer term they should be removed from entitlement to social security benefits and that they should return to the position whereby they depend on the students awards system, parental contributions and their own vacation earnings. The argument of the hon. Member for Falkirk, West seemed to be based on the assumption that at the moment students pay nothing towards local government services. There are large numbers of students in my constituency, many of whom are living in accommodation for which they have to make a contribution to the rating system, often without support.

Mr. Canavan: But only a minority contribute.

Mr. Ancram: The hon. Gentleman says that only a minority contribute. If he were to look at the breakdown of student numbers, I think he would find that if students are living in rented accommodation they are paying an element of rates through the amount of rent that they pay to their landlords.

Mr. Canavan: That makes nonsense of the whole argument.

Mr. Ancram: No, it does not.

However, we accept that students will require help to enable them to meet the charge. Therefore, we propose that students who are eligible for grant—including those who, because of parental income, receive no grant payments at present—should receive a flat rate each year towards their personal community charge liability. It will be based on the average level of personal community charge in Scotland each year and it will have regard to the level of assistance that is available under the rebate system. The detailed arrangements will be worked out well before the introduction of the charge in two years' time.

I believe that the new clause of the hon. Member for Falkirk, West is unnecessary. The protection for those whom he is seeking to protect is already there. It is included in the rebate system. Therefore, I hope that he will withdraw his new clause. If he does not, I shall ask my hon. Friends to resist it.

I hope that the hon. Member for East Lothian appreciates that his new clause would be likely to make things more difficult rather than easier for those whom he is trying to help, and I ask him to withdraw it. If he does not, again I shall ask my hon. Friends to resist it.

Mr. Canavan *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. The hon. Gentleman has already spoken. Does he have the leave of the House to speak again? Mr. Canavan.

Mr. Canavan: The Minister cannot have it both ways. He cannot complain that under the existing system most people do not pay rates and say that that is undemocratic and then say that many students who do not pay rates directly pay them nevertheless, indirectly as a proportion of the rent that they are charged by their landlord. It makes nonsense of the Minister's argument.

The Minister has either misread or deliberately misinterpreted my new clause 8. If somebody ceases to be a full-time student, he ceases to qualify for the rebate under the terms of my new clause. I am dissatisfied with the Minister's reply. He ought to accept the principle of the new clause and ask his father to move an appropriate amendment in the other place.

Mr. Home Robertson: The Minister's reply is far from satisfactory. This debate will be regarded as very bad news indeed by all occupiers of tied housing in Scotland, regardless of the service or industry for which they work. There appears to be some hope for the armed forces, but neither this Minister nor any other has given a specific undertaking. All we have had is the undertaking of the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker)—with all the authority that he carries—that service men in Rosyth and Lossiemouth might be classified as people in overseas postings. That seems to be a curious new approach.

As for farm workers, the Minister has confirmed that this is a deliberate transfer from a property tax on farmers to a personal tax on farm workers. In many cases that will be seen as a nice windfall for employers and as very hard luck for a number of very low-paid people. The Minister tried to fudge the issue, but he knows as well as I do that farm workers in Scotland are among the lowest paid people in Scotland. He is seeking deliberately to impose an additional tax on them. All he is offering is a pie in the sky rebate scheme, but he will give no details.

In view of the hon. Gentleman's unsatisfactory answer, I do not intend to withdraw the new clause.

Question put and negatived.

New Clause 4

New Town Development Corporations

'A New Town Development Corporation shall be treated as a local authority for the purposes of section 19 of the Local Government (Financial Provisions) (Scotland) Act 1963'.—*[Mr. Cook.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

As the Minister will be aware, I have been in correspondence with him about this matter. In 1984 he and I exchanged letters on this point. The Minister will also be aware that this point was the subject of vigorous representations by Livingston development corporation in response to the 1983 White Paper and that therefore it has previously been on his desk.

It is a modest point. I do not pretend that it is a major point of political principle. However, it refers to what I regard as an anomaly in the law. Nobody intended the anomaly; therefore, no one is to blame. As no one is to blame, I hope that no one feels under any obligation to defend it. I certainly hope that the Minister will feel under no obligation to defend the anomaly. Neither he nor I qualified for the franchise when this anomaly was created. Therefore, I invite him to apply his native intelligence, legal training and natural acumen and an open and fresh mind to the problem that is before him, which I am sure he accepts requires attention.

The problem stems from the Local Government (Financial Provisions) (Scotland) Act 1963 which in section 19 provided, no doubt sensibly, that any land which consists of a park vested in a local authority and from which the local authority does not derive profit "shall not be entered in the valuation roll"

[Mr. Robin Cook]

for subsequent years. The difficulty that that gives rise to in my constituency and, no doubt, in the constituencies of my hon. Friends who represent the other Scottish new towns is that that section is confined to local authorities and does not apply to the development corporations of the new towns. Indeed, the Act was passed in 1963 and Livingston development corporation was not designated until 1964 and, therefore, could not have hoped to come within the scope of the Act as an entity in its own right.

Our problem is that in West Lothian we have a recreation and leisure department of the district council, which is extremely active and imaginative and which has a far-reaching and wide programme providing facilities for my constituents and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), but which suffers from a limited budget. Therefore, it is unable to provide as many facilities as it would wish, and as many facilities as the new town requires. The net result of that is that quite a large amount of land held as open parkland and recreation spaces in Livingston new town is vested not in the local authority but the development corporation.

When I took this matter up with the Minister in 1984 his reply was that it is open to the development corporation and the district council to negotiate a transfer of the ownership of the land. That point has been explored with both parties. However, there is a legal difficulty, which no doubt the Minister can understand but, I am afraid, I cannot get my mind round it. It relates to the rating of car parks attached to local authority parkland and it makes the district council reluctant to accept ownership of more parkland for fear that it is lumbered with a rating charge for the car parking space. However, whatever the legal obstacles to the transfer may be, I put it to the Minister that, having recommended transfer as a way of solving that anomaly, he has recognised that the land vested in the local authority for recreation purposes and the land vested in the development corporation for recreational purposes is identical in purpose and nature and should, logically, be treated in an identical fashion for valuation purposes. As it is, the land is treated differently. The occupants of parkland vested in a development corporation cannot qualify for exemption under section 19 and, therefore, find themselves liable to a rating charge.

The occupant of the particular parkland which first drew my attention to this problem is Livingston rugby club, an institution of which I am proud to say that I am honorary vice-president. That is a post I am happy to fulfil, not in any mistaken view that I may ingratiate myself with the leader of my party, but because it recognises the substantial community contribution made by the club, particularly its work among youngsters through its junior teams.

Livingston rugby club finds itself faced with a charge on the use and occupation of its pitches which it believes to be almost unique. The clubs with which it plays which use parkland vested in local authorities do not find themselves liable to such a rating charge. If the club's pitch was two miles to the east it, in turn, would not be liable to a rating charge. Indeed, most odd of all, in the 1990s, when Livingston development corporation is wound up and ceases to exist and its recreation and leisure function is transferred to West Lothian district council, the rating charge will then disappear. I do not know what ground in logic could be found to justify the present charge for the rugby club occupying the land now. There is no ground in public policy to be served by it.

The revenue which would be forgone by the local authority and, therefore, ultimately by the Government by making the modest change to law would be negligible. That brings me to the obvious question put to me by the Minister in 1984, which is that since the money that will be saved by the rugby club will be modest, why make the change?

7.15 pm

I shall digress slightly but I hope stay within order. The rugby club, like other sports bodies, faces a heavy burden of rates charges. It runs into several thousands of pounds. It regards that burden as unreasonable since it is non-profit making, it provides a leisure facility and supplies a focus for the local community. I shall not develop that point since it is the subject of a later debate on an amendment on the Notice Paper. However, the fact remains that it faces a heavy rates charge arising not from the pitches, but from the ancillary buildings and club premises. Why, then, take particular exception to the rating charge that arises from the use of the parkland?

The reason I raise this point and why the club takes particular exception to this charge is that it is the salt in the wound. Not only does the club find itself with a heavy rates burden, which it regards as unfair and anomalous compared with similar clubs south of the border, but, on top of that, it has to shoulder an extra amount, which may be small but which is certainly distinctive and discriminatory. In the club's view—and I am bound to say that I have strong sympathy with it—it is the last straw. It is an anomaly which it has to bear but which other clubs do not have to bear. Although I have illustrated my remarks by reference to its particular position, it is an anomaly which applies to all parkland held by Livingston development corporation and, no doubt, it is an anomaly which exists in the constituencies of my hon. Friends who represent Scottish new towns.

I put it to the Minister that this is not a partisan point. I would not claim Livingston rugby club as the strongest bastion of my political support. For all I know, there may be people in the club who support the Minister's party. I put the matter to him in a non-partisan way and I invite him to approach it in a non-partisan manner. I ask him not to be prejudiced against my new clause because it is moved from the Opposition Benches. I should say in advance that I am perfectly prepared to be advised by him that my new clause is technically incompetent. One of the reasons why I am anxious that, at some stage in my parliamentary career, I may occupy the Treasury Bench is that I hope that some day I shall be able to move an amendment which turns out not to be technically incompetent. I would be happy to withdraw my new clause if those are the grounds of objection offered by the Minister. However, I would be happy to do so only if in replying to the debate he recognises the principle, accepts that there is an anomaly and resolves to seek whatever way may be open to him to meet that principle and resolve it, perhaps in another place.

Mr. Ancram: I was touched by the blandishments of the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) at the beginning of his remarks. I have to be careful not to be tempted into paths which I might not otherwise have strayed into. I have listened carefully to the arguments he has put

forward. As he says, section 19 of the Local Government (Financial Provisions) (Scotland) Act 1963 provides that any lands and heritages consisting of a park vested in or under the control of a local authority, and from which the local authority does not derive any net profit, should not be entered in the valuation roll. The effect of that is, of course, that such lands and heritages are not liable to be rated. The term "park" is defined for the purposes of the section as including any recreation ground or pleasure ground. As a general rule, however, buildings situated within a park will still enter the roll, and be rated, unless they are used for purposes which are ancillary to those of the park. That, as I understand it, is what the new clause is trying to extend to parks which are vested in or under the control of new town development corporations.

It seems to me that, as a matter of general principle —I am sure that the hon. Member for Livingston will agree with me on this — where there is any case for extending a rating exemption it has to be made out very carefully. I do, however, take the points that have been made by the hon. Gentleman about the differences in treatment under the present law between local authority parks and those of new town development corporations. On the face of it, the matter certainly warrants being looked into further. I could not obviously agree to the new clause now on the basis of this short debate, but I am willing to take the matter away to consider it further, not alone but in consultation with COSLA and the new town development corporations, because they have an interest in how this is developed in the future. I cannot give any positive undertakings to the hon. Gentleman that I will meet his point, but I hope that he will accept that I make this suggestion to him in good faith and that on that basis he will be prepared to withdraw the new clause.

Mr. Robin Cook: On that basis, I would of course be willing to withdraw my new clause. I am grateful for the positive way in which the Minister responded and obviously I shall hope to be informed by his office of the progress of his consultations and I shall report back to my constituents. I shall ensure that the consultations are pressed for. I hope that the House can now proceed to debate the rest of the Bill in the same amiable and agreeable style.

I beg to ask leave to withraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 1

ABOLITION OF DOMESTIC RATES

Mr. Ancram: I beg to move amendment No. 2, in page 1, line 7, leave out '1992' and insert '1989'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): With this it will be convenient also to discuss the following amendments:

No. 3, in page 1, line 7, leave out '1992' and insert '1991'.

No. 4, in page 1, line 7, leave out '1992' and insert '1997.'.

No. 5, in page 1, line 7, at end add

'and shall be phased out from 1989.'.

Government amendments Nos. 6 and 7A,

Amendment No. 8, in clause 2, page 1, line 11, leave out '1992' and insert '1991'.

Government amendments Nos. 9 to 12, 93, 97 to 106, 108 to 120, 107, 121 to 129 and 13,

Amendment No. 14, in clause 3, page 2, line 15, leave out '1991-92'.

No. 15, in clause 3, page 2, line 38, leave out '40 per cent.' and insert '30 per cent.'.

No. 16, in clause 3, page 2, leave out line 39.

Government amendments Nos. 19, 21, 27 and 33,

Amendment No. 165, in clause 5, page 5, line 22, at end insert—

'(2) There shall be an annual revaluation of non-domestic subjects from and after 1993'.

No. 177, in clause 5, page 5, line 30, at end insert—

'(3) In any revaluation of lands and heritages consisting of a caravan site, there shall be disregarded any value attributed to any caravan stationed thereon and section 3 of the Rating (Caravan Sites) Act 1976 shall thereupon cease to have effect.'.

Government amendments Nos. 34 to 40, 45 to 47, 88, 150, 152, 89 and 90.

Mr. Ancram: This large group of amendments seeks to give effect to the Government's decision that the community charge should be brought fully into operation with effect from 1 April 1989. The broad purpose of the amendments is therefore to remove from the Bill the provisions relating to the transitional period that was due to last from 1 April 1989 to 31 March 1992.

It was originally envisaged that during the three-year period domestic rates would be steadily phased out while the community charge was being phased in. However, the advantages of a clean break introduction of the community charge have been put to us by a number of organisations which were concerned about the administrative difficulties local authorities would face in running the community charge and domestic rates side by side during the transitional period. Bodies such as the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, the Scottish forum of the Rating and Valuation Association and COSLA came out clearly in favour of the clean break rather than a transitional period, while others, including a number of individual local authorities, expressed their concern over the cost and complexity of going ahead with the transitional arrangements. As my right hon. and learned Friend said earlier, pressure was put on us by my hon. Friends in Committee and not least by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) in a famous amendment that he moved on the basis that it was probing and then withdrew. In that amendment he presented arguments to which we may return later.

Mr. Dewar: What column was that?

Mr. Ancram: I can tell the hon. Member that the reference is column 284 of 15 January. He will find there that the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) described the amendment as probing and the hon. Member for Cathcart withdrew it. The point was made during the course of that debate and we decided that there was a great deal of force in those views.

The advantages to local authorities will not simply be in terms of removing the burden of running two systems in parallel. Authorities will also be able to plan more effectively for the introduction of the new community charge as they will no longer have to consider the interim arrangements to cope with the transitional period. The clean break will also make life simpler for individuals who will get a single community charge bill rather than two bills calculated on quite different principles.

The amendments that are necessary to dispense with the transitional period are essentially technical. Many simply

[Mr. Ancram]

consist of changes in dates. Clause 3, which made provision for domestic rates in the transitional period, is dropped, as is clause 5 which dealt with the effects of future revaluations on domestic subjects. Both are no longer necessary. Schedule 1 can be considerably shortened and simplified as it no longer has to make provision to identify the subjects on which domestic rates were to be charged during the transitional period.

Some hon. Members were concerned that the dropping of the transitional period would put an undue burden on individual payers of the community charge. As the debate progressed, it was felt that the transitional period was not going to make that much difference. Indeed, on 15 January in Committee the hon. Member for Cathcart said:

"The administration of a big bang would be easier and the difference that it would make to the taxpayer would not be great." — [*Official Report, First Scottish Standing Committee*, 15 January 1987; c. 281.]

I felt that in a nutshell that was an endorsement of the principles that are to be adopted. Throughout the Committee stage, the hon. Member for Cathcart accused me of not listening to him and I am sure that he will now welcome the fact that I am giving positive proof that where he spoke sense — which I cannot say that he did frequently—I listened to him closely.

I commend the amendments to the House. They will be welcomed by those involved in administering the new system and they will be widely welcomed by people in Scotland who will now be able to get the full benefits of the community charge at an earlier date than would otherwise have been the case and who may have noticed that that will happen with the full support of the Opposition.

Mr. Dewar: The hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Ancram) enjoyed himself making that speech. I am always pleased to see someone who drudges getting a little pleasure out of life. That is good for all of us.

These amendments deal with the phasing that has disappeared. They deal with the transitional provisions which are no more — "Now you see them, now you don't". I must confess that I approach this concession with mixed feelings. We see the administrative advantages of a clean break. We became convinced slowly over a period during discussions with various people in local government that probably the balance of advantage was in favour of the clean break.

An amendment to that effect was tabled by my hon. Friends in Committee. It was certainly a probing amendment and there is nothing dishonourable in that. As my hon. Friend the Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) made clear, it was a probing amendment that was paving the way for later discussion. There was no doubt that the arguments were fairly and effectively put by a number of my hon. Friends. This clutch of amendments is clearly something which the Opposition welcome. The amendments reflect an area about which we expressed considerable alarm and disquiet.

There was a great deal dismissive and unpleasant criticisms of the Committee stage of the Bill, especially during the debate on the timetable motion. That criticism was made the more irritating when we consider its source — but there you are, we all put up with that kind of thing.

The hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mrs. McCurley) produced a rather startling test of the effectiveness of a Committee stage. It was apparently the number of concessions and amendments that the Government had to table. She rather triumphantly proved that because the Minister had been obdurate to all argument and had given not an inch—well, perhaps two inches, as there were two very small concessions — in some way the Committee stage had been a disaster and the Opposition had been totally ineffective. I am delighted that the hon. Lady will now be happy to know that it was a very much more productive Committee stage than she had anticipated. Presumably the Opposition can wear this thicket of amendments as a badge of pride. The hon. Lady's theory is somewhat unlikely. Perhaps I can preserve it for posterity by calling it "McCurley's law".

I am reminded—perhaps irrevelantly, but only briefly —of a brilliant piece of Opposition work, by the hon. Lady's standards, during the passage in another place of the Matrimonial Homes Act 1967. The Minister may also remember the passage of that Act during which a noble peer—I do not even know who the hero was—objected very strongly to the use of the word "titled". You may remember, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the Bill dealt with conveyancing matters and referred to "titled" and "non-titled" spouses. That was objected to on the grounds that a "titled" spouse was clearly the wife of a Member of another place. It was extremely unpleasant that that should then be imported into a Bill that dealt with such matters as battered wives and broken marriages. As a result of that brilliant stroke, several hundred amendments appeared on the Order Paper changing "titled" and "non-titled" to "entitled" and "non-entitled". I suppose that if we apply "McCurley's law", that was one of the great parliamentary triumphs of the decade. I am not sure that it will hold as the proper test, but I record it in passing.

We have these concessions and amendments which we pressed for and I must not be ungracious about them. However, it is fair to remind the Minister that in Committee the amendments were strongly resisted by the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Lang), who looks after Scottish industry in his spare time. He was in fine form. He described the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) as being as "pellucid as opaque glass". I suppose that is how they talk down in Galloway. I must go down some time to find out.

7.30 pm

Mr. Ancram: I do not want the hon. Gentleman to get the wrong dialect. My hon. Friend was giving an example of Caithness dialect as used by the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) on every other occasion in Committee.

Mr. Dewar: I am always careful about Conservative Ministers who talk about glass and mental capacity. I remember the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross (Mr. Fairbairn) referring to his mind as being like a pond in winter frozen over. I suppose that it is a matter of taste.

I thought that the hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithdale made a brave speech on that occasion. Indeed, he got completely out of line with his master's voice, because he started by saying that all the talk about difficulties for COSLA and the local authorities were exaggerated. He said:

"There are a number of able and experienced professionals staffing Scottish local authorities, and they should be able to make the necessary arrangements to cope with the transitional period."

That was a startling statement, because it was praise for local government and local government officials. It shows that there is still some realism lurking at least in the junior parts of the Scottish Office.

The Minister went on to say:

"I repudiate the prediction of the president of COSLA"—that is fighting talk—

"that there will be five years of chaos if the Bill is enacted and implemented as we propose. To me that is nothing more than a strong criticism of officials in finance departments up and down Scotland."—[*Official Report, First Scottish Standing Committee*, 15 January 1987; c. 283.]

He was taking up the cudgels on their behalf. He then asked that the amendment be withdrawn or he and his hon. Friends would bury it with the block vote.

Perhaps the Under-Secretary of State still believes that there would not have been five years of chaos. But the fact that he has tabled these amendments shows that he accepts the argument that there would have been a period of considerable difficulty and that we are better off without the transitional arrangements, which is what the Opposition argued in Committee.

It is important to clarify our position for the record. We believed that great difficulty would be caused by running the rates and the poll tax in tandem. We thought that it would cause much public confusion and much complication for officials already under pressure. Indeed, it was not just a matter of them running in tandem; the proportions of the tax take contributed by each form of revenue-raising would vary during the period. For example, if one considers the one-day period, as I did in a moment of enthusiasm, one sees the problems of running the rebate and housing benefits systems, with authorities that have different responsibilities following two forms of taxation. It became clear that great difficulty would be caused, so we came to the conclusion that there was a strong administrative case for moving in the way that the Government have chosen. That was the basis for our amendments.

The trouble is that it is purely an administrative argument and does not touch our basic objections to the Bill as drafted and the scheme as envisaged. Those objections remain.

The Under-Secretary of State was a little less than frank when he managed to give the impression—it may have been unintentional, but he may be under a misapprehension—that most of those who had lodged technical objections as to the practicality of the poll tax were safe abed, relieved that their fears had been swept away with the disappearance of the phasing arrangements, and he quoted the Scottish branch of the Rating and Valuation Association in that context. I have here a comprehensive series of comments on the scheme from the Rating and Valuation Association—dated 13 February 1987, so it does not have cobwebs on it yet.

The letter contains much adverse comment on the phasing arrangements in clause 3, so no doubt the association will warmly welcome the fact that they have disappeared. It would not be fair to the House to quote at length from this sophisticated and lengthy document, but hon. Members will take my word for the fact that it still contains plenty of reservations, caveats and criticism of matters that will continue to be essential parts of the scheme, if it is implemented. The association describes the retail prices index test in clause 4 as inappropriate, and it calls the collective community charge machinery "unnecessarily cumbersome" and says that it should be scrapped. It says that parts of clause 20 are

"unworkable in their present form."

In summing up, the letter states:

"The Government should be in no doubt that the relative yield from the community charge will be considerably less than that from domestic rates. The community charge will be easily avoided and considerably more expensive to collect than domestic rates."

The association makes a sustained case for that conclusion.

I hope that the Minister accepts that he put a gloss on the matter when he seemed to suggest that the opposition to the Bill has been defused and that there were no doubts among the professionals. The Rating and Valuation Association represents professionals. It is not a gaggle of Labour councillors plotting the downfall of the free market economy and the prosperous future of the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth). It represents people who have examined, in a narrow professional sense, the nuts and bolts of the system and found it wanting.

I make those points because it is important that our position and the position of those who have criticised the Bill should not be misinterpreted later. The amendments will provide some improvement. They will simplify the introduction of a bad scheme, but unfortunately we have failed to improve it in any way with other amendments. In a sense, the change sharpens the divide between the parties. It removes the blurring and the period of confusion. It means that suddenly in 1989 a fully armoured, 100 per cent. poll tax will be sprung upon us. Although I give the amendments a qualified welcome, I do not wish to leave anyone under the impression that our opposition to the Bill has been decreased by this concession. I would much rather—there is a strong case for this—that the Minister had decided to introduce the clean break at the end of the planned phase-in period in 1992 instead of in 1989, when there will be many administrative difficulties. The authorities will have to organise collection and compile registers before April 1989.

I am glad that, despite the snorts and the cries of repudiation in Committee, Ministers listened to our argument. I can only express the pious, and I fear unfounded, hope that even at this late stage it will be a catching habit and that there will be signs of movement in other areas.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The purpose of amendment No. 3 and the related amendments standing in my name was to shorten to 1991 the phasing-in period of the community charge, with appropriate changes in the percentages. In a sense, they were fall-back amendments. He will know that because he has expressed concern, as has the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), about the practicability of the phasing-in period. I tabled the amendments as a fall-back in case my hon. Friend found himself unable to accept the case for the direct introduction of the community charge in 1989. Obviously I am not pressing the amendments, and I warmly welcome his decision.

My hon. Friend's decision is welcome on two quite different grounds, first, on the grounds of practicability. That was the theme in the speech of the hon. Member for

[Mr. Allan Stewart]

Garscadden who rightly referred to the Rating and Valuation Association, and the welcome and well-considered points that hon. Members from all parties have received from that body. I do not want to rehearse those arguments. However, I should like to add that the second major ground for the direct introduction of the community charge in one year is the acceptability and credibility of the entire system. There is no doubt that many people were concerned about the acceptability of bringing in a community charge over such a long period which, in political terms, could cover not only the beginning of the next Parliament but, arguably, into the Parliament after that.

During the period 1989-1992 there would not only have been considerable complications but a lack of the advantages of the community charge, in terms of acceptability and the benefits for the democratic control of local authority expenditure. Considerable confusion would have resulted. Therefore, I congratulate my right hon. and hon. Friends on their decision, which is sensible, not only in practical terms, but in terms of principle.

Mr. Maclennan: The alliance is in favour of the Government's proposals, in the sense that we have been persuaded that the practicalities of administering a poll tax make it sensible to have a clean break. That was not always our view, but we have been persuaded by the arguments that have been addressed by those who are most likely to be closely involved with its implementation.

However, it was also our view that the date on which the translation to the new system would take place seems too soon. The need for careful preparation and proper debate of many of the matters which have not yet been decided and which are covered by the subordinate legislation that will depend on this Bill mean that the date should be later than that which the Government have in mind.

The Minister will recall that in Committee I proposed a different operative date. I suggested 1994. That was designed not only to give the proper time but to ensure that there was a settled opinion that the change should be made. It is not sensible to introduce a tax system that does not enjoy the support of the taxed public. To follow the point that has just been made by the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), that would require the interposition of more than one general election.

There is great advantage in having a settled view as to what local taxation is appropriate before we break up the system with which we have lived for about 200 years. Cleanliness for that break is to be preferred to trying to run in tandem two systems that are both complex. I am glad that the Minister arrived at the conclusion that he did.

7.45 pm

Mr. Bill Walker: I welcome my right hon. and hon. Friend's amendments. Amendment No. 1 brings forward the date. As every hon. Member who has spoken has said, the practical advantages in doing that are to be commended, partly because operating the two systems in tandem would have imposed a heavy work load on the local authorities. The amendment should be welcomed, if only for that reason.

However, I welcome it for another reason. The earlier that we bring such matters into operation and make them effective, the more we shall see the benefits in the way in which the population at large responds to them. I sincerely believe that the system will be welcomed once it is seen to be operating because, contrary to the views expressed from the Opposition Benches, the Scottish public like to know what is happening. The rating system has never been properly understood and has been a hostile form of taxation with no friends, other than those who seem to be running it, and councillors who see benefits to themselves in being elected under a system in which there is little real accountability.

Amendment No. 33 deletes clause 5. My amendment, amendment No. 177, is an amendment to the clause. On the assumption that clause 5 will be deleted from the Bill I should like to say a few words about why I have tabled amendment No. 177. History and experience show that Scottish assessors often view things substantially differently in different regions.

My hon. Friends on the Front Bench will have recollections of reed beds and caravans, matters in which I had a constituency interest, because the caravan and leisure industry is an important part of the tourism that is so vital to the well-being of constituencies such as mine. Therefore, I tabled my amendment to spell out quite clearly to the assessors what the legislation would mean. Unless one spells that out clearly one runs into problems. Amendment No. 177 deals with "the revaluation of lands and heritages" consisting of caravan sites. That is important because caravanners and caravan sites have had the ghastly problem of not enjoying the discounted rebate that everyone had thought had gone through in an earlier Act. However, we discovered that the Scottish assessors did not see it quite that way, and in the end primary legislation was required to rectify something that everyone, including the Minister who put the Bill through, believed already applied to caravan sites. It was believed that they would enjoy the same benefits as in England. However, that turned out not to be the case and the discount never materialised in Scotland.

The amendment gives me the opportunity to draw attention to the assessors in some detail. District valuers in England and Wales operate quite differently from the assessors in Scotland. I am always fascinated by the way in which the assessors arrive at their valuations, and how they arrive at quite different conclusions in adjacent regions. From the point of view of the Rating (Caravan Sites) Act 1978, the district valuers in England applied the Act as it was intended.

However, that did not apply to Scotland, and that situation had to be remedied by the Rating and Valuation (Amendment) (Scotland) Act 1984. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State will remember that I was involved in several private Members' Bills, early-day motions and all the other devices that we use in this place to draw attention to a matter that we feel is wrong. I was delighted that my hon. Friends understood that and brought forward measures to put things right. However, it was about eight years before the correction was made. I did not believe that we would want to face that position again before the Bill was enacted. I had horrible feelings about what could happen if we did not spell out clearly to the assessors what the legislation meant.

I did not serve on the Committee because I was ill when the Members who served on it were selected. It is the first major Scottish Committee on which I have not served since coming to the House, so it has been a bit of a holiday

for me. However, I understand that in Committee Ministers said that they understood clearly the worries and problems of the caravan and caravan site industry, and I thank them rather belatedly. I am pleased that this evening they have tabled amendment No. 2 with related amendments and amendment No. 33 because it will not be necessary for me to take any action on my amendment No. 177.

Mr. Gordon Wilson (Dundee, East): First, I shall deal with the Government amendments. Given the horrendous implications of phasing in a new system and maintaining the old, the Government are right to introduce these amendments. However, if one does not agree with the nature of the poll tax, one regrets that it will be imposed so much faster. All hon. Members will probably agree that in practical terms the Government have taken the only possible course, but I am less sure whether they have chosen the correct year in which to introduce the system. Considerable difficulties will be met by those who must prepare the various registers, and they will be hard pushed to bring the new system into effect on the date that the Government have chosen.

Without slighting the amendment selection, I am not sure why amendment No. 165 in my name and that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles (Mr. Stewart) has strayed into this sequence of amendments. Perhaps it qualified because it included a date and the Government amendments were largely altering dates. But since many of my excellent new clauses were cut down by the scythe of selection, far be it from me to complain.

The amendment provides for a change in the arrangement for the valuation of commercial property. It may well be that I have not taken on board fully the Government's intentions in this regard, but, like the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker), I did not serve on the Committee. A reason why there was such a huge outcry at the time of the revaluations almost two years ago was that many who had shops or hotels or who operated businesses were hit by a heavy increase in their valuations at the end of the septennial revaluation. Because of the delay factor in revaluation they were clobbered by unexpected demands in cash terms on their businesses.

It has always been a matter of public notice that those who own premises or operate businesses have frequent disagreements with local authorities about the scale of their rates payments. That is a matter for on-going discussion. They have found difficulty in budgeting where, apart from any inflationary increase in rates which may have taken place under the commercial rate, they have been met on revaluation by a quantum leap, sometimes of 300 per cent., which in cash terms has meant a substantial increase in the sums that must be paid.

My amendment suggests that from and after a given date annual revaluations shall be introduced. That would probably not have been feasible when assessors had to deal with domestic properties, but that problem has now been removed by the Bill, so assessors will have time to pay a little more attention to commercial rating. Indeed, it could be said that the number of properties affected is much less and there is no reason why an annual revaluation should not be feasible.

Furthermore, the Government intend to introduce a national business rate, but that may not come into effect before the turn of the century. The Minister is shaking his head, but he knows full well that in the sister kingdom of England there has been no revaluation for a considerable time. It would be a painful exercise if his English colleagues had to introduce a valuation which inclined both systems to work more closely together. He would take some pleasure from that because English Ministers would have to wriggle, scream and screech in the same way as he and his colleagues in the Scottish Office had to during revaluation.

Be that as it may, I am suggesting an annual revaluation which would take into account current trends. If it appeared that the rates of any given commercial property were increasing beyond what the business could bear, early notice would be given to the owners so that they could look for alternative premises in good time.

My amendment has a great deal to commend it and I urge the Minister to give it due consideration and to disembed it from all the other amendments taken with it.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The people of Scotland should be dancing in the streets tonight. These amendments make a tremendous difference to the impact of the Bill. The fact that the burden of domestic rates will disappear in 1989 rather than 1992 will be widely welcomed.

I praise my hon. Friend the Minister for his genius in introducing the amendments and getting all Opposition spokesmen jumping on the bandwagon and saying how much they support the amendments, although they have been wholly opposed to the community charge. He may have looked for a phasing-in period to introduce the community charge and to abolish domestic rates because he may have been taken in by the statements of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) and his various colleagues in the Labour party and, indeed, by hon. Members in other parties that they would fight the Bill to the last ditch, that they would fight it and fight it again and that it was the worst thing that had ever happened to Scotland. On the Opposition Benches I see three Labour Members, one Liberal Member, one SDP Member and one SNP Member. If that is fighting to the last ditch——

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the hon. Gentleman to count incorrectly? He has already made one mistake.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That seems to be a point more of arithmetic than of order.

Mr. Forsyth: I am not sure whether the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) is referring to his normal schizophrenia or whether I have missed one of his colleagues.

Mr. Foulkes: One cannot have normal schizophrenia.

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman and his party pledged to fight the Bill. We are advancing the introduction of the abolition of domestic rates which is a historic decision, and if this is the opposition that we were promised, it is feeble.

I cannot but believe that my hon. Friend the Minister thought that there would be stronger resistance both from the Opposition and in Scotland to his proposals than there has been. The way in which he has doggedly pursued the argument and explained how the tax will operate to the benefit of the majority of the people in Scotland has brought us to the position where the abolition of domestic rates ahead of time is not a matter of controversy.

[Mr. Forsyth]

The hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Wilson) tabled amendment No. 165. This must be the biggest piece of cheek from any party this Parliament. On television, in the newspapers and in this Chamber the hon. Gentleman complained about the last revaluation and said that Scotland was uniquely disadvantaged. He argued that that was an outrage and an example of how the Government did not care about Scotland which had to endure this revaluation while England did not. Now he is suggesting, not that Scotland should have regular revaluations, but that it should have more revaluations, that they should be annual, thus creating a markedly different situation from that which exists in England. However, just a few months ago, for his own political advantage, he was arguing that there was an injustice in Scotland. How can the hon. Gentleman square that? I will gladly give way to him if he cares to explain how he reconciles his previous position with the position that he takes now.

8 pm

Mr. Wilson: The hon. Gentleman ought to be aware that I have never attacked the fundamentals of revaluation. In times past the Minister has pointed that out. I said that a septennial revaluation suddenly heaping huge increases upon people is bad for business and bad for Scotland. Secondly, there are differences in valuation law relating to the valuations of properties in England and Scotland, and they operate to our disadvantage. That is one reason why I put down some new clauses on this topic. Unfortunately, they were not selected.

Mr. Forsyth: At the time of the last revaluation I do not recall the hon. Gentleman going around Scotland saying that England was uniquely disadvantaged because it had not had a revaluation for 12 years. He did not go around saying that businesses in England were facing a tremendous threat. On the contrary, he said that the Tory Government had introduced a revaluation and after seven years there was none in England and Scotland was uniquely disadvantaged. He is now arguing for annual revaluations in Scotland and saying that every Scottish business man should be faced with considering an annual appeal against his assessment, with all the expense and burden that that would impose. That is typical of the opportunism that we see in Scotland from the hon. Gentleman's party. Once again it shows that only the Tories are prepared to take seriously the rating system and its running, rather than just going in for the political mud-slinging and opportunism that this amendment represents.

Mr. Wilson: Would the hon. Gentleman care to say where great satisfaction is to be found in the way in which the Government are currently treating commercial ratepayers? The evidence that I have had is that business men are not at all happy with the Government's proposals.

Mr. Forsyth: The business men who advised the hon. Gentleman that they would be better off with annual revaluations must not understand the rating system or its impact on them. Does he think that the business men in Callander in my constituency or in his constituency would welcome the prospect of filling in forms or going to appeal every year if they think that they have been treated unjustly? If he thinks that, he does not have much understanding of business men.

Business men to whom I have spoken welcome the decision to maintain commercial rates and to put a ceiling on the increase. That is because they will know where they are and will not get the sort of huge increases which, in arguing for annual revaluations, the hon. Gentleman said were a burden on business. If he recognises that unpredicted and sudden increases are a burden, why does he not welcome these proposals about commercial rating? Once again the hon. Gentleman is trying to exploit people's understandable fears and worries about change but he is not doing anything constructive. His party mouths that it is in favour of a local income tax but, like the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan), it has yet to come up with a workable scheme or to participate in a meaningful way in discussions about one of the most important issues in Scottish politics.

I welcome the Government amendments. I am overcome with admiration for the Scottish Office for being able to abolish so quickly a hated tax and for being able to draw so much support from Opposition Members who previously committed themselves to open hostility towards my hon. Friend's opening position.

Mr. Ancram: I find myself in the rather unusual position of responding to a debate on a series of Government amendments which have been welcomed by all parties in the House. I wondered whether to describe that in card-playing terms as a full house, but perhaps that would be rather overdoing it. A royal flush was the other thought that came into my mind, but I am not sure whether that is appropriate either. I am grateful to hon. Members for welcoming the Government's decision to do away with the transition period.

I shall deal first with the amendment dealt wih by my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker). He is a persistent and hard-working defender of people with caravan interests. He said that this was discussed in Committee and he will see in the record of the Committee for 15 January at column 322 that my hon. Friend the Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Lang) quoted at some length from a letter that I wrote to the chairman of the Scottish caravan industry joint liaison committee. That letter was written on 27 November last year and set out the position. I shall summarise that position for the House.

The Bill gives a choice on how caravans, which are not allowed to be occupied for human habitation throughout the year and are occupied by individuals and not the caravan site operator, are to be treated. Either they come out of rating, which seems to be the purpose of the amendment proposed by my hon. Friend, although I appreciate that, effectively, it is a probing amendment, and the individual occupiers would become liable to the standard community charge, or they remain in valuation and are subject to the modified arrangements for levy of non-domestic rates proposed in the Bill.

The caravan industry was concerned, as were the Government, that a change in the standard community charge would increase the burden on caravanners. Therefore, it is proposed that an individually occupied static leisure caravan should continue to be valued under the present arrangements where it is assessed along with the site as a single unit and entitled to 40 per cent. derating or, where it is not situated on a caravan site subject to single unit valuation or where the occupier so elects, is

individually valued and rated. This is the course preferred by representatives of the caravan industry with whom the Government have consulted.

The provisions in the Bill are considered to be better for caravanners than if they became subject to the standard community charge. I am sure that my hon. Friend appreciates that most people in the caravan industry have accepted that this is so. I hope that on that basis he will be prepared not to press his useful amendment, which has given us a chance to place on record the thought that has gone into this part of the Bill.

Amendment No. 165 stands in the name of the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Wilson). My hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth) was a little unkind in his speech, because the hon. Member for Dundee, East always protected himself by saying that he was a great believer in revaluations. The strangest comment that he made, and which he reiterated in this debate, is that his main argument is about the anomalies between Scotland and England because of the different rating systems.

I find it hard to understand how a Scottish nationalist, whose whole political purpose, as I understand it, is to ensure that Scotland is separate and that its interests are dealt with in a Scottish way and by the Scottish legal system, should say when the system that he is seeking is in place — as it is in terms of the Scottish valuation system — that, because it works in a different way from the system in England and the English seem to be paying less, he is unhappy about it. Suddenly, Scottish nationalism goes out of the window and the cry is for harmonisation. That is one of the more strange positions that the hon. Member adopted during the period of revaluation. Indeed, he still adopts that position.

I think we all accept that regular revaluations are necessary to keep the tax base up to date. As the Green Paper envisaged, it is planned to have simultaneous revaluations of non-domestic property north and south of the border in 1990. Statements have been made to that effect. In a sense, this is part of the process of harmonisation of valuation and rating between the two countries. A simultaneous revaluation is an essential part of any process of harmonisation.

Mr. Wilson: I am aware that there was a reference in the Green Paper to simultaneous revaluation. Does the Minister think that that will be carried into effect because the history of valuation and revaluation in England shows that when Ministers are confronted with the problem they retreat? Does he not agree that it is more likely that revaluation in England will not take place? How will the provisions in the Bill help those who occupy commercial subjects in relation to those premises that pay less in England than in Scotland? What changes in valuation law does the Minister propose? The Minister is aware that the basis of valuation in Scotland, which may be based on the same terminology as in England, is different in practice.

Mr. Ancram: First, it is planned to have simultaneous revaluation of non-domestic properties north and south of the border in 1990. That must be part of any process of harmonisation and it is regarded as such. The Inland Revenue and the Scottish assessors have met to discuss how harmonisation with regard to revaluation may be achieved in practice. The hon. Gentleman is right that there are differences between the two systems. I believe that there are differences in practice and differences in law. Therefore, we must seek to eliminate the differences in practice before a revaluation — if possible before the 1990 revaluation. Until we have simultaneous revaluation based on a similar practice we shall not be able to judge where the differences of law exist and set about correcting them.

The process of harmonisation, by its nature, is not one that can be carried out swiftly. However, the Government have launched that process and I believe that it will be of advantage to ratepayers in Scotland. An argument in principle can be made for having a revaluation each year. That is covered in the Green Paper with reference to the reduction in turbulence that is normally associated with revaluations over a long time and keeping a tax base up to date. Those matters were canvassed. However, to move from the system of quinquennial revaluations to annual revaluations over a few years — as implied in the amendment — represents a considerable undertaking.

To bring about such a fundamental change in a relatively short time it would be necessary to pay particular regard to the work of the local assessors. Developments that are taking place — such as advanced computer technology — may make that a possibility in the future. I would not wish to preclude or confirm that development at this stage. We wish to listen to further representations about that. If we retain the rating system as the base of non-domestic taxation, it is obviously in all our interests to ensure that we have the fairest and most acceptable system in its place.

The purpose of these amendments is to get rid of the transitional period. They have been widely welcomed. It is interesting that at the end of the debate in Committee the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson), who I am glad to see in the Chamber, said:

"If the Government believe that the poll tax will be such a tremendous improvement and so much fairer and attractive to the people of Scotland, why on earth did they not have the courage of their convictions and introduce it immediately?" — [*Official Report, First Scottish Standing Committee*, 15 January 1987; c. 284.]

That was the hon. Gentleman's argument for supporting the amendment moved by his hon. Friend. I hope that the hon. Gentleman, other hon. Members and those outside the House understand that we are committed to the abolition of domestic rates. We are confident that the system we propose in this Bill will work. It is in that spirit that I move these amendments and I am grateful to my hon. Friends for supporting them.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 2

VALUATION ROLL NOT TO INCLUDE DOMESTIC SUBJECTS

Amendments made: No. 6, in page 1, line 9, leave out '1992-93' and insert '1989-90'.

No. 7A, in page 1, line 11, leave out '1992' and insert '1989'.—[*Mr. Ancram.*]

8.15 pm

Mr. Bill Walker: I beg to move amendment No. 176 in, page 2, line 2, at end insert—

'(*b*)(i) any mobile home and the caravan site on which it is stationed including any buildings, ground pertinents, heritable facilities and services which may be used in connection therewith, but excluding any caravan not being a mobile home.

[Mr. Bill Walker]

(ii) for the purposes of this subsection "mobile home" and "caravan site" shall have the meaning assigned to them respectively by the Mobile Homes Act 1983 and the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960.'.

In some respects this amendment is a follow-up to the previous group of amendments. It was designed as a probing amendment. Its purpose is to ensure that, when residential caravans are deleted from the valuation roll with the abolition of domestic rates, the assessor shall, in valuing a caravan park, exclude from his calculations the pitch on which a residential caravan is stationed and those parts of the caravan park used by the occupants of residential caravans.

If the amendment is accepted the assessor, when arriving at his valuation of the caravan park, will not be entitled to include any buildings, roads, lighting, services and so on, which, if used in connection with the occupation of an ordinary dwelling house, would not be separately rated as they would be covered within the community charge. It is necessary for all the matters to which assessors in Scotland shall have regard to be spelt out in the legislation. As I said earlier, the assessors in Scotland, unlike the district valuers in England and Wales, are independent of Government directions. Accordingly, they do not have regard to any directions regarding the relaxation of valuation principles. That is why I have brought forward this amendment.

Problems arose as a result of assessors in Scotland refusing to follow the declared intention of the Government regarding the valuation of caravan sites under the Rating (Caravan Sites) Act 1976. That Act was followed by the district valuers in England and Wales but was not followed in Scotland. The matter had to be put right by the enactment of section 15 of the Rating and Valuation (Amendment) (Scotland) Act 1984. That Act inserted section 3A into the Rating (Caravans Site) Act, but that took place eight years after the introduction of the Rating (Caravan Sites) Act.

My amendment should make the task of the assessor, if required, much easier without any loss of revenue. I stress "if required" because I would like the Minister to clarify the exact position so that when assessors and others in Scotland are required to consider the legislation properly there is no doubt in anyone's mind about what was intended by the legislation and the current state of affairs.

Mr. Home Robertson: I am indebted to the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) for raising this issue. I am aware that he is interested in the question of caravans and mobile homes. It raises another intriguing aspect of the legislation. Arising out of the amendment, we must ask when a caravan becomes a mobile home. How on earth does the hon. Gentleman expect an assessor to apportion those parts of facilities attached to a caravan site that are used by touring caravans at the same time as being used by people resident in mobile homes? It highlights an area of anomalies that will be created by the legislation.

The hon. Gentleman has discussed mobile homes and caravans and I can visualise some fascinating situations in his part of Scotland. During the berry-picking period and the tatty-lifting time there are a substantial number of people temporarily resident in caravans who will be moving around farms in his area, in Angus and the neighbouring areas of Grampian. These people will supposedly be subject to the poll tax and I would be fascinated to hear how they will be taken into the system.

Mr. Bill Walker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. As the hon. Gentleman is so knowledgeable about the situation that exists during berry-picking time in my constituency, he will also recognise that there are few made-up roads or other facilities where the caravans are located during berry-picking. Much of what is contained in my amendment has nothing to do with what the hon. Gentleman is talking about.

Mr. Home Robertson: I accept that. However, I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising this point because it is an intriguing example of the absurd task that the Government are laying upon registration officers and the people whose duty it will be to collect the poll tax. For part of the year such people will have the duty of finding the travelling people in the hon. Gentleman's part of the world. He will have to put them on to the register and then collect poll tax from them. These are the people on whom the Government want to load this new tax to relieve other people who may be paying higher rates. It will not be possible to collect tax from such people. I will be interested to hear what the Minister has to say.

Mr. Ancram: There is nowhere in the Bill a mention of the imposition of poll tax, so the question put by the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) does not arise.

The treatment of caravans under the Bill has been looked at carefully in consultation with a number of interested parties, including local assessors. The policy that has been developed has been explained to caravan interests and was made clear in the last set of amendments discussed in Committee and in a letter that I wrote to the chairman of the Scottish caravan industry joint liaison committee.

The main difficulty that I have with my hon. Friend's amendment is that it seeks to define "mobile homes" in terms of the definition in the Mobile Homes Act 1983, which, in turn, refers to the definition of "caravan" in the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960. This immediately casts doubt on the words in the amendment "but excluding any caravan not being a mobile home" which give the amendment a certain circularity.

Leaving that aside, in the light of what I have already said both tonight and in Committee, the amendment seems to be going far too wide, in that it seems to bring all kinds of caravans, along with caravan sites and any related site development, within the scope of domestic subjects. This means, for example, that large commercial caravan sites would be excluded from rates. This goes much further than is appropriate and than has been envisaged in consultations.

The policy that we have worked out is fair and reasonable and has been accepted by the caravan industry, which has welcomed the steps that we have taken to ensure that the Bill will not harm its interests. I hope that, on the face of that, my hon. Friend will feel able to withdraw his amendment.

Mr. Bill Walker: By leave of the House, I thank my hon. Friend for that clear explanation of the Government's position and what is intended within the

legislation. I am delighted to pass this information back to the caravan people and if they feel that this is not clear, although I think that it is, they can take an opportunity in the other place to try to do something about it. On that basis, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Amendments made, No. 9, in page 2, line 7 after 'above', insert—'*(a)*'.

No. 10, in page 2, line 9 after second 'and', insert—

'*(b)* the part of those lands and heritages which does not constitute domestic subjects'.

No. 11, in page 2, line 10 at end insert—

'(5A) Any proprietor, tenant or occupier of any lands and heritages may appeal to the valuation appeal committee for the area in which the lands and heritages are situated against any decision of the assessor

(a) to alter the valuation roll with effect from 1st April 1989 by deleting those lands and heritages on the ground that they constitute domestic subjects; or

(b) not so to alter the roll.'.

No. 12, in page 2, line 11 leave out 'to IV' and insert 'and II'.—*[Mr. Ancram.]*

Schedule

VALUATION AND RATING

Amendment made: No. 93, in page 24 leave out Part I. —*[Mr. Ancram.]*

Mr. Ancram: I beg to move amendment No. 94, in page 25, line 21 after '10', insert

'Subject to paragraph 15 below.'

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take Government amendments No. 95 and No. 96.

Mr. Ancram: Schedule 1(15) is intended to avoid the need for the assessor to make alterations to the valuation roll reflecting each and every change in the use made of part residential subjects, however small that change might be. If it is to achieve that objective, the paragraph should apply to the making of alterations as well as to their coming into effect. As it stands, paragraph 15 does not in any way bring about restrictions in the number of alterations that have to be made under paragraphs 10 and 11 of the schedule. It only makes the date when the alterations come into effect, which is otherwise governed by paragraph 14.

Amendment No. 96 ensures that the paragraph can meet its purpose. It also introduces a useful element of flexibility by enabling a period other than three months to be prescribed. This will allow adjustments to be made in the light of experience.

Amendments Nos. 94 and 95 are consequential upon No. 96 and I think that hon. Members will feel that this is an improvement to the way in which the legislation will operate.

Mr. Home Robertson: Just this once, I am prepared to take the Minister's word for it.

Question put and agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 95, in page 25, line 32, after '11.', insert

'Subject to paragraph 15 below,'.

No. 96, in page 26, line 15, leave out from 'shall' to the end of line 16 and insert

'be made or take effect until three months, or such other period as may be prescribed, after the date when that apportionment note is made or takes effect, whichever is later.'.

No. 97, in page 26, line 30, at end insert—

'17A. No rates shall be leviable in respect of such part of their rateable value as relates to the residential use of any lands and heritages which are part residential subjects.'.

No. 98, in page 26, line 35, leave out

'a domestic subjects note or'.

No. 99, in page 26, line 38, leave out

'domestic subjects notes and'.

No. 100, in page 26, leave out lines 44 and 45.

No. 101, in page 27, line 1, leave out '*(b)*'.

No. 102, in page 27, line 4, leave out Part IV.

No. 103, in page 27, line 39, leave out

'the domestic or, as the case may be,'.

No. 104, in page 27, line 40, leave out

'sections 3 (domestic rates) and'

and insert

'section'.

No. 105, in page 28 line 1, leave out

'the domestic or, as the case may be,'.

No. 106, in page 28, line 2, leave out

'3 (domestic rates) and'.

No. 108, in page 28, line 29, leave out

'the domestic or, as the case may be,'.

No. 109, in page 28, line 30, leave out

'sections 3 (domestic rates) and'

and insert

'section'.

No. 110, in page 28, leave out from beginning of line 36 to 'the non-domestic' in line and insert

'"rate" means the non-domestic rate within the meaning of section 4 (non-domestic rates) of the Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc. (Scotland) Act 1987,'.

No. 111, in page 28, line 47, leave out

'the domestic or, as the case may be'.

No. 112, in page 28, line 48, leave out

'3 (domestic rates) and'.

No. 113, in page 29, line 9, leave out 'domestic rates and'.

No. 114, in page 29, line 11, leave out 'domestic and'.

No. 115, in page 29, line 12, leave out 'domestic and'.

No. 116, in page 29, line 14, at end insert

', for the words "district rate" substitute "non-domestic district rate".'.

No. 117, in page 29, leave out lines 15 to 18.

No. 118, in page 29, line 20, leave out

'"domestic rate" or'.

No. 119, in page 29, line 21, leave out 'respectively'.

No. 120, in page 29, line 22, leave out 'sections 3 (domestic rates) and' and insert 'section'.

No. 107, in page 29, line 26, at end insert 'for the words "district rate" wherever they appear, substitute "non-domestic rate"'.

No. 121, in page 29, leave out lines 27 to 36.

No. 122, in page 29, line 43, leave out 'the domestic or, as the case may be,'.

No. 123, in page 30, line 6, leave out 'the domestic or, as the case may be,'.

No. 124, in page 30, line 7, leave out 'sections 3 (domestic rates) and insert 'section'.

No. 125, in page 30, line 14, leave out 'the domestic rate,'.

No. 126, in page 30, line 19, leave out 'the domestic rate,'.

No. 127, in page 30, leave out from beginning of line 31 to 'and' in line 32.

No. 128, in page 31, line 5, leave out 'domestic and'.

No. 129, in page 31, line 5, leave out 'sections 3 (domestic rates) and' and insert 'section'. — *[Mr. Ancram.]*

Clause 3

DOMESTIC RATES 1989-1992

Amendment made: No. 13, in page 2, line 13, leave out clause 3.—*[Mr. Ancram.]*

Clause 4

NON-DOMESTIC RATES

Amendment made: No. 19, in page 3, line 39, leave out 'in whose entry in the valuation roll there appears no domestic subjects note' and insert 'in respect of which there is an entry in the valuation roll'.—*[Mr. Ancram.]*

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Ian Lang): I beg to move amendment No. 20, in page 4, leave out line 4 and insert—'(B–S) × I'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take Government amendments Nos. 22 to 25 and No. 28.

Mr. Lang: Amendments numbers 20, 22, 23 and 24 are drafting amendments intended to remove a possible ambiguity in the definition of "I" in subsections (3) and (4) of clause 4. At present I is defined in terms of a percentage increase in the RPI over a 12-month period. This might be taken to require that the other factors in the formulae be multiplied by a number on a percentage scale from 1 to 100. Clearly this is not what is intended.

The amended definition of I dispenses with percentages, and expresses I in terms of a ratio of the RPI at the two relevant points in time.

To define I in this way requires adjustment of the formulae themselves. The process of adjustment enables the formulae to be expressed more simply.

I hope that I have made the position clear.

Mr. Home Robertson: I confess that algebra was never my strong point, so I am not sure whether I am grateful to the Minister for removing a (B – S) or an (M) from the two formulae in subsections (3) and (4). As I understand it, these amendments will mean that the Secretary of State — with the consent of the Treasury, which is not a proviso that fills us with confidence—will determine the maximum non-domestic rate poundage for each local authority, which will generally be based on the increase in the retail prices index over the previous year.

It is important to reiterate at this stage our opposition to the principle of Whitehall dictating the details of local affairs in Scotland, and that affects the determination of non-domestic rates as well as everything else. This part of the Bill is a serious infringement of the principle of local democracy. It undermines the accountability of local authorities to local business. Ministers keep telling us that one of the main objectives underlying the Bill is increasing the accountability of local authorities.

It is probably worth mentioning that there will still be statutory consultations with non-domestic ratepayers under the new legislation, but that will be pointless, because the person who will be determining the non-domestic rate will not be present at the statutory consultations because he will be the Secretary of State for Scotland.

One can visualise certain circumstances in which business men and chambers of commerce might come along to their local authority at the statutory consultation and say that they would like additional local authority services. They might want a new road built or some improvement in community facilities which might be very useful to them. However, many local authorities, under the new regime, will have no choice but to say to the non-domestic ratepayers, "We are sorry. We would love to provide additional services in your area that will be useful for your businesses, but you must recognise that you are paying a reducing and limited contribution towards our budget, so you cannot expect us to be using poll tax payers' money to assist businesses." That will rather inhibit discussion in that forum.

The formula in clause 4 is based on a largely irrelevant multiplier, for these purposes—the retail prices index. Fundamentally, I am speaking to amendment No. 25, which would replace the reference to the retail prices index with a reference to a local government price index. Such an index exists. I understand that the Scottish Office, in its dealings with COSLA and local authorities in Scotland, works on a calculated volume measurement of local authority costs. Such a measurement can and should be made. We suggest that that is the most appropriate way of basing the calculation of the non-domestic rate under the operation of this new legislation.

8.30 pm

Businesses have been hard hit by rate increases, which have been engineered by this Government, in recent years. Indeed, I know that businesses have made strong representations on the subject. I must ask the question, how would a business man like it if his budget were to be subject to controls based on utterly irrelevant criteria which are dictated by the Scottish Office? That is what would happen to local authorities under this new formula. The consequences of that artificial calculation could be drastic, not only for the local authorities, their employees and those who use local authority services, but also—it is important to emphasise this—for the poll tax payer, or community charge payer, if the Minister insists on giving this rather cosy name that the Government have selected.

The Secretary of State took great pleasure earlier in quoting from the recent representations from the Rating and Valuation Association. I shall quote another part of what the Rating and Valuation Association has been saying to hon. Members during the last week, specifically on clause 4:

> "It is considered that the Retail Prices Index is quite inappropriate to Local Government's costs. An alternative (preferably specially constructed) index should be sought.
>
> Since the increase in non-domestic rates will be limited to the retail prices index increase in September of the previous year, Community Charges will not only have to be determined by including estimated pay and price increases on that part of an authority's expenditure to be met from community charges but also to include the difference between September retail price index and estimated actual pay and price increases arising during the year on that part of the authority's expenditure to be met from non-domestic rates. In other words, the Community Charge payer will forever more be subsidising the non-domestic ratepayer."

The association said that, and the Secretary of State has seen fit to give credence to the Rating and Valuation Association in earlier debates. The Minister owes it to us to take some account of what it says on this subject.

The cost of providing local services is influenced by matters that are not covered in the retail prices index. The largest element in local authority costs is staff costs—teachers' salaries, manual workers' wages and such like. Some 60 per cent. of local authority costs are related to staff costs, wages and salaries. The next largest element in

local authority costs is loan charges, which amounts to 15 per cent. of the total. In addition, there are a range of other costs — materials, machinery associated with property maintenance, road vehicles and all the rest. None of that is adequately reflected in the retail prices index.

I have a copy of the most recent summary of the retail prices index, and it is worth referring to the prices that are taken into account in the retail prices index. The first item is food, which comes to 18·5 per cent. of the total. Alcoholic drinks account for 8·2 per cent., tobacco for 4 per cent., housing for 15·3 per cent., fuel and light for 3·2 per cent., durable household goods for 6·3 per cent., clothing and footwear for 7·5 per cent., transport and vehicles for 15·7 per cent., miscellaneous goods for 8·1 per cent., services for 5·8 per cent., and meals bought and consumed outside the home for 4·4 per cent. Precious little in that is relevant to the calculation of local authority costs. That is a point which the Minister should explain and take into account in responding to the debate. There is nothing about wages, precious little about loan charges and nothing about building materials or other items which are relevant to the affairs of local government.

The retail prices index has nothing whatever to do with local government costs, so a multiplier based on that consideration alone is bound to distort the situation. Indeed, it is the refusal of the Government to take account of the real increases in the cost of local government services in uprating rate support grant in recent years which has done more than anything else to force up rates during the years that they have been in power.

The constituency that I represent is currently contemplating a rate increase of 30 per cent. That will cover only a 6 per cent. increase or growth in services. The rest of that 30 per cent. increase in rates — in other words, 24 per cent. of the total—is accounted for by the failure of the Government to take account of the increases of costs and to increase the rate support grant accordingly.

At present, everybody — domestic and commercial entities — is contributing towards the cost of local authority services. Under this new system, the increase will be concentrated on the domestic sector, because of the way that the formula will apply. This artificial new restriction on the contribution of businesses to local authorities seems likely to drive up domestic poll tax rates at an alarming rate. As I understand it, if the business rate is frozen to this formula, which is associated to the retail prices index, but a local authority finds its costs have increased by, for example, 6 per cent. more than the retail prices index, the bulk of that extra burden will fall on the poll tax payer. A 6 per cent. increase in the cost of local authorities would be translated into an 18 per cent. increase in the poll tax.

In that scenario, the personal poll tax would be forced up from the often quoted £250 a head to £295 a head in one year. I have asked for some information from COSLA, and it confirmed that in a normal year local authority costs will increase by 2 per cent. more than the retail prices index. Some 2 per cent. of local authority costs in Scotland amounts to approximately £20 million, which would mean an increase of £6 a head to the poll tax payer. That only takes account of the suppression of the business rates under this formula.

Another imponderable is the sheer inefficiency of the poll tax system. It is quite inevitable that difficulties will arise in collecting this tax, because a significant number of people will not pay it. To compensate for that, those who pay it will have to pay more than they should. This poll tax—of which everyone is cheerfully saying, "It is only going to be about £250 a head" — will be jacked up rapidly as a consequence of this formula, other aspects of the Government's legislation and the manner in which they intend to administer it. People who think that they will be better off under the poll tax system should be warned of the high-speed ratchet effect that the Government are building into the system. People on low incomes, who are being dragged into this new tax net, have every reason to be alarmed at that prospect.

The solution to the crisis of local government finance will have to be the restoration of realistic levels of central Government support to local authorities. That is what the Labour party is pledged to work towards. This formula is a deliberately obscure mechanism to cut the contribution of businesses to local budgets and progressively transfer the burden of the cost to the poll tax payer. We think that the whole system of poll tax is wrong. The non-domestic contribution is calculated on an unrealistic basis. We are proposing a calculation of the non-domestic contribution on a genuinely realistic basis, which would at least protect the personal taxpayer from the vicious spiral that I have been seeking to describe.

That is why I feel strongly that the House should accept amendment No. 25. However, there is a procedural problem. I intend to press the principle of amendment No. 25, but that will be rendered difficult by the effect of Government amendment No. 24, which will be dealt with first, which means that amendment No. 25 cannot be voted on. Therefore, it is our intention to vote against Government amendment No. 24 to register our strong belief that variations in the non-domestic rate should be able to reflect factors which affect the costs of providing local services which are essential to domestic householders, non-domestic ratepayers and businesses.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) has made one technical and one general point. The technical argument was that the retail prices index is not relevant for these purposes. I hope that the RPI will become wholly irrelevant. The Government's counter-inflation policies may very well achieve that in the not-too-distant future, but the RPI would be extremely relevant to everybody if, by any mischance, the Opposition attained power.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will resist in principle the proposition that a special index should be constructed. If such an index were constructed, there would inevitably be pressure to increase the costs in it. There would be no incentive to reduce its component costs. The area of most concern would be wage costs as there would be every reason for one side of the negotiating table to push for high wage increases and no incentive for employers to resist. If local authorities, like many others, have to take account of the RPI, they are much more likely to be realistic and to resist unnecessary cost increases.

My hon. Friend explained the amendments lucidly but I did not quite follow amendment No. 23. I am not entirely sure why it is necessary to replace the formula in line 21. If my hon. Friend does not want to add to what he said earlier, I shall read carefully tomorrow what he said.

The hon. Member for East Lothian made a general point to justify dividing the House. I accept that non-domestic rates must be retained, but they have a series of economic disadvantages. If they are paid by the company, they are an overhead which is unrelated to profitability

[Mr. Allan Stewart]

and therefore a tax on investment and jobs. If rates are passed on to the customer—I suspect that they are at least in part—they are likely to be a regressive tax. Opposition Members have talked about equity, but that represents a tax even on the poor.

I disagree fundamentally with the proposition of the hon. Member for East Lothian because the consequences of increasing non-domestic rates are often borne wholly outside the local community. That is certainly true of industrial rates, although it is probably less true of commercial rates. There is therefore not the accountability to which the hon. Gentleman refers. The same is not true of national Government as the consequences of any taxation imposed by a national Government are felt overwhelmingly in the nation.

The non-domestic ratepayer has often been milked by local authorities. That has had a serious effect on jobs. We debated this matter in Committee when the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) seemed to take the view that increases in non-domestic rates have no economic effects on jobs, although the hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) did not share that view. Non-domestic ratepayers require the type of protection that my right hon. and hon. Friends are suggesting.

Mr. Maxton: Would the hon. Gentleman care to say what benefits are granted to non-domestic ratepayers by payment of rates? There is much business directly as a result of local authorities. There are firms which rely entirely on local authority orders. Many other companies survive because local authority employees, who are often a large proportion of the population, buy goods and services provided locally. Without that local government financial input, many companies have gone to the wall. How many building companies, for example, have gone to the wall as a result of the Government's capital expenditure cuts?

8.45 pm

Mr. Stewart: If I endeavoured to answer that general proposition, I am sure that I would fairly quickly be ruled out of order. Capital expenditure under Scottish Office programmes has increased substantially in real terms.

Of course, there is a complex relationship between non-domestic ratepayers and local authorities. I am not suggesting that non-domestic ratepayers do not receive benefits from the services provided by local government. My argument, however, is that the consequences of increased expenditure and therefore of increased rates on non-domestic ratepayers can have serious and adverse economic consequences. It is in a sense taxation without representation.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will confirm that the Government's policy remains unchanged and that he will resist in principle as well as in practice the concept of replacing the RPI with a special index.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): The hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) said that there was some opposition to non-domestic ratepayers having local taxation imposed on them. His arguments were general and apply to any tax. They could apply to corporation tax. We can argue that that tax is profit based, but companies will go out of business if they cannot pay the rates.

I declare an interest in the Fife Regional Co-operative Society. The hon. Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Henderson) displayed no sympathy for that society when he spoke earlier. I hope that we shall soon have an announcement that what has appeared in the press in Fife and elsewhere about the Fife Regional Co-operative Society is quite wrong and that the backlog of rates, which is regrettable, has been redressed. There was, however, no sympathy from the hon. Member for Fife, North-East for a commonly-owned concern.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Douglas: No.

On clause 4 the Government's amendments are of an arithmetically calculated variety. They do not strike in any way at the root incidence of this particular clause. The clause shows quite clearly that the imposition on the non-domestic ratepayer will be frozen and will be inflation related to the retail price index, as if that was the only inflation that was of interest to local authorities.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) suggests in his amendment that if there is to be fairness at all it should be related to what might be construed as a local authority inflator. That strikes me as perfectly fair, if we are to have this tax at all. It should relate to the expenditure and the changes in costs to the local authority.

The Government say that this is a radical and reforming measure, but they show little faith in its radical nature because they place the local authority, and especially the domestic ratepayer, in a catch-22 position.

You would no doubt call me to order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if I went too far along that particular road, but in clause 24 and in schedule 3 the Government show that they are putting such great faith in the poll tax that they say that it is an increased measure of accountability and that it is such a great measure of accountability that it will call those bad spendthrift local authorities to book. However, they have such faith in it that they have to take powers to retrench and, if necessary, impose a levy on those so-called recalcitrant local authorities. So much for local democracy.

In this measure the Government have it both ways. They put great faith in this reforming measure. On the one hand they are saying that they want local authorities to be called to account, but if for reasons outwith their control cost increase beyond the RPI, that portion will be placed on the poll tax payer. Moreover, if those local authorities try to impose that burden on the poll tax payer, and if the Government consider that burden to be excessive, the Government will claw it back. So much for accountability.

The Bill — especially this clause — is a fraud perpetrated by a Government of frauds who have tried to construe this measure as a reform. When in heaven's name was there a poll tax before? It was way back in the 15th and 16th centuries. So the Tories are marching forward into the 15th and 16th centuries.

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) on his spirited speech which has brought some life back to the debate after the deadening effect of the contribution by the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), who has spoken in all of these debates. He speaks sometimes with great perception and wisdom and that is presumably why he is not on the Front Bench.

What puzzles us most is that he is one of the few people who served in the Government, was sacked and has not yet had his knighthood. The only explanation, given his innumerable speeches on the Bill and the lack of a knighthood, is that some sort of piecework system has been adopted by the Conservative party. The hon. Gentleman must earn his knighthood by tedious but ultra-loyal speeches. Tonight he displayed that absolutely because he told the hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Lang) that he did not understand what the Minister had said. He could not understand the explanation, but he was still going to vote for it. That is ultra loyalty, and I am sure that the Patronage Secretary will be in at the time of the vote and will pay due recognition to that fact. When the day comes for turning up brief, loyal and boring speeches the knighthood will be there in the next honours list.

Nothing less than a knighthood would be appropriate as a reward for loyally sticking by every dot and comma of the Bill. As this debate amply illustrates, we see the inconsistencies of the Bill in their full, stark glory. It comes forward as a minor technical amendment moved by the hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale almost in his sleep as though it was something of no great consequence. We know, however, that it underlines the truly bogus nature of the whole scheme that will now be foisted on the Scottish people. It is a test bed for what will become a grandiose experiment on the English and the Welsh in the unfortunate event of the Conservatives winning another period of office.

It is predicated on a lie. It is predicated on a misconception. It is predicated on a prejudice that local authorities are all profligate with their expenditure, that all local authorities' expenditure should be condemned, that practically everything that local authorities do is to be caricatured by the minority of local authorities and has little or nothing to do with the real world which we all have to inhabit.

I am glad to say that yesterday the Hamilton district council in my constituency announced that this year it was going to cut the rate bill by 5p. Here is a Labour local authority—the composition of the council is 17 Labour members, 2 Liberal and 1 Conservative, the last being an accident in the great unanimity of my constituents which has reduced the rates this year by 5p by good and efficient husbandry of the resources, and yet it is to be caricatured with all the others that enter into the great hall of horror that the Conservatives use to justify this Bill.

One of the most bogus points of the whole argument is to pretend that, in some way, business will be relieved of some of the burdens from which it complains that it suffers. The great selling point that was just mentioned was to be the uniform business rate—that this will in some way be the great liberation of the single old ladies in tenement flats and of those widows who live in huge houses. It is also to lift the financial burden from industry. However, the majority of industries in Scotland will know that the services will still have to be paid for, and will not be conned by that.

I do not accept the bland assurances given here this evening that this is a means of relieving them of the responsibilities that they know they will have to accept. The index linking with retail prices bears out the suspicion that I am sure most of them already have. We know, and my hon. Friend the Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) has amply illustrated it and proved it this evening, that, inevitably, whether they are Conservative or Labour, local authorities' costs run ahead of the retail prices index. Because of the much narrower tax base which will be used under the poll tax, there will be a much greater impact on the local population. Precious few industrialists are not individual ratepayers, so they will hardly think it a great liberation if, on the one hand, business is cushioned from the increases caused by inflation and, on the other, they have to bear in their domestic rates a disproportionate part of the cost of the formula. This poll tax Bill will be no better news for industry than for the vast majority of our constituents, who will suffer from this grossly unfair and unreasonably regressive measure which has been projected solely as an election gimmick. The scheme will be costly and a bureaucratic nightmare. The consequences will fall just as much on large and small businesses as on the poorest people.

The inviolable iron link to the retail prices index which will protect business ratepayers for ever is only as good as the Minister's promises. I doubt that an industrialist or small business owner in Scotland would believe these promises—having seen the Government's record north of the border during the past six years—any more than earlier promises. This discredited, discreditable empty gimmick has been produced simply to get the Government off the hook. It will bear hardest on the weakest and poorest in the community and will finally marginalise any relevance that the Scottish Conservative party has to the affairs of the country which we represent.

9 pm

Mr. Lang: The deep opposition to the clause expressed by the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) and other Opposition Members comes rather odd in this debate on a couple of drafting amendments, especially when they had the opportunity to debate their amendment, which would have left out the whole clause. We have the rather curious formula of the Opposition planning to vote against a Government drafting amendment in order to express their support for their rather different amendment. By comparison, the formula which I explained to the House earlier falls into a simpler category. I should like to explain to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) that the change being made under subsection (4) applies the same information which I gave to the House in the context of the formula under subsection (3).

As for the amendment of the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson), we went over this ground thoroughly in Committee. The local authority cost index, to give the index its normal title, would not be an acceptable alternative to the general index of retail prices for the purposes of clause 4. The local authority cost index is no more than an informal joint undertaking of the Scottish Office and COSLA. It could not possibly be used as a basis for determining increases in non-domestic rates without first placing the whole operation on a much more formal basis and opening it up to sufficient public scrutiny to ensure that the index would be generally acceptable as a satisfactory basis on which to proceed. The whole process of drawing up the RPI is decided by a committee, the retail prices index advisory committee, which has members representing a wide range of interests, including the CBI, the TUC and Government Departments. This helps to ensure its reliability and general acceptability.

[Mr. Lang]

This brings me to another reason for opposing the amendment. The RPI is a broadly based index which is widely acknowledged as a sound measure for assessing the general rate of inflation, and that could not be said of the local authority cost index. It would be far too easy for local authorities to push their costs up in the knowledge that, through the mechanism of the index, non-domestic ratepayers would be bound to meet their share of the costs. My hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood made that point extremely well in warning the House to beware that type of index. This is not to argue that local authorities would take the opportunity to do so, but the point is simply that non-domestic ratepayers would not then have the same statutory protection which we have undertaken to give them.

The hon. Member for East Lothian used the word "irrelevant" to describe the RPI and his hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) took a similar line. I notice that, in their comments on the proposal, all their concern was with the local authority. When do we ever hear any concern from the Opposition with the business man who has to pay the rates? That is where our starting point is. When we hear of Lothian proposing to increase its rates by 29 per cent. and inflation is under 4 per cent. we can see the need for protection for the business community which exists as a cross between a milch cow and a sitting duck. The only thought that some local authorities give them is when deciding whether to milk or to shoot them, and they end up doing both.

It is necessary to impose a discipline on local authorities. The clause tackles head-on the main weakness in the non-domestic rating system in Scotland. For far too long, businesses have had to put up with the sudden, sharp and often unexpected increases which take place from year to year in their rates demands. Profligate and spendthrift local authorities have been able to make unreasonable impositions on their business communities with complete impunity because business does not have a vote in local elections. *[Interruption.]* I am replying to the debate. If Labour Members had any concern for the well-being of Scottish industry and commerce, they would give the clause their whole-hearted support. Instead, they have greeted it with a series of ill-informed and irrelevant criticisms which show only too clearly how little genuine concern the Labour party has for Scottish business.

The other day, we saw a report that an American electronics company was contemplating locating in Scotland, but it warned us that the one thing that would put it off would be the return of a Labour Government.

The past system lacked accountability. We have seen wide variations in rates between different authorities that have created business inefficiency and disruption of production costs. The system has been arbitrary and erratic in its impact and has undermined efficiency and competitiveness. It has concealed true costs and undermined the link between the cost of services and the cost to domestic ratepayers. We are determined to introduce a system that will have predictability and perceptibility and will give protection to the business community. In that spirit, I urge the House to support the Government's amendment.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 21, in page 4, leave out from 'rate' to end of line 6.

No. 22, in page 4, leave out lines 16 and 17 and insert—

'*(c)* I is the ratio of the retail prices index for September 1988 to the retail prices index for September 1987.'.

No. 23, in page 4, leave out line 21 and insert—

'M × I × R'.—*[Mr. Ancram.]*

Amendment proposed: No. 24, in page 4, leave out lines 25 and 26 and insert—

'*(b)* I is the ratio of the retail prices index for September of the immediately preceding year to the retail prices index for September 12 months earlier; and'.—*[Mr. Lang.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 216, Noes 164.

Division No. 108] **[9.05 pm**

AYES

Ancram, Michael
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Best, Keith
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Browne, John
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Budgen, Nick
Bulmer, Esmond
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carttiss, Michael
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Cope, John
Critchley, Julian
Crouch, David
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Durant, Tony
Evennett, David
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fletcher, Sir Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Ground, Patrick
Gryffs, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John S
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harvey, Robert
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(N'folk SW)*
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hirst, Michael
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Howard, Michael
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Irving, Charles
Jackson, Robert
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
McCurley, Mrs Anna
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, M. *(N'bury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
Madel, David
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Mather, Sir Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*

Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Morris, M. *(N'hampton S)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Osborn, Sir John
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Powley, John
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Keith
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertf'dshire N)*
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Patrick *(N'lch N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Michael Portillo.

NOES

Abse, Leo
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'ah)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Buchan, Norman
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Clay, Robert
Clelland, David Gordon
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coleman, Donald
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(L'lli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Freud, Clement
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Fife Central)*
Hancock, Michael
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley, N)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Janner, Hon Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Martin, Michael
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Randall, Stuart
Rayneford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shields, Mrs Elizabeth
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John McWilliam and
Mr. Frank Haynes.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 27, in page 4, line 38, after '*(p)*', insert

'"the base rate" means—

(i) the rate determined by that local authority in respect of the year 1988-89 less, in the case of a regional or islands council, such portion of that rate as they have determined to be their public water rate for that year under section 39 of the 1980 Act (which relates to the levying of rates in respect of expenditure on water supply), or

(ii) where, before 1st April 1989, the Secretary of State prescribes a base rate in respect of that authority for the purposes of this section, the amount so prescribed;

(b)'.

No. 29, in page 4, line 44, after 'of a', insert 'tenth of a'.

No. 30, in page 4 line 45, leave out from 'shall' to the end of line 2 on page 5 and insert

'increase or, as the case may be, reduce the sum to the nearest tenth of a penny.'.—*[Mr. Ancram.]*

Mr. Maxton: I beg to move amendment No. 31, in page 5, line 2, at end insert—

'(6A) The non-domestic rate levied by each local authority in respect of lands and heritages specified in subsection (8) below:—

(*a*) shall not exceed one half of the rate which would be leviable apart from the provisions of this subsection; and

(*b*) may be such lesser amount as the local authority may determine.

(6B) The lands and heritages to which subsection (7) applies shall be those occupied by a club, society or other organisation wholly or mainly for the purposes of sport or physical recreation, as the said purposes may from time to time be defined by the Secretary of State for Scotland (acting on the advice of the Scottish Sports Council and the Association of Local Sports Council) where any surplus of funds is applied exclusively to the improvement of its facilities or is otherwise applied for the furtherance of the aforesaid purpose except that any area of the club, society or other organisation that is used as a licensed bar or restaurant shall pay rates on that area, although in deciding the rate the local authority may take account of the net profit made by such bar or restaurant in any one financial year.'.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take amendment No. 178, in page 5, line 2, at end insert—

'(6A) Before determining a non-domestic rate under this section, a local authority shall, in accordance with such procedure as the Secretary of State may direct, make provision for relief from rating for any lands or heritage occupied by a club, society or other organisation, not established or conducted for profit, and which are wholly or mainly used for the purposes of sport or physical recreation.

(6B) The Secretary of State may by statutory instrument define any term necessary for the purposes of subsection (6A) above.'.

Mr. Maxton: As this is a debate on sport, I am sure that all hon. Members, particularly Scottish Members, will be delighted to know that Dundee United is beating Barcelona 1-0 — *[Interruption.]* It is typical that even when one tries to make a reasonable cross-party comment the Secretary of State seems to find it funny.

This is a debate that has aroused some interest and therefore I intend to be brief to allow other hon. Members to participate. What this new clause would do is essentially what Strathclyde regional council, of its own volition, has decided to do, which is to give 50 per cent. rate relief to clubs with licensed bars and premises for those parts of the ground and premises which are not licensed and do not have a restaurant. However, the local authority will take into account the turnover and profit made in the bars when deciding the rates that will be paid.

This is a sensible and moderate attempt to solve problems faced by sports clubs. It is not necessary to reiterate the problems that sports clubs have faced. However, there are many sports clubs in Scotland, especially those with licensed bars, which are finding it incredibly difficult to pay their rates bills. As a result, some are in very serious trouble.

We attempted to do something about that in Committee. I believe that the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Hirst) and his hon. Friends is far removed from the hon. Gentleman's very brave words prior to the debate in Committee. He suggested then that sports clubs should be taken out of rating altogether. However, he now suggests the status quo. The amendment represents the status quo with the exception only of the word "shall". Under the existing position:

"A rating authority can grant relief of rates to organisations whose property is occupied for the purposes of a club, society, or other organisation not conducted for profit, which are wholly or mainly used for purposes of recreation."

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Maxton: No, I will not give way as this is a very short debate and I want to get on.

After all his huffing and puffing and the publicity he received, the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden has tabled an amendment which reflects the existing practice in every local authority. It does not take us—

Mr. Forsyth: Will the hon. Gentleman give way now?

Mr. Maxton: The amendment does not take us one step forward. However, amendment No. 31, if accepted by the House, will give genuine relief to sports clubs that require such relief.

It is very important for sports clubs that the Minister, if he cannot accept the amendment, at least makes it clear that he will move some form of amendment in another place. The hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden tried to withdraw his amendment in Committee on the basis of a supposed promise from the Minister who said that he would consider the matter carefully. There are no Government amendments on the Amendment Paper today covering that matter and that must come as a bit of a shock and a surprise to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Forsyth: Give way.

Mr. Maxton: I will not give way. I hope that the Minister will seriously consider the amendment and support it.

Sir Hector Monro: I hope that tonight we shall get somewhere on this issue of mandatory derating of sports grounds. I have to remind myself that on 19 November 1966 I moved an amendment for 50 per cent. mandatory derating in the then Finance Bill which was unfortunately opposed by the Labour Government of the time. Tonight I hope that we shall make progress, bearing in mind that we went into this matter in great detail during proceedings on the Rating and Valuation (Amendment) (Scotland) Act in March 1984 during which two amendments to do roughly what we are trying to do today were defeated by the casting vote of the Chairman in Committee.

We need to make it clear that tonight we are dealing with derating of sports clubs as opposed to the important issue that we dealt with earlier in the Rating and Valuation (Amendment) (Scotland) Act 1984 which dealt with the very unfair valuation affecting Scottish sports clubs generally, — clubs such as Rangers and Celtic, or the Hawick and Gala rugby clubs — as opposed to the problems in England and Wales.

Mr. Bill Walker: My hon. Friend mentioned different football clubs. Will he also mention Dundee United, which is doing so well tonight?

Sir Hector Monro: Yes, of course. We have already cheered the good news, and we hope that it will hold its position until the end of the match.

This issue is distinct from the high valuations in Scotland compared with those in England and Wales, which we hope will be resolved sooner or later, especially if there is a revaluation in England. But if we accept, as the Government must, the principle of mandatory derating of

sports clubs—it has happened in Northern Ireland, with the distinction that licensed premises were considered to be separate from sports facilities — for the limited amount that it would cost nationally, we should go ahead with it in Scotland. I welcome what has been done in Strathclyde and Fife. Those two large authorities have taken the important step. Let us encourage the other regions to do the same. The easiest way to do that would be for the Government to introduce an amendment in another place to provide for mandatory derating.

We have heard the arguments of the Sports Council and the Central Council for Physical Recreation. The Government must give a lead to show the many volunteers in sports organisations in Scotland that we shall take this important step forward to resolve the problem of rates on Scottish sport clubs, especially the unlicensed parts of those sports clubs. Sports officials will look to the result of this debate with great anxiety, so I hope that the Government will announce their acceptance of the principle.

Mr. David Lambie (Cunninghame, South): I have been looking forward to this debate since the debate on the Rate Support Grant (Scotland) Order a fortnight ago, when I told the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Hirst) that he had been conned by the Government into not pushing his amendment in Committee. I have been proved correct. I was disappointed to hear the hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) say that the Government should give a lead in another place. This is the time for them to give the lead that they did not give in Committee. Conservative Members assured us that the Government would give a lead on Report, but now the hon. Member for Dumfries is saying that they will give a lead in another place, where Members of Parliament have no say. Unless they give a lead tonight, the Opposition should support amendment No. 31.

I am one of those who believe that, at a time when the Government are cutting support to local authorities so that they cannot provide the sports facilities that they used to provide and we must now depend upon amateur sports clubs, the latter must be given concessions so that they can provide sporting facilities. I believe that no amateur sports club should be on the valuation roll, but I cannot even convince my side of that tonight, so I shall support amendment No. 31, which provides for mandatory 50 per cent. relief from rates.

I do not understand amendment No. 178, and I hope that the Secretary of State will tell us what it means. But I trust that he will not try to con the Opposition as he conned his hon. Friends into withdrawing their amendments in Committee. The hon. Members for Strathkelvin and Bearsden, for Dumfries, for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) and for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth), who has had an Adjournment debate on the subject, should stand up and be counted tonight. This is an opportunity for them to stand up and, for the first time, to vote against the Government. If they do not do that, the people and amateur sports clubs in Scotland will recognise that they have been conned, just as other hon. Members have been conned by the Government Front Bench. Therefore, I ask them to stand up and be counted and vote for the sports clubs of Scotland. If they do so, we shall get support and the 50 per cent. mandatory rate. If they do not want to do that, they will go down in history as the people who killed the amateur sports clubs in Scotland and they will never be forgiven by the Scottish people.

9.30 pm

Mr. Rifkind: It might assist the House if I were to intervene at this stage to state the Government's position on this important matter.

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State dealt with this matter in Committee and, having heard lengthy discussions, offered, without commitment, to take the problem away for consideration. The Government have been giving serious consideration to whether, and if so in what way, it would be appropriate to help to solve the real problems that sports clubs face in Scotland because of factors to which hon. Members on both sides of the House have drawn attention. We have considered various possibilities and have concluded that mandatory relief for sports clubs would not be the best solution.

Mr. Lambie: Why not?

Mr. Rifkind: I am about to explain.

The amendment which the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) has proposed would break up the framework in the 1962 Act, a framework which clearly distinguishes between charities which are to have 50 per cent. mandatory relief and a wide range of non-profit-making bodies with worthy purposes, including recreation, in respect of which local authorities are to have complete discretion as to what percentage of relief — from zero to 100 per cent.—they should give. Charities apart, the idea of local discretion here is right and we should not seek to substitute some central view. However carefully we framed any legislation, we should be left with problems in defining centrally what category of bodies should get the relief. Those who framed the 1962 Act were right to respect the place of local discretion in making the dificult judgments that are needed. We should not depart from their basic thinking now.

However, I am determined to help sports clubs, and I propose to do so in the following way. I propose to ensure that local authorities are not deterred from due exercise of their discretion by any thought that if they grant relief to a particular club they lose income, which they then have to recover from their other ratepayers, or, after 1989, from community charge payers. If they decide to grant relief, they should be compensated by an addition to their grant. The new grant system for which clause 25 provides will enable me to give local authorities an important new reassurance in this connection. Grant distribution under the new system will take into account differences in expenditure need and in the amounts of non-domestic rate income.

I intend to measure non-domestic rate income net of reliefs given by local authorities under the 1962 Act. If that is done, giving more relief will directly increase the amount of grant that an authority gets.

As a result, after 1989 all concerned with the welfare of sports clubs, and, indeed, the local authorities, can be satisfied that if a local authority uses its discretion it will not lose a penny of its income.

But I go further. I am keen that the practical effect of the approach I have outlined should be available sooner. I have concluded that my approach will, subject to one point, make it possible to achieve improvement in the

[Mr. Rifkind]

treatment of relief by 1988—a date earlier than anything that has been canvassed by Opposition Members either in Committee or this evening. In respect of 1988-89, the benefit is rather more complicated to achieve because of the provisions governing the present rate support grant system. At present some authorities, those which in any year qualify for the resources element of the grant, have in practice no financial disincentive to grant relief. But this depends on a rather technical point. What I want to do is to ensure that we can provide for a system in 1988-89 that is as fair, predictable and universal as the system I have described for 1989-90. Therefore I will arrange for an amendment to be made in another place to this Bill so as to bring the existing grant provisions broadly into line with the post-1989 arrangements.

It may help the House if I describe some details of how the arrangements for relief will work. Responsibility for the granting of relief will remain with the local authorities. They are best placed to ensure that it is only given to bona fide sports clubs. Each autumn, the rating authorities will be asked for details of commitments made for the following year to give relief to sports clubs. Since such relief can be terminated only from the end of a financial year after 12 months' notice there will be no risk of any authority taking the grant without giving relief. Relief given to sports clubs will be subject to scrutiny by an authority's auditors in the normal way. These proposals and the legislative amendment that we shall introduce in another place will remove the last disincentive.

Mr. Dewar: The Secretary of State will understand that we shall want to read what he has said because it is complicated to take in on first hearing. As I understand it, I welcome what he has said and I recognise that it is an important step forward. I accept this point about the voluntary principle and the judgment exercised by local government.

The Secretary of State said that there will be an amendment in another place for what may be described as a bridging provision. Is there any need for legislation? Should there not be some statutory mark of the general scheme that he announced in the first place? Does that not require some legislation? Will he confirm that the practical effect is that if the discretion is properly exercised with all the safeguards of auditors' scrutiny and so on, the rate income forgone will be made up completely by the Scottish Office? Will he confirm that there will not be some ill-defined addition to grant and that the total shortfall will be made up specifically?

Mr. Rifkind: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his welcome and I appreciate that he will wish to study the details before giving a detailed response. I genuinely welcome his response. There is a need to make a relatively minor amendment in another place to enable these new provisions to be available next year. However, after 1989, when revenue support grant replaces rate support grant, it is possible under the existing terms of clause 25 for me to operate by dealing with the matter in the way that I have explained without further legislative amendment.

I can confirm that the effect of these proposals will be that any individual local authority which may lose revenue which it would otherwise have received from a sports club but for the relief that it will provide will receive additional rate support grant commensurate with the revenue forgone.

Mr. Kirkwood: On first hearing I echo the welcome that the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) has given the proposal. Will there be any difficulty for a club, such as the Hawick rugby club, which has a substantial licensed element to its income and premises? Will the local authority still be able to exercise discretion and take an objective judgment over the whole position of the recreational aspects vis-a-vis the licensing aspects of the club when considering granting discretionary relief?

Mr. Rifkind: Discretion will remain with local authorities, as it does at present. The only change will be that if a good proportion of authorities were to exercise that relief, they would lose revenue from clubs, which would not result in any improvement in their grant from central Government. That is the only situation that would change. Most hon. Members would not see it as particularly desirable to give relief for the licensed premises of a sports club. However, I emphasise that that is a matter for the local authority to decide and to exercise its discretion if it thinks that relief is appropriate.

Mr. Maclennan: Is the Secretary of State saying that if revenue is forgone by the local authority as a result of giving relief, it is his present intention that that should be made good by an adjustment in the rate support grant? If that is the case, can he tell us what assurance there is that his successor will continue such a concession? If the concession is purely discretionary and not written into statute, what assurance can sports clubs have that the concession which the Secretary of State alleges he has made will be a lasting one and not merely put forward by him at a convenient time from the point of view of an election?

Mr. Rifkind: As my hon. Friends have said, the best assurance would be to continue to vote for the Government who introduced the measure. I appreciate that that might not be the answer that the hon. Gentleman wished me to give. Obviously, if any future Government wished to change the policy, they could do so by introducing legislation or by asking Parliament to change the legislation as easily as by changing it in any other way. The Government are introducing this new change and we firmly intend to implement it as long as we have the power to do so.

Mr. Foulkes: The Secretary of State says that the money a local authority loses will be added to the rate support grant settlement. How will the local authority know that the money has been added to the RSG settlement if it did not know what the original RSG settlement was to be?

Mr. Rifkind: I explained earlier the way in which the system will operate, that each autumn the rating authorities will be asked for details of commitments made for the following year to give relief to sports clubs. Since such relief can be terminated only from the end of a financial year and after 12 months' notice, there will be no risk of any authority taking grant and not giving relief. *[Interruption.]* Obviously the House is in a curious mood because hon. Members have just heard announcements about new proposals.

Mr. Foulkes: Will the Secretary of State give way? We are suspicious of the right hon. and learned Gentleman.

Mr. Rifkind: I am anxious to give way, but I know that if I remain at the Dispatch Box for much longer there will be no opportunity for other hon. Members to take part in the debate.

Mr. Dewar: My hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) has raised an important point which I should like to rephrase in order to get at the point by a different route. In the rate support grant settlements, there are clearly specific grants. If they go up, it is in effect a redistribution, while the total remains the same. One is merely reducing expenditure in other areas in order to make a concession. Is this new money and how can the local authorities know that it is new money and not simply money taken from another pocket?

Mr. Rifkind: The position is simple. When each year Government decide on the aggregate of rate support grant, they will take into account all the circumstances and they will have to include—*[Interruption.]* This is not some new principle. It is exactly the way in which rate support grant is determined by every Government, and that is the proper way to do it. I have told the House that no local authority will lose a single penny by a decision to grant relief of the kind that we have outlined. These proposals and the legislative amendment that we will introduce in another place——

Mr. Millan: The Secretary of State has not answered the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar). At the moment, specific grants are deducted from the aggregate RSG and the net amount is then distributed as RSG. Will that happen in this case?

Mr. Rifkind: It will not be done by means of a specific grant. It will be done through the needs element next year. With regard to the new system, it will be done under clause 25. *[Interruption.]* That is what I said in my earlier speech.

The proposals and the legislative amendment that we will introduce in another place will remove the last disincentive any local authority may have had to withhold relief from sports clubs. I am happy to commend them to the House.

9.45 pm

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): At the end of the day I do not believe there will be more money for local authorities to support sports clubs; the global sum will be the same. However, I am happy that the discretion will be with the local authorities.

In my constituency there are some sports clubs which do excellent work, but there are others that are, frankly, only an excuse to open licensed premises. They are an extension of a pub. In my constituency there is a club, the Ranza angling club, and I do not know anyone in that club who owns a fishing rod. It exists for people to have a drink. I have no objection to people going to licensed premises, but I object to public money going into such a club. I am glad that the local authority rather than the Secretary of State will have the discretion about funding such clubs.

Mr. Ernie Ross *rose*——

Mr. Martin: No, I will not give way.

Mr. Home Robertson *rose*——

Mr. Martin: No, I will not give way. If the Front Bench had not used so much time, perhaps I would be able to give way.

There is an excellent junior sports club in my constituency, St. Roch's Junior Football Club. That club handed over the running of its licensed premises to a committee. The licensed premises were supposed to make some money towards the upkeep of the grounds. However, the grounds and the club itself are still as poor as church mice. Thousands of pounds in takings disappeared from the face of the earth, and there was no benefit to the sports club.

I cannot envisage a situation wherein a sports club, run in such a fashion, should receive any support from the local authority. It is all very well for the new clause to state that it excludes licensed premises. However, anyone who knows anything about local bowling clubs will be aware that, at the annual general meetings, there is one faction which wants better facilities for the sports club and wishes to raise the price of drinks on the licensed premises, and another faction interested in the licensed premises and wishes to keep the price of drinks down. I hope that when support is given to sports clubs care is taken to ensure that they are bona fide sports clubs.

Sir Russell Johnston *rose*——

Mr. Martin: No, I am sorry, I will not give way.

I hope that those members of sports clubs who may read the reports of this debate will take steps to try to allow young unemployed people to enjoy the use of their facilities at off-peak times. There are too many bowling clubs, golf clubs or squash clubs — of which hon. Members are supportive—that are closed shops. Each year they put up their annual fees to ensure that only an elite may join. If we are to give subsidies, we should ensure that the clubs have a policy that allows those who are less fortunate than ourselves the use of such facilities.

Mr. Michael Hirst (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): It is probably rather a good thing that you have chosen to call me at this stage, Mr. Speaker, after, rather than before, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State has made his announcement. I am happy to be able to say that I unreservedly welcome his statement. I am certain that it is fully supported by my colleagues. The disarray and silence on the Opposition Benches is significant. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) must be regretting some of his comments. It is a pity that he did not wait to hear what my right hon. and learned Friend had to say.

Mr. Ernie Ross: I do not want to delay the House for more than a couple of seconds, but it is appropriate that we are talking about sports grounds when Dundee United has just successfully beaten Barcelona 1-0. There will be an early-day motion and I invite right hon. and hon. Members to sign it.

Mr. Hirst: Probably the only voice of accord this evening will be welcoming that result. I have no doubt that the hon. Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) will be able to have that recorded in his local newspaper.

I am glad that my right hon. and learned Friend made this announcement tonight. It is the result of sustained pressure from Government Back Benchers. In Committee, we had some hard words from those such as the hon. Member for Cathcart. As I do not think that he will have a chance to participate, I pay warm tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth) who, in an Adjournment debate and since, has, with his colleagues on

[Mr. Hirst]

this side of the House, championed the cause of amateur sports clubs in Scotland. He has at last achieved the justice that we have always sought.

The announcement underlines the importance that the Government attach to supporting the efforts of amateur sporting clubs in Scotland. Sadly, in recent years, because of high rates bills, these clubs have had to spend more time fund-raising than coaching youngsters in the essentials of their sport. The hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey) is not with us. I recognise the representations that he made on behalf of the amateur boxing clubs in his part of the world, clubs whose future was threatened by the size of their rates bill.

The hon. Member for Cathcart will remember that throughout the comments that I made in Committee I argued for the principle of discretionary relief. He was the first to tell me that rates relief should not be handed out to the Royal and Ancient at St. Andrews, to Muirfield or to some other prosperous golf club.

Mr. Maxton: No.

Mr. Hirst: Yes. The hon. Gentleman was the first to say that the result of my amendments in Committee would be to hand out money to those who did not properly deserve it. Therefore, I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for arranging a scheme that will ensure that the local authority will be able to grant relief, on a discretionary basis, to clubs that properly deserve it.

Sir Russell Johnston: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. I know that he has been most anxious, as have many hon. Members, to secure an effective scheme. However, we are worried about whether the relief scheme that the Secretary of State has offered, because it is not specific, and is variable within the rate support grant formula, will give local authorities the assurance and confidence that we seek.

Mr. Hirst: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman listened to my right hon. and learned Friend's speech as I did. As I understand it, the local authority would not qualify for relief if it did not make money available to amateur sports clubs. If I am wrong I will give way to my right hon. and learned Friend so that he can correct me. In other words, if the relief is not granted to sports grounds local authorities will not qualify for the compensatory amount.

We must pay tribute to the sustained campaign by the amateur sports clubs in Scotland, which were the first to identify the problem, and which continuously drew the attention of hon. Members to the need to relieve the rating burden because in many instances it threatened the future of their clubs.

This is a thoroughly welcome statement. I am particularly grateful to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland who, when in Committee I moved amendments, undertook to take them away, consider them and, if possible, bring back some sort of scheme on Report. When he did not do so he was vilified. He has been the subject of abuse from Opposition Members, but tonight we have seen that Conservative Members care for amateur sports clubs in Scotland.

Mr. Wilson: Like many Opposition Members, I welcome the relief that has been given to the hard-pressed amateur sports clubs, many of which were verging on bankruptcy and some of which are now having to sell land to keep going, land which could have been used for sporting purposes. Like many Opposition Members — although we do not like looking a gift horse in the mouth — we begin to wonder where the cash is coming from. The sports clubs have won, but I am not sure that the local authorities have, because it may be that in making up his budget the Secretary of State will take some cash off various things before making adjustments. If the new money is coming from the Treasury, I shall be delighted to see it.

Can I point out to the Secretary of State that this is just one battle in the war? One of the main causes of contention in the commercial sector is the huge imbalance in valuations between England and Scotland. This subject was hinted at earlier. The Secretary of State, taking the relief route, has not addressed himself to the problems which arise from valuation.

It was my intention, had more time been available, to refer the Secretary of State to *Armour on Valuation*, a major tome on the subject, which suggests a route for dealing with the problems of those who run the football grounds. We have heard the excellent news from the hon. Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) of Dundee United winning, but the rates bill on Tannardice park, Dens park, Ibrox or Parkhead is heavy compared with other facilities in England. Therefore, the Government cannot rest on their laurels. They must consider valuation. Having said that, I thank the Secretary of State for whatever relief has been given on this occasion.

Mr. Maxton: Any relief for the sports clubs is welcome. My initial response to the statement of the Secretary of State — which was cleverly worded — was one of welcome. But having listened to the questions that he answered from some of my hon. Friends I now have several grave reservations as to whether the local authorities will ever see the money that he is prepared to give them.

Did he consult the local authorities and do they approve of the scheme? The Secretary of State was careful to say that he is removing the disincentives to giving relief, but he did not say that he was giving the local authorities any incentives to grant relief.

What the Secretary of State has done will be welcomed by the sports clubs, but I am not convinced that it will be welcomed by the local authorities.

We wish to look carefully at the scheme. We shall not make a judgment on it now. We shall return to it in another place. We do not believe that the Secretary of State, having looked at the document, will give the local authorities the money. We want to look at it, and we shall return to it in another place.

Mr. Rifkind: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Maxton: If the Secretary of State will allow me, I should like to finish what I am saying. While we retain reservations about what the Secretary of State is doing, we do not believe that it would be appropriate to push my amendment to a vote. Therefore, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 5

REVALUATION: GENERAL

Amendment made: No. 33, in page 5, line 21, leave out Clause 5.—*[Mr. Ancram.]*

Clause 6

VALUATION OF PREMISES PART OF WHICH OCCUPIED AS DWELLING HOUSE

Amendment made: No. 34, in page 6, line 8, leave out from '1989' to 'resulting' in line 9 and insert "enter in the valuation roll only the part not occupied as a dwelling house, at the value'.—*[Mr. Ancram.]*

Clause 7

STATUTORY AND OTHER REFERENCES TO RATEABLE VALUES ETC.

Amendments made: No. 35, in page 6, line 13, leave out '1992' and insert '1989'.

No. 36, in page 6, line 17, leave out '1992' and insert '1989'.

No. 37, in page 6, line 19, leave out '1992' and insert '1989'.

No. 38, in page 6, line 23, leave out '1992' and insert '1989'.

No. 39, in page 6, line 28, leave out '1992' and insert '1989'.

No. 40, in page 6, line 35, leave out '1992' and insert '1989'.

No. 41, in page 6, line 38, leave out 'appeared' and insert 'appears'.

No. 42, in page 6, line 46, leave out 'been' and insert 'appeared in the valuation roll in force immediately before 1st April 1989 as'.

No. 43, in page 6, line 48, leave out 'immediately before 1st April 1992'.

No. 44, in page 7, line 5, leave out ', occurring on or after 1st April 1992'.

No. 45, in page 7, line 18, leave out '1992' and insert '1989'.—*[Mr. Ancram.]*

Clause 8

INTERPRETATION OF PART I AND MINOR AND CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS

Amendments made: No. 46, in page 7, line 24, leave out from '"domestic rates"' to end of line 25 and insert 'means rates which are leviable on lands and heritages which are domestic subjects".

No. 47, in page 7, leave out lines 28 and 29.—*[Mr. Ancram.]*

Clause 10

LIABILITY FOR PERSONAL COMMUNITY CHARGE

10 pm

Mr. Maxton: I beg to move amendment No. 51, in page 8, line 37, at end insert

'The Secretary of State shall in each year ensure that each full time student eligible for a grant from any award granting authority shall receive from him a sum equivalent to the personal community charge levied by the local authority in which he is resident during term time.'.

Our previous subject for debate might have been more interesting and lively, but it is not the one which bears most heavily on the effect of the poll tax on the people of Scotland.

Clause 10 implements the community charge for each individual. The Secretary of State has separated students and made them a completely different category. He does not want to give them relief under the rebate scheme or to include them among people who may move in the course of their job. There are many people in Scotland who do that, including us. The right hon. and learned Gentleman suggests that community charge should be imposed on them where they are full-time students. it is not to be imposed on them at their home address and they are not allowed to make a choice between the two.

Many university students will pay more.

Mr. Henderson: Many will pay less.

Mr. Maxton: The Secretary of State has said that he is prepared to give up to 80 per cent. of the average community charge in Scotland to those in receipt of a grant. Only at Aberdeen university, however, is the personal community charge below the average. Only at St. Andrews university is it on the average. At Edinburgh, Stirling and Glasgow universities, the charge is above the average. It is not true, therefore, that university students will pay less.

Mr. Henderson: I meant that some students who currently pay rates but get no compensation in their grant will by definition be better off under the new arrangements.

Mr. Maxton: It is not necessarily true that people do not get anything off rates. A married couple in a flat, for example, will get a higher allowance because of their circumstances. If a student shares a flat with a group of people, the burden of rates is shared across all the people within that flat. Earlier we heard from the Minister the contention that students who are in halls of residence pay in rent something towards the rates. At least that was what it sounded like. If the Minister wishes to contradict that, I shall give way.

Mr. Ancram: To set the record straight, I said that those who live in flats in many cases pay rates themselves or could find themselves paying a proportion of the rates to their landlords through their rental payments. I specifically excluded halls of residence, as I understand that, in most cases, there is not a great rates element involved in what they pay there.

Mr. Maxton: I am glad that the Minister has cleared that point up, because his earlier remarks on the new clause tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) were confusing.

Students who live in flats contribute something towards the rates. Those who live in halls of residence do not. Even students who live at home and who pay their parents something towards their keep contribute, or may contribute, something towards the rates. However, the Minister has stated verbally, and in the commentaries and press releases that have been put out about students, that he will be giving, on top of the awards, a certain sum of money to make up for the fact that students must pay the community charge. However, nothing in the Bill says that. That is a promise made by a Government whom I know that many students in Scotland distrust very much.

[Mr. Maxton]

That promise may well be maintained in the first year by an increase in the student grant, but there is no guarantee whatsoever — certainly not from this Government, judging by what they have done with student grants during the past few years — that that money would be paid in any year thereafter. That is quite clear.

I have yet to be convinced by the Minister that the local authorities in England and Wales will be prepared to pay that sum of money to students from their authorities who go to Scottish universities.

That money does not cover and will not cover students who in any way finance themselves through a year or two years at university. That includes especially students who are repeating a year for any reason, perhaps because of failure. It also includes some other students who may be financing their own courses. They will all pay the personal community charge.

Mr. Henderson: On the hon. Gentleman's remarks about students financing themselves, a student has only to be eligible for a grant to be entitled to gain from this provision, as I understand it. Even if their parents pay entirely for their maintenance and they receive no grant, they will still receive assistance towards the community charge.

Mr. Maxton: That is not the way that I understand it. The Minister may help the hon. Gentleman and myself on that point, but, as I understand it, there is nothing in statute and nothing in the Bill that says that the Minister has to pay anything at all towards it. We are relying entirely upon the words of the Minister in this matter. I am trying to make the point that a student who has failed a year's studies and who wishes to repeat that year may not be eligible for a grant, or if he is eligible for a grant that year, he may well not be eligible for a grant in his last year at university because limits are put on the eligibility of grants. Nevertheless the student will still have to pay his own community charge.

There is no way in which—I accept that even with my amendment there is no way—the large numbers of foreign students who come to our universities and who are already put off by the increase in fees that they have to pay in Scottish universities, will be eligible for any help from the Scottish Office in terms of those grants.

My amendment would give to students the power to place a statutory obligation upon the Secretary of State to ensure that each full-time student eligible for grant from any award-granting authority shall receive the sum equivalent to the personal community charge levied by the local authority in which the student is resident during term time. In other words, my amendment would take the average Scottish personal community charge, put it into statute, and ensure that a student's local authority will receive the money. In fact it would give 100 per cent. rebate for students in regard to the community charge.

Students are aware of what may happen to them with the personal community charge. They think that it may be yet another disincentive to prevent poorer people from taking up full-time higher education. Hon. Members should not take that lightly. Our aim should be to encourage people to take up opportunities in full-time education. We are desperately short of skilled and educated people. Everyone who can go to university should. Any disincentive put in the path of people going to university should be deplored, but I am afraid that that is what the Government are doing with the personal community charge.

Mr. Ancram: I listened carefully to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) and was surprised to hear him raise the matter of foreign students and students who repeat courses. His amendment——

Mr. Maxton: I said that foreign students were not covered by my amendment.

Mr. Ancram: A reading of the amendment suggests that the eligibility for the payment which he suggests is precisely the same as that proposed by the Government. The amendment seeks to require my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State to reimburse all full-time students eligible for grants with a sum that would exactly cover their personal community charge liability. I cannot accept that.

Although we accept that students will require help to enable them to meet their personal community charge liabilities, it is not appropriate that that help should be provided either in the way that the hon. Gentleman described—which would be a new form of assistance—or through the social security system, because our longer-term aim is to remove students from entitlement to social security benefits and to return to the position where they depend on grants or a parental contribution and on their vacation earnings.

In that light, we have proposed that students eligible for grant, including those — this is an important point — who, because of parental income, receive no grant payments at present and who may often for that reason be some of the least well off students at university, should receive a flat rate sum each year towards their personal community charge liability. This will have regard to the level of assistance available under the rebate system for people on low incomes. The likely figure is a minimum contribution of 20 per cent., as we discussed earlier. It is likely that the same assumption will be made in the grants system.

Mr. Douglas: Will the Minister help me, because I am not clear about the inter-relationship between the grants system run by the Scottish education department and the system administered in England and Wales? A number of the people who will pay the personal community charge will be in receipt of grants from local authorities in England and Wales. What discussions has the hon. Gentleman had with local authorities and the Secretary of State for Education and Science to reimburse those students? At what level will they be reimbursed? What administration will be available for that purpose?

Mr. Ancram: Obviously, the hon. Gentleman would not be surprised to learn that this matter has been discussed at great length with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science. We would not make a proposal of this sort if we did not believe that it could be administered. Grants in Scotland effectively come from three sources. If the hon. Gentleman wishes I can, with a little notice, give him the exact proportions in which they are paid. The sources are the Scottish education department, Scottish local authorities and English and Welsh local authorities paying for students in Scotland.

10.15 pm

Having considered the matter, we believe that it will not be difficult to change the administrative rules in each case to ensure that a supplementary grant payment of the sort that I am describing could be made available to students in Scotland.

It would be quite wrong to follow the course that the amendment suggests, of reimbursing students in full for their personal community charge liability. It is a basic principle of the reformed social security system, which will be brought into effect on 1 April 1988 as a result of the provisions of the Social Security Act 1986, that all those liable for local taxation payments should make some contribution towards them. That principle has been fully debated and accepted by Parliament and will apply to all those liable for the personal community charge. I cannot see a reason for students to be exempt from that rule. The assistance that we propose through the grant system will allow them to receive help along broadly the same lines as we are providing through the rebate system for others on low incomes. The system is fair and equitable. It takes the students' position fully into account. For that reason, I resist the amendment.

The hon. Member for Cathcart went a little wide of the amendment and talked about the deeming provisions in that part of the Bill that affects students. We discussed this matter at length in Committee. I made it clear to the hon. Gentleman—it is worth reiterating it to the House—that the reason we decided that students should be deemed to be solely or mainly resident at their place of university is that, by the nature of university education, they would otherwise be capable of being registered up to six times, if not eight times in the case of Stirling university, at different residences during the course of a year. It was considered that, as in most cases students are likely to spend most of their time at their place of university education, it was simpler for their sake and administratively to have them deemed to be resident at their place of study.

Mr. Maxton: The Minister's argument is farcical. Many people, including hon. Members, live in two places at several times during the year. We have two residences, and we change our addresses weekly. We certainly move out of London during the three-month Parliamentary recess and at Easter and Christmas. It is a simple matter. The Minister has only to say that a student shall deem one place to be his sole or main residence. That is a qualification under clause 10, anyway.

Mr. Ancram: I have to be a little cautious, because that point is not part of the amendment. When we discussed this matter in Committee—the hon. Gentleman referred to the lives led by hon. Members—the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) rather plaintively said that he knew where his home was. If he looks at the provisions for sole or main residence, he will see that the situation is effectively quite different in regard to a Member of Parliament who travels a great deal, as opposed to a student who is known to be in a particular place for a certain length of time and then to move to another place for another length of time. Under the provisions of the legislation, the sole or main residence could change several times during a year, to the disadvantage of the person concerned. To accept reality, apart from anything else, and to simplify matters, a decision was taken to deem them to be resident.

Mr. Henderson: This matter is of considerable importance to local authorities that have a substantial student population. Six hundred and fifty hon. Members will not make much difference to heaven knows how many London boroughs, but 3,000 students at St. Andrews will make a great difference to the economics of a district council such as Fife or a comparatively small district council such as Stirling.

Mr. Ancram: My hon. Friend made a valid point. The students in his and my constituencies might partake of the services provided by local authorities. It is in line with the principles of the Bill that they should be expected to make a contribution towards such services.

The hon. Member for Cathcart suggested that students should be exempted from the community charge. However, it would be difficult to justify one brother in a household, just because he is a student, paying no community charge while another brother, who might be unemployed and who would therefore be on the maximum rebate that is available, was paying a minimum contribution. Our scheme, in the form of proposals that will have to be fully worked up by the time that the community charge becomes payable, creates a degree of fairness and parity between those two categories, which I believe is right. On that basis, I ask my hon. Friends to resist the amendment.

Mr. Douglas: I listened with interest to the intervention of the hon. Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Henderson). He is concerned about the students of St. Andrews university. We all share his concern. However, if the hon. Gentleman was truly concerned about those students, he ought to have asked his Government to sort out the problem. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman has not been very successful, because the problem has not been sorted out.

According to figures that I have obtained from the Library, in 1984-85 there were 9,310 full time students—8,220 undergraduates and 1,090 postgraduates — at Scottish universities who were domiciled elsewhere in the United Kingdom. I do not know what proportion of those students came from England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Students will need a subvention to enable them to pay the poll tax.

It was suggested that it would be very unfair if a student in a household did not have to pay the poll tax. However, the reverse is also true. I am told that in 1984-85 there were 2,980 full-time students and 2,140 undergraduates and 840 postgraduates domiciled in Scotland who went to universities elsewhere in the United Kingdom. If they are domiciled in Scotland but go to a university elsewhere in the United Kingdom, they will be benefiting from local authority services in those areas, but they will not be paying the poll tax. By trying to cater for students, we are creating absurd anomalies.

Student grants cannot be discussed in this debate, but considerable anomalies will be created, particularly in the case of those who rely on parental contributions. Many parents make no payment, and that is very hard on students. Students must be compensated in some way or another for the poll tax. Local authorities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland will have to receive about £3 million for students. If these local authorities have 10,000 students in the universities, how much money will students receive to enable them to pay a personal liability that is imposed upon them?

[Mr. Douglas]

The hon. Member for Fife, North-East said that it is cleared up. I submit that it is not cleared up and unless the Minister can tell us what the position is tonight, I would imagine that he has some responsibility to get the matter cleared up in another place or certainly — I speak personally—we will be pressing for further clarification during other debates.

Students are in a difficult position and I take the general view that this is not something that we can cast aside. It is an additional burden on students, perhaps in the region of £200 or £300 a year, and it is not something we can take lightly. I take the point made by the hon. Member for Fife, North-East, that it may be a disincentive for students from England and Wales.

Mr. Henderson: At worst, it would have been for one year during the transition. However, now that the transitional period has been telescoped, it will not arise at all as a serious problem.

Mr. Douglas: That may mean that the hon. Gentleman has some understanding that Scotland is going to be the guinea pig for a shorter period, but one does not know.

There is an imbalance for 7,000 students, 10,000 if we take the net total, and it must be clarified. It has to be a payment that will be imposed in one way or another by English, Welsh and perhaps Northern Irish local authorities on students who come to Scotland. I ask the Minister not to be so sanguine and cavalier about it. We need much more clarification than we have been given.

Mr. Maclennan: I agree with the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) that there is a need for greater clarity from the Minister as to how he envisages students being compensated to the level of 20 per cent.

Mr. Ancram: Eighty per cent.

Mr. Maclennan: Yes, to the level of 80 per cent.

The mechanisms are important and the Minister has not revealed anything tonight about how it is proposed that the moneys should be made available. It is not clear whether it is to be duty imposed upon English local authorities to pay the additional grants and whether, if they do discharge that duty, they will be compensated by central Government. It is understood that in so far as the grants come directly from central Government, students can be recompensed, but it is not clear, when the grants are payable by local authorities, whether it is to be treated as mandatory or discretionary on local authorities.

The Minister has added to the confusion felt among students as to what their position will be, not only in respect of their duty to pay the poll tax in Scotland, but as to how they will be placed vis-a-vis students in other parts of the United Kingdom. Is there going to be a period in which it is financially better for students in Scotland to attend universities in other parts of the United Kingdom? Will the extra cost operate as a disincentive to English, Welsh or Northern Irish students to attend Scottish universities?

Those matters have not been clarified by the Minister and I hope that he will take the opportunity of this debate to explain more precisely than he yet has what mechanisms he has in mind. It is plain that he has not worked the whole thing out, and I do not entirely blame him for that. However, he should be a little forthcoming about what he would wish to see done.

Mr. Maxton: I find it difficult to believe that students like hon. Members, do not know where their homes are. Most students are quite clear that their home is where they have come from, where they go home at the recess and where their parents live. I cannot see that the Minister's arguments have much validity.

As the Minister has left things now——

Mr. Ancram: I was going to explain.

Mr. Maxton: The Minister says that he was going to explain, but it would have been usual for him to intervene before I rose to speak.

The point is that as things stand and as the Minister has left matters, if he pays each student 80 per cent. of the average Scottish personal community charge, a student at Aberdeen university, Robert Gordon's college of technology, or the college of education in Aberdeen will make a profit and be in pocket by about £15 a year. As I understand it, the community charge average is about £220 in Scotland and I believe that in the Grampian region and in Aberdeen the community charge will be about £170. Therefore, money will be put in the students' pockets. A student at St. Andrews university will pay roughly £44 a year because that is about 20 per cent. of £220.

Mr. Henderson: It is £39.

10.30 pm

Mr. Maxton: Very well, £39.

A student at Strathclyde university, Glasgow university, the Glasgow college of technology, or the Jordanhill college of education or the art college and students at the other colleges in Glasgow and Edinburgh will be paying close to £100 a year. I believe that that is a very unfair discrimination between different groups of students in different parts of the country. The Minister may want to reconsider that point.

If students are to be treated in this way, there should be a statutory obligation upon the Secretary of State to provide relief to students. It is fine for the Minister to say that he will increase grants and do this and do that. However, there is no obligation in law for him to do so. Students have seen what the Government have done with their grants and quite rightly they do not trust the Government. They believe that something will probably go wrong. They may get the 80 per cent. of the community charge in the first year, but in the coming year the grant will only rise by 1 per cent. and not by the full amount of inflation. Therefore, the payment will be eroded until eventually there is no allowance for the community charge within the Secretary of State's proposals. There must be a statutory obligation.

The way in which the Minister is handling this matter will mean that there will be some students to whom he cannot guarantee the grant. I have yet to hear from the Secretary of State how he will oblige Birmingham to pay this sum of money to students who go to St. Andrews university. If two students go to Birmingham council and ask for grants to go to university and the council only has enough money to provide one grant, the council will give it to the student going to an English university which does not have the extra poll tax. The council will not allow the other student to go to the Scottish university. There is a disincentive. Much of the information that I have received on this matter has come from a member of the court of St. Andrews university who is equally not a supporter of the

Labour party. He is gravely concerned that there will be a disincentive for students to go to Scottish universities unless there is an inbuilt statutory obligation upon the Secretary of State to provide help.

Mr. Henderson: The hon. Gentleman must not make the English too worried about this, for two reasons. First, all English students going to Scottish universities will receive help to meet the community charge. Secondly, at the moment, a very large proportion of the English students at St. Andrews receive no grant or assistance towards their rates bills when they live in flats outside the university. In future, they will get assistance towards their community charge payments, so they will be a good deal better off twice over.

Mr. Maxton: The Minister has given us no clear idea of how he will ensure that English local authorities will pay this money. Indeed, he has given us no clear assurance that he will allow students any relief. If he will stand up and give an undertaking that this will become a statutory obligation, I shall be interested to hear what he has to say.

Students certainly wish to see a statutory obligation placed upon the Secretary of State to provide such relief. The Opposition believe in 100 per cent. grants and 100 per cent. rebates for all those whose income is at a certain level. That is an issue of principle between us and the Government. The Government have not given students the commitments that they require. The provision should be statutory, and I ask my hon. Friends to vote for the amendment.

Mr. Ancram: With the leave of the House, I wish to reply to the debate. I had hoped to speak before the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton), but I waited to see whether anyone else wished to take part, and the hon. Gentleman was very anxious to speak.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) asked about the parental contribution and made the valid point that those students who receive the full parental contribution receive no subsistence grant and have problems. I made it clear that although they may receive no grant at present, under the scheme that we propose they would receive the supplementary grant towards their community charge. That will be warmly welcomed by the students affected. The hon. Gentleman asked what sum had been agreed. The sum will depend on the level of community charge in Scotland, upon the average of which the supplementary grant will be worked out, and on the number of eligible students. It is impossible, two years off the time when this measure is likely to apply, to give the hon. Gentleman an idea of what it will cost.

The hon. Members for Dunfermline, West, for Cathcart and for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) asked how the scheme would be made to work. I can tell them that the awards scheme in England is mandatory. Although it is operated by the local authorities, it is under the direction of the Department of Education and Science, which compensates local authorities for the awards. We believe that it would be a simple adjustment to introduce this supplementary grant on the same basis.

The hon. Member for Cathcart is a wonderful man for spraying out figures. He suggested that, in Aberdeen, on an assumption of 80 per cent. of the average community charge for Scotland, students would be better off by £15. I must tell him that they would be required to pay £15 rather than having that amount in pocket. He said, generally, that students in Edinburgh would pay £100. As an Edinburgh Member, I have an interest in ensuring that he gets that figure correct. It would in fact be £58—about half the figure that he suggested.

As for the scheme itself—I tried to make this clear in Committee and, in an attempt not to detain the House tonight, I did not go into as much detail—the idea is that the sum which will be made available through the student awards system will be based on the average personal community charge in Scotland each year. That is the principle which I enunciated in Committee. The proportion of that average which will be covered is likely to be in line with that which will be proposed for the rebate system that we shall debate tomorrow. Of course, there are details to be worked out before we introduce the scheme, but those are its general principles. Generally, they have been welcomed by students in Scotland, who were worried that they might have to pay the entire community charge.

Mr. Douglas: The Under-Secretary of State accused my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) of spraying figures, but he has been spraying round spurious exactitudes. He has given us an idea of what students in Aberdeen and Edinburgh might pay. Can he give us some feel of the global sum that the Department of Education and Science might be asked to pay if the provision is made statutory? Will it be £2 million, £3 million, £4 million or what?

Mr. Ancram: As the hon. Gentleman is anxious to have that figure, I can tell him that the figures I used in Committee and that I am using tonight are based on the assumptions that community charge levels will be based on current levels of expenditure. We must accept that we must make those assumptions because we do not know what the levels of expenditure will be in two years' time. If the hon. Gentleman is interested in having a global figure, I can get it for him and if he wishes, I shall write to him. But it will be based, not on an exact prediction of what the situation will be in two years' time but on various assumptions relating to current levels of expenditure.

Mr. Henderson: Does my hon. Friend agree that the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) was wrong to think that there was any serious danger of English students not coming to Scottish universities because of this, given the scale of commitment that a student is making in coming to any university and that the benefits that he will gain from coming to a Scottish university far outweigh any matters of that sort?

Mr. Ancram: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for reminding me of that point. It is a strange point to raise especially when, given the statements made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, there will be a system of community charges in England soon after that has been started in Scotland. The question of cross-border disincentives will soon disappear.

I have a great deal of confidence in Scottish university education, having been educated at universities in England and Scotland. The quality of education provided by Scottish universities is a sufficient attraction to ensure a good, steady number of recruits in the years to come. If the hon. Gentleman will not seek to withdraw the amendment, I ask my hon. Friends to resist it.

Question put:—

[Mr. Ancram]

The House divided: Ayes 170, Noes 216.

Division No. 109] **[10.41 pm**

AYES

Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'rmline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Buchan, Norman
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Clay, Robert
Clelland, David Gordon
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coleman, Donald
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(L'lli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Freud, Clement
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, Mrs Llin
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Fife Central)*
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley, N)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Janner, Hon Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Martin, Michael
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shields, Mrs Elizabeth
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R.*(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stott, Roger
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Allen McKay and
Mr. Chris Smith.

NOES

Alexander, Richard
Ancram, Michael
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Best, Keith
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Budgen, Nick
Bulmer, Esmond
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Carttiss, Michael
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Cope, John
Crouch, David
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Durant, Tony
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fletcher, Sir Alexander
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John S
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harvey, Robert
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(N'folk SW)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hirst, Michael
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Jackson, Robert
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
McCurley, Mrs Anna
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, M. *(N'bury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
Madel, David
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Mather, Sir Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Moate, Roger

Monro, Sir Hector
Morris, M. *(N'hampton S)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Osborn, Sir John
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Portillo, Michael
Powley, John
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertf'dshire N)*
Sumberg, David
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'lch N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Michael Neubert and
Mr. Gerald Malone.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 10

LIABILITY FOR PERSONAL COMMUNITY CHARGE

Mr. Ancram: I beg to move amendment No. 155, in page 9, line 1, leave out subsections (6), (7) and (8) and insert—

'(6) Persons who—

(a) are married to each other and live together, or

(b) live together as if they were man and wife

shall be jointly and severally liable for the personal community charges, relating to the period during which they live together, for which each of them is liable.'

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): With this it will be convenient to take the following: amendment No. 166, in page 9, line 1 leave out subsection (6), and Government amendments Nos. 156 to 159.

Mr Ancram: These Government amendments stem from a commitment given in Committee following upon an amendment moved by, I think, the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) that we would consider further the provisions on joint and several liability for the personal community charge. The view was strongly expressed in Committee that unmarried couples whose household arrangements might in many cases be very similar to those of married couples, should also be made jointly and severally liable for the charge. On consideration, we have indeed reached the view that it should not be easier — at least potentially — for unmarried couples to be able to evade the payment of personal community charge than it will be for married couples. These amendments therefore give effect to that policy.

Apart from dealing with the basic position on joint and several liability in clause 10, they entail consequential amendment to clauses 15 and 22, and schedule 2. I shall deal with the amendments in the order that they appear in the Amendment Paper. Amendment No. 155 deletes the present provisions for joint and several liability of married couples in subsections (6), (7) and (8) of clause 10, and replaces them with the provision that married and unmarried couples who live together should be jointly and severally liable for the personal community charge.

The basic anticipated criteria by which it will be determined whether a couple are living together as man and wife will be similar to criteria used by the Department of the Health and Social Security at the moment. I shall deal with this is more detail shortly.

Amendment No. 156 provides that the joint and several liability of married and unmarried couples should not be included in the community charges register. While joint and several liability exists in all cases where a couple are married or living together, we do not propose that that liability should be invoked except when some difficulty has arisen over collection of the community charges due. The appearance of a note of joint and several liability in every case on the register would therefore be unnecessary, as well as involving the registration officer in complex and arguably intrusive inquiries of all couples at the stage when the register was being made up. That was a matter of concern to some Committee members. As a consequence, amendment No. 157 deletes from clause 22 the provision that any person shown on the register as jointly or severally liable to pay any community charge shall be entitled to inspect the entry in the register relating to each person with whom he is so liable. That no longer applies. We propose that the register will not in fact record any instances of joint and several liability, since in terms of amendment Nos. 52 and 56, which we will discuss later, there will no longer be any provision for joint and several liability between owners and tenants for the standard or collective community charges. Clause 22(2)(d) is therefore unnecessary.

Amendments Nos. 158 and 159 make the further changes that will be necessary to the procedures for recovery of community charges as a result of the extension of joint and several liability. They exclude the use of summary warrants for the recovery of arrears dependent on the joint and several liability provisions. Instead, the local authority must first raise a sheriff court action—ordinary action or summary cause—against the married or unmarried couple for payment of the outstanding charges. This will establish the joint and several liability. In the normal case, however, we expect that authorities will seek to recover arrears of community charges by the summary warrant procedure against the individual partner. Where that is unsuccessful, or where the authority has reason to believe that it would not be effective, it will, subject to paragraph 7(5) of schedule 2, be able, in the case of married or unmarried couples living together, to invoke joint and several liability and to pursue one partner's debts against the other partner. However, that will not be possible until it has raised an action and been granted a decree from the sheriff, as I have explained. In considering whether to grant a decree, the sheriff will take into account all the circumstances of the case, including the question of whether a couple who are not married are living together as man and wife. In this context a decision by a social security appeals tribunal that the couple should be jointly assessed for social security purposes may be of relevance.

These amendments have fallen consequent upon an amendment moved in Committee that rightly raised the difficulties and pressures that may be caused if married couples were treated differently from those who were living together but were not married.

Mr. Maxton: One of the points that COSLA raised with us was that by not including couples who were living together but not married we could create problems in terms of housing benefit.

Mr. Ancram: The housing benefit rules already cover that situation and will carry over in terms of the rebate provision that will be made available under this legislation.

This set of amendments, as they stand, cover the difficulties that may be caused where a couple who are living together but not married are in a position to evade payment whereas a married couple are not in such a position. Most Committee Members appreciated that that would cause problems and we all wished to avoid that.

As a result of the amendment so ably moved in Committee by the hon. Member for East Lothian, these amendments are now brought forward. I hope that they will find favour with the House.

Mr. Wilson: I welcome the changes made by the Government through these amendments. It would be wrong for a husband and wife to be treated in a different way from persons living together, and the Government have rightly accepted the arguments that were presumably made in Committee.

I have tabled amendment No. 166. I suspect that at this late stage of the proceedings, especially now that the other Government amendments have been made, there is little chance of persuading the Government to relax on the question of joint and several liability. However, I thought it worthwhile putting down a marker because if, as I understand it, the community charge is a personal tax, it should be payable by each person. The names should go individually on to the register. That is a matter of principle and it is what the Government should have provided for. I accept that the best way of proving the identity of persons living together is going against both parties in a sheriff court action, but I still do not agree with the principle.

11 pm

Mr. Ancram: The hon. Gentleman's first concern that they should not appear on the register as being registered jointly and severally liable is covered by the amendments.

Mr. Wilson: I took the point that the Government have improved on the situation through their amendments. I presume that the names of the persons who are allegedly living together will still appear on the register, as with husband and wife, although there will be no statement of whether there is liability.

Mr. Ancram: The register will have the names of every adult over 18 living at the address. Under the provision of the Bill before the amendments, a married couple would have had a distinguishing mark beside their name, probably the letters J and S, which would have signified that was joint and several liability and identified them as such. That is no longer necessary, so they will appear as names on a register against an address, just as everyone else on the register will.

Mr. Wilson: I was right to agree that the Government have chosen the correct mechanism to follow, although I disagree with the principle. It is always difficult coming in on Report, after matters have been exhaustively discussed in Committee. Although I do not press my amendment, I put down a marker, and express my opposition to joint and several liability, when the liability should be personal if the Government believe that accountability should be appropriate.

Mr. Henderson: I have two brief points to make. My hon. Friend the Minister will know that I met Fife regional council recently, and it has been having discussion within the Scottish forum for rating, valuation and other revenues. My hon. Friend will know that the forum is organised for the benefit of Scottish local authorities involved in rating, valuation and the collection of other revenues. Members include all regional councils, more than half the district councils, the Scottish special housing association and two of the three islands councils. I understand that in the main these authorities are represented by staff involved in revenue administration. Clearly, the Government will take some note of what such a body has to say.

The regional council, in line with that forum, expressed two major matters of concern to me. One was that all members of the forum had unanimously recommended that domestic rates be completely abolished with effect from 1 April 1989, and that the full community charges be introduced from that date. It is with great pleasure that I find that, within days of my carrying that message to my hon. Friend, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State announced just that policy. That will also be a great pleasure to the forum.

The other point put to me by Fife regional council was more directly related to this group of amendments. Amendment No. 155 replaces clause 10(6), (7) and (8) with a new subsection (6) which says:

> '(6) Persons who—
>
> *(a)* are married to each other and live together, or
>
> *(b)* live together as if they were man and wife
>
> shall be jointly and severally liable for the personal community charges, relating to the period during which they live together, for which each of them is liable.'

For a number of different reasons, Fife regional council was concerned that if the definition of what constituted a married couple in the Bill differed from that in the housing benefit regulations, a range of different administrative problems could arise. I understand that there will be new housing benefit regulations in April 1988, if not at any other time.

I am looking for an assurance from my hon. Friend the Minister that the Bill will be on all-fours and compatible with the housing benefit regulations, or vice-versa.

Mr. Hugh Brown (Glasgow, Provan): Will the Minister clarify why it is necessary to have the principle of joint and several liability? If the register will not distinguish between a married couple and a couple living together, I do not see the need to define a couple. Surely individuals should have a distinct liability for the personal charge? Why can the Minister not give consideration to that aspect before we conclude these stages?

Mr. Home Robertson: We briefly covered this subject in Committee. The Minister rather eloquently described it as the bidey-in element, which had been suggested by COSLA. COSLA has come in for a certain amount of vilification from Ministers during debate on the Bill. I am glad that the Minister has, on this occasion, acknowledged that COSLA has drawn the attention of Parliament to a relevant and necessary amendment. I am grateful to the Minister for coming forward with this set of amendments, which clarify the position of unmarried couples living together as man and wife.

Following the point that was made by the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Wilson), we had quite a lot to say in Committee about the principle of joint and several liability. It rather undermines one of the fundamental principles that the Government have been laying much store by in putting forward their case for the community charge—every individual in Scotland over the age of 18 years should be liable to pay. The principle of couples being jointly and severally liable undermines a substantial part of that principle.

In an earlier debate the Secretary of State quoted a lot of figures about the alleged lack of accountability of local government in Scotland because, he claimed, relatively few people were ratepayers at present. That conveniently discounts the fact that a high proportion of people were the spouses of ratepayers, and if the two groups were put together they made a total of 79 per cent., which is hardly a minority.

I wonder what the comparable figures will be for the community charge in the future? Have the Government estimated how many couples will be jointly and severally liable? In effect, that means that only one of those partners will be paying the tax. The other member of those households will, by the Government's definition in their

[Mr. Home Robertson]

criticism of the rating system, be freeloading. The Government cannot have it both ways. I would be interested to know how many people they expect to fall into this category.

Mr. Wallace: It is always difficult to intervene on a matter which has been dealt with at length in Committee.

My point relates to the question of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Brown) about why we should have joint or several liability. I surmise that the reason why this has been put forward is ease of collection, to try to exclude one possible means of avoidance. If that is the case, it could lead to harshness, because, as I read the amendment that the Government are now seeking to substitute, the partners would be jointly and severally liable relating to the period during which they lived together. It is not sexist to say that the consequences of one partner leaving could be more harsh if the husband leaves the wife and goes to an unknown address. The bill for unpaid community charge could easily fall on the wife, who may have no earned income of her own and depend on the state.

I do not want to start a debate about taxes being seen to be fair, but I do not think that it will generally be thought fair to give a woman who has been deserted a bill for unpaid community charge for a period when she was not living alone. The Minister might say that payment would not be enforced in such circumstances. That merely reveals the inadequacies of the system and shows that it has not been fully thought through.

Mr. Ancram: The hon. Members for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) and for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Brown) asked why we should have joint and several liability. In certain circumstances, spouses and partners will have no assets of their own and their community charge liabilities therefore cannot be recovered. That was recognised in certain marriages and for people whom I described in Committee, as the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) has reminded me, as bidey-ins. Our proposals represent a reasonable approach to the problem.

I cannot envisage a sensible local authority trying to recover two charges from a partner with no assets, not least because it is for such a person's benefit that we are providing for joint and several liability. Recovery on that basis might not be possible. There is no system of taxation about which I could say, hand on heart, that there is 100 per cent. recovery, and I suspect that hon. Members could not either.

Our proposal for joint and several liability allows a local authority to try to recover a community charge from a partnership when one might have no identifiable assets from which recovery could be made, precisely because of the nature of the relationship.

Mr. Wallace: I understand the Minister's argument and accept that local authorities would sometimes not press home the charge in the circumstances which I suggested. That is a crucial admission that the House is being asked to accept a tax which is imposed on people who cannot pay it. That is a fundamental unfairness which we have identified.

Mr. Ancram: If the hon. Gentleman compares the amendments with the Bill, he will find that the Bill identifies a couple as jointly and severally liable from the start. Although they get separate bills, the hon. Member for Provan will remember from Committee stage that they will be in the register as jointly and severally liable.

The amendments create joint and several liability only when recovery has proved impossible on an individual basis. We have established that the authority goes through the process of recovery via the register. When that fails, or if the authority can see that that method will not work, it can go to the sheriff to have joint and several liability declared.

That answers what the hon. Member for Provan said. He said—it had not struck me until he said it—that the weakness in the Bill had been the application of joint and several liability before billing or recovery had arisen. That is met by the amendments, so I should have thought that they would go a long way to satisfy him.

11.15 pm

Mr. Maxton: What effect will the amendments have on rebates? If a husband is not jointly and severally liable for his wife's commuted charge, surely the wife is entitled to ask for a rebate on the basis of her income, with no relationship to her husband's income.

Mr. Ancram: I shall deal with rebates when I respond to the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Henderson). The hon. Member for East Lothian raised the same issue in principle, and I would contend that his argument has been diminished by the amendments that have been placed before the House this evening. It would seem that he missed the opportunity to advance his argument when the issue was before the Committee. In any event, in the light of the amendments, his argument is a month too late.

The hon. Member for East Lothian asked about numbers, and I cannot tell him the number of married couples in Scotland. I can tell him, however, that there are about 50,000 unmarried couples living together in Scotland.

Dr. Godman: What is the position of a married couple who separate and continue to live under the same roof for some years before one of them leaves the domestic home?

Mr. Ancram: The hon. Gentleman will understand that subsections (6) and (7) are being replaced by the amendment. Subsection (8) states that the two subsections "do not apply to persons who, although married to each other, are separated and live apart."
That must be a matter of fact and circumstance in each instance.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Fife, North-East for reminding us that the Rating and Valuation Association forum called for the ending of transition, which has been achieved in the Bill. My hon. Friend asked about the definition of "joint and several liability" in the terms of the Bill, and I suspect that his local authority is concerned about the rebate under clause 26 as against the housing benefit rebate provisions. The rebate system that is proposed under clause 26 will be a carry-forward, effectively, with the necessary adjustments under the housing benefit regulations. The housing benefit provisions for cohabiting couples will carry over into the rebate system, and there will be the relationship with the community charge. The concern to which my hon. Friend

has referred has been expressed by a number of local authorities, but it does not come within the terms of the amendment.

The definitions of the joint and several categories within the Bill are slightly different from those within the Social Security Act 1986, but only in minor drafting terms rather than in any substantial way. The various applications of joint and several in respect of couples living together, whether married or unmarried, will have the same parentage although they might be slightly different in appearance from the provisions in the 1986 legislation. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Fife, North-East is reassured.

Mr. Henderson: The definition should be sufficiently similar in the two sets of regulations so that the computer programme that is designed to handle one is able to handle the other. There lies the main problem.

Mr. Ancram: That is most important in terms of the support through the rebate schemes. Apart from possible slight variations, effectively they will be the same provisions. As to the definition used for collection, the sheriff will decide whether joint and several liability exists. It is likely that one of the matters to which he has regard is whether, under the social security provisions, the couple would have been so deemed to be cohabiting.

Mr. Kirkwood: Will the Minister assist me in clarifying the position of the sheriff when the local authority approaches him for a decision? In terms of the court's jurisdiction, will the sheriff be able to delay enforcement? Can he refuse to issue a declaration and, if so, in what circumstances? Does he have a choice?

Mr. Ancram: As I said when talking about amendments Numbers 158 and 159, just as in any other case, the local authority has to go to the sheriff—it will either be an ordinary action or a summary cause—to establish the joint and several liability. Each case will turn on its own facts. The decision will be the sheriff's. We expect that the main criteria will be similiar to those applied by the DHSS when it considers whether a couple should be jointly assessed for benefit entitlement. Obviously, the sheriff will wish to satisfy himself of that. It is right that the sheriff should take into account all the relevant circumstances of the particular case before deciding whether to grant a decree.

Mr. Kirkwood: Will that be enforced?

Mr. Ancram: The sheriff will be asked for a decree. He will decide whether to grant it. There is nothing especially complicated in that procedure. I hope that those hon. Members who invited us to table the amendment will accept it.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 12

Liability for and calculation of standard community charge

Mr. Lang: I beg to move amendment No. 52, in page 10, leave out lines 5 to 10 and insert——

'(4) The person liable to pay the standard community charge in respect of any premises shall be—

(a) subject to paragraph (b) and (c) below, the owner of the premises;

(b) subject to paragraph (c) below, if the premises have been let for a continuous period of 12 months or more, the tenant; or

(c) if the premises have been sub-let for such a period, the sub-tenant,

and that liability shall, in the case of a tenant or sub-tenant be in respect of the period of his tenancy or, as the case may be, sub-tenancy.'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to take Government amendment No. 56.

Mr. Lang: The amendments seek to clarify and improve the position on liability for the standard and collective community charges, which will apply respectively to second homes and other domestic property where there is no sole or main resident, and to premises designated by the registration officer whose residents are very transient.

The Bill as drafted provided for joint and several liability between the owner of such premises and any lessee or sub-lessee whose lease or sub-lease was for a continuous period of 12 months or more. This was to meet the case where the owner might be difficult to trace or have relatively little direct connection with the property. On consideration, however, we have reached the view that a provision for joint and several liability in these circumstances could lead to some confusion in that, although the owner and lessee would be equally liable for the charges, the local authority might be in some doubt as to which person to approach for payment.

The amendments therefore propose a slightly different way of approaching the question, by setting out the circumstances in which the owner, tenant or sub-tenant will be liable. If there is a sub-lessee with a lease for a continuous period of 12 months or more, he will be liable for the charge. If there is a lessee, but no sub-lessee, with such a lease, he will be liable. If there is no such lessee or sub-lessee, the owner will be liable. Thus it would always be clear in any particular set of circumstances who is liable to pay the standard and collective community charge. I commend the amendments to the House.

Mr. Maxton: The amendments make the standard charge more of a property tax. It is a tax on the use of the property and is basically a return to rates. It may be a fixed rate, but it is a rate on the property. It is a clear breach of the principle behind the idea of a personal community charge. Conservative Members should be aware of the fact —although they really do not care—that, whereas the rates on a holiday house are paid according to its size and, therefore, the number of people who might be using it at any one time, now the charge for all holiday houses will be exactly the same. Whether the holiday home is Balmoral or a tiny flat somewhere in Newport, basically, the rate will be the same. Someone in Newport will pay a higher standard charge on his little property than the Queen will pay at Balmoral. It clearly is a property tax.

Mr. Lang: The hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) is wrong, but after 125 hours in Committee I doubt whether I shall change his mind now. It is not a property tax, but a charge for the services to which properties have access.

Amendment agreed to.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I beg to move amendment No. 53, in page 10, line 19, leave out from 'be' to end of line 27 and insert 'the personal community charge'.

As the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) said, the clause concerns second home owners,

[Mr. Allan Stewart]

particularly holiday home owners. It has always been recognised that there is a need for special provisions to deal with them. No arrangements are made for second homes. There is clearly a loss of income to local authorities from previously rated properties, despite the fact that, as my hon. Friend the Minister said, the owners of second homes use local services. They typically do not use all local services such as education or social work, but they rely on police and fire services. On the whole, second home owners make a little use of local authority services for limited times of the year. A few years ago, the estimated number of second homes in Scotland was about 17,300, the owners of about 65 per cent. of which were usually resident in Scotland.

I accept that the Government have listened to the arguments about the issue. The Green Paper proposed the standard charge, which would be two units off the personal charge. Clause 12 now proposes that the standard charge should be between one and two times the personal charge, subject to the discretion of local authorities. That proposal allows authorities a multiplier of between one and two in the case of small second homes or when the encouragement of seasonal visitors is important for the local economy. The effect of amendment No. 53 is that the standard charge will be equal to the single personal charge. Therefore, it pushes one step further in the direction in which the Government have already moved.

I accept that there is a balance of argument. There is something to be said for giving local authorities discretion. However, it inevitably leads to a complicated system. It means that from year to year local authorities could, for whatever reason, change their position on one personal community charge and two personal community charges for second homes. That would mean an extra burden. Given that the second home is typically small, that it is typically used only on a seasonal basis, and that its users do not put a burden on many local authority services, notably education, which is the biggest single expenditure item in local authority budgets, it would be simpler if my hon. Friend the Minister were able to accept that the standard charge should be the same as the single personal charge.

This issue is important to many areas of the country, notably Dumfries, Galloway, Upper Nithsdale, Argyll, Angus, East, Tayside, Fife, Moray and other areas. Indeed, as has been pointed out, it is of importance to the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Corrie).

This is an issue on which my hon. Friend, if he is in a generous mood tonight, could make a gesture which would be important to rural economies. It would be a little extra boost for tourism and would encourage construction in certain areas. I hope that my hon. Friend is able to accept at least the principle of amendment No. 53.

Mr. Ancram: I listened to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) very carefully. I know that he is very concerned about this matter. It might help if I were to explain to the House again the basic purpose of the standard community charge. It is to be payable by owners or long-term tenants of domestic property in which there is no sole or main resident. In that kind of case the abolition of domestic rates would mean that local authorities would inevitably lose revenue, despite the fact that local authority services are provided for the owners or tenants of homes in this category. The standard community charge is not, therefore, a property tax but a contribution towards the cost of local authority services that are enjoyed by the owners of second homes, particularly those services that relate to property.

11.30 pm

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) keeps telling me that he does not have a second home because he does not rent the house to which he goes in Arran for long enough for it to count.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood was quite right when he said that the Green Paper suggested as a basis of consultation that the standard charge should be set at a level equivalent to two units of the personal community charge in the area of the second home. The intention of the Green Paper was to ensure that over the country as a whole the charge would give broadly the same yield as the domestic rates paid at present by the owner. However, we recognised that local authorities may wish to set the standard charge at a level lower than two units, should they take the view that, in local circumstances, that level would be too high. That is why a range for the multiplier is provided of between one and two.

In a sense, my hon. Friend's amendment recognises a possibility that is already in the Bill, as drafted. A local authority could have regard to the needs of a rural area and to the general economic situation within its area and it could opt for a standard charge that was the equivalent of one personal community charge, as the amendment suggests. However, the amendment would remove a local authority's discretion in an area where a variety of different circumstances could apply and would therefore make the Bill's provisions much more rigid than they are.

I have taken note of what my hon. Friend said and I appreciate his concern, but on balance local authorities' scope for variation of the standard community charge should remain as it is set out in the legislation. On the basis of the explanation that I have given, I hope that, although my hon. Friend may be a little disappointed that I have been unable to be as generous as he had hoped, he will be prepared to seek to withdraw his amendment.

Mr. Maxton: I am delighted to hear that the Minister is not accepting the amendment of his hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart). It would have made the position regarding second homes even worse than it is now. The disparity between people's income, the size of their properties and what they would have been asked for bears no relation to their ability to pay. Balmoral would have been classified as a holiday home. If the hon. Gentleman's amendment had been accepted by the Minister, the Queen would have paid the very princely sum of £160 a year for that property. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) keeps muttering that that is ridiculous, but it happens to be a fact that at present the local authority receives from the royal family £3,300 a year in rates. If the hon. Gentleman had had his way, it would have received only £160 a year.

Sir Hector Monro: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Maxton: No, I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman. That figure of £160 would also have been paid by somebody who owns a very small holiday cottage in the same area. That would have been a quite ludicrous

differential, and it would have been true of the hon. Member for Dumfries and his flat in Edinburgh. I presume that he has only one second home; perhaps he has more than one. At present he pays large sums of money in rates. I presume that under this amendment he would have paid a very much smaller amount of money in rates.

Sir Hector Monro: Has the hon. Gentleman added up the number of permanent residents at Balmoral? If he had he would realise that rates would be at least a four figure sum, perhaps more.

Mr. Maxton: The difference is that at present the Queen and the royal household are responsible for paying the rates and the people who live as permanent residents are not. Under this system, the Queen would pay £160 and every individual who lives there would pay his own personal community charge. The fact is that there is no differential in the standard community charge. Like the personal community charge, there is no differentiation in terms of people's ability to pay, the size of their property or whatever. Along with the rest of this tawdry Bill, it is something that is — *[Interruption.]* The Minister says that I am admitting that I am wrong. I am not admitting that I am wrong. What I am saying is absolutely right. Balmoral is a holiday home and so is the tiniest flat in Millport.

The amendment would reduce further people's contribution towards local authorities in terms of second homes — *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Hirst) can describe anybody as a fool, or whatever else it was that he might have said, but I would rather be a fool than the unctuous creep that he is.

Mr. Allan Stewart: With the leave of the House, I am tempted to respond to several of the points made by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton). I am amazed that he took four minutes for something that could have been said in 20 seconds. It was a trivial contribution to the debate. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister for what he said, although, as he suggested, I am slightly disappointed that he has take the line that he has. However, in the circumstances I beg to ask leave to withdraw amendment No. 53.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. Lang: I beg to move amendment No. 54, in page 10, line 43, at end insert—

(12) The person liable to pay the standard community charge in respect of any premises in respect of a financial year shall be entitled to recover from any person to whom he lets or sub-lets the premises or whom he permits to occupy them an amount equal to the portion of that standard community charge which, calculated by apportionment on a daily basis, accords to the number of days in that year for which the premises are let, sub-let or occupied by that other person (and such an amount is referred to in this section as a "standard community charge contribution").

(a) shall be in addition to any obligation of his to make other payments (whether by way of rent or otherwise) in respect of the premises in respect of which that contribution is made;

(b) is not affected by any enactment relating to the control or restriction of any such other payment, and shall not, for the purposes of any such enactment, be regarded as such a payment or part thereof.'.

This amendment will improve the provision to be proposed in the standard community charge to be payable in respect of second homes and similar property where there is no sole or main resident by putting it beyond doubt that the person liable for the standard community charge may recover contributions towards that charge from tenants and others, such as holiday visitors, whom he permits to occupy the premises for short periods.

Where the tenancy or any sub-tenancy runs for a continuous period of more than 12 months, the tenant or sub-tenant will become liable for the standard community charge on the assumption that the property remains a second home and has not become his own sole or main residence.

The provision of the amendment will allow tenants with shorter tenancies or informal occupation arrangements to be required to make some contribution towards the standard community charge for which the owner, or long-term tenant of the premises is liable. It is right that there should be some provision to that effect since people who occupy premises of that sort for short holiday lets and similar arrangements will be making use of local authority services during the period of their residence.

The amendment makes it clear that, like the collective community charge provided for under clause 13, payments should be in addition to and not part of any rent or similar payments made by tenants or occupiers and they will not come within the control of the Rent Acts. However, the amount payable will be restricted to the proportionate amount of the standard community charge relating to the period for which the premises are let.

Mr. Maxton: I find this a rather interesting amendment and one in which I have to declare a personal interest as someone who, for six weeks of the year, rents a cottage on the island of Arran. As I understand it, the owners of that or any other cottage in similar circumstances, certainly on islands off the west coast of Scotland and elsewhere, where the owner normally lives in the cottage for eight months of the year and lets it for the other four months, will be liable to a charge for those four months. They have a personal community charge based on that being their sole and main residence. Along with everybody else, they pay that personal community charge and nothing but that charge.

We are not considering a second home here—at least I do not think that we are, although I do not understand the exact position. It is not a second home, and a personal community charge is payable on that house. However, the owners move out for four months of the year and are entitled to charge me or any one else who uses the house for part of the community charge for the period during which we use the services of the local authority. The owners will be able to offset some of their own personal community charge. This is a very difficult position. Is it not a second home when the owners are living somewhere else?

Many of these owners have a but-and-ben at the back of the house into which they move. Which property is the owner paying the charge on? I do not think that the Minister has clarified how the charge is paid. The more appropriate way to deal with the matter would be to consider that property for the four months of the year in question as a non-domestic property and it could be charged accordingly.

Mr. Lang: The amendment is to clause 12 which relates to the:

"Liability for and calculation of standard community charge."

[Mr. Lang]

I made clear in introducing the amendment that it adds new provisions to allow for the recovery by persons liable for the standard community charge. It does not relate to the personal community charge.

Mr. Maxton: I still think that the Minister has not completely cleared up the whole position of——

Mr. Ancram: The hon. Gentleman does not understand.

Mr. Maxton: Yes, I understand exactly what the Minister said. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Ancram) is trying to be his usual shallow clever self.

Ministers still have not cleared up the position with regard to holiday homes which are first homes which are then sub-let. It is not at all clear where that fits in. When I go to Arran now I am not sure whether I will get a bill separately itemised to cover the time that I used local services. Do I pay nothing towards those services? If I rented on a commercial basis from someone letting a second home, I would be paying something towards the local services. However, if I take a house from someone for whom that house is the normal first home, I will contribute nothing. This is a very confusing position. I do not believe that the Minister is clear about it.

Mr. Bill Walker: The hon. Gentleman is making heavy weather of this. Does he realise that in the circumstances that he has described the probability is that the individual letting his permanent home for the period as a holiday home is probably not declaring that income for income tax purposes?

Mr. Maxton: That is a completely separate matter. The hon. Gentleman is saying that not only will they receive their personal community charge rebated by charging that person for letting the house, but will also not pay income tax. Obviously, that is a matter for the courts to test, but I do not believe that that happens, and it is a smear on the people from whom I rent the house as they are my friends.

Under the proposals, will someone who owns a cottage or a house as a second home and allows friends to use that house have to charge his friends? I suppose he will not have to. However, the Government have got themselves into a mess on the whole question of the standard community charge and second homes. They do not know what they are doing. They have not worked it out. If they had wanted to introduce a personal community charge they would have done better to leave second properties within the non-domestic sector and charged rates upon them. That would have been a better way of handling the position. However, because of the Government's dogma in terms of introducing a community charge, they have failed to do that.

Mr. Henderson: Fife regional council has made a small administrative point, which may more appropriately be raised in relation to the next group of amendments, but which relates to clause 12(8) as well as to clause 13(8). That is the determination of the multiplier. Fife regional council asks that the multiplier should be restricted to two decimal points. I put this hesitantly, because I think that it is within the power of the local authority to determine the multiplier, but I should be grateful for my hon. Friend's reassurance on the matter.

Mr. Lang: I am not sure how my hon. Friend's inquiry relates to this amendment. I should be happy to discuss with him the operation of the standard community charge multiplier, but it does not apply in the context of this amendment, and I might be ruled out of order if I developed that theme. However, I shall discuss it with him later.

11.45 pm

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) is debating the wrong problem in the wrong circumstances, because what he is worried about is not what we are debating or what the amendment provides. In answer to his question about the owner of a holiday home having to charge friends to use it, I should say that there is no obligation to charge friends in this context, but if the holiday home is subject to the standard community charge, the provision would enable the owner to recover that part of the charge that was quantifiable in proportion to the number of days for which the property was let. But if he was lending the house to someone, it is unlikely that he would do that.

It would be inappropriate for me to discuss the hon. Gentleman's personal circumstances and the arrangements into which he enters in Arran. Suffice it to say that, if the property that he occupies is owned by a person who is liable to pay the standard community charge on it, the provisions of the amendment would apply, but not otherwise.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 13

LIABILITY FOR AND CALCULATION OF COLLECTIVE COMMUNITY CHARGE

Amendment made: No. 56, in page 11, leave out lines 16 to 21 and insert—

'(4) The person liable to pay the collective community charge in respect of any premises shall be—

(a) subject to paragraph *(b)* and *(c)* below, the owner of the premises;

(b) subject to paragraph *(c)* below, if the premises have been let for a continuous period of 12 months or more, the tenant; or

(c) if the premises have been sub-let for such a period, the sub-tenant,

and that liability shall, in the case of a tenant or sub-tenant be in respect of the period of his tenancy or, as the case may be, sub-tenancy.'.—*[Mr. Lang.]*

Mr. Lang: I beg to move amendment No. 57, in page 11, line 34, leave out from 'in' to end of line 35 and insert 'the register as having effect in relation to the premises'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 58, 59 and 86.

Mr. Lang: The purpose of these amendments is purely technical.

Subsections (7) and (8) of clause 13 relate to the calculation of the total amount payable by way of collective community charge in respect of any premises in respect of any financial year. Subsection (7) provides the basic method of calculation. It says simply that the amount due is the personal community charge times the multiplier. Subsection (8) deals with what happens when the multiplier changes: it provides that in those circumstances the amount due for the year can be calculated at any point in time on the basis that there will be no further changes in the multiplier for the rest of the

year. Taken together, the two provisions will enable the local authority to calculate at any moment how much an individual liable for the collective charge is still due to pay, and to issue demand notes accordingly for the remainder of the year. Clause 21*(c)* deals with the fact that the multiplier specified in the register has having effect is to be conclusive.

The amendments do nothing to change that basic approach. They simply recognise that, under clause 17, amendments to the register can be made with retrospective, immediate or prospective effect, so there is the possibility that the existing terminology used — the multiplier

"specified in relation to the premises in the register"

— may not be sufficiently precise. The effect of the amendments is to make it clear that the figure which is to be used in the calculation in respect of any period of time and the figure which is to be conclusive, is the multiplier which has effect in relation to that period of time.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 58, in page 11, line 37 leave out from first 'in' to 'is' and insert

'the register as having effect in relation to any premises'.

No. 59, in page 11, leave out lines 39 and 40 and insert 'new multiplier shall remain in effect in relation to those premises from the date when it takes effect until the end of the year.'.—*[Mr. Lang.]*

Mr. Lang: I beg to move amendment No. 60, in page 12, line 15 after 'situated', insert 'which'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government amendment No. 61.

Mr. Lang: These are purely drafting amendments designed to ensure that there is no confusion within subsection (11) of clause 13 about the calculation of the collective community charge contribution.

As the subsection stands, the collective community charge is defined as a portion of the amount of the personal community charge calculated by apportionment on a daily basis according to the number of days for which the individual liable to pay is resident in premises subject to the collective charge. The parliamentary draftsman considers that it is more precise to change the wording so that lines 15 and 16 read,

"which, calculated by apportionment on a daily basis, accords to the number of days for which he is so resident.".

This new terminology makes no difference at all to the policy intention or intended effect of the subsection and the changes are necessary simply to make the drafting more precise. The form of words which would result from these amendments is the same as new subsection (12) of clause 12 inserted by Government amendment No. 54 a little earlier.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendment made: No. 61, in page 12, line 16, leave out 'according' and insert 'accords'.—*[Mr. Ancram.]*

Mr. Ancram: I beg to move amendment No. 62, in page 12, line 45, at end insert—

'(17) A person to whom there has been paid, by way of a collective community charge contribution, any sum which (for whatever reason) is not due shall repay that sum.'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to consider Government amendment No. 138.

Mr. Ancram: Concern was expressed in Committee about the possibility that an individual might find himself in double jeopardy as a result of the operation of the collective community charge provisions. The argument, if I can summarise it, ran as follows.

The collective community charge is payable in respect of premises that are used as the sole or main residence by the people who live there but whose residence is so transient that individual registration is not a practical proposition. The amount of the collective community charge is to be based on a multiplier, determined by the registration officer taking into account the number of people who use the premises as their sole or main residence. Views were expressed in Committee that the registration officer might set the multiplier too high, thereby placing pressure on landlords to recover collective community charge contributions from the highest possible proportion of their residents and that that might lead to undue pressure on those residents to pay the contribution even if they were, and continued to be, liable for and paying the personal community charge somewhere else. In practice, we do not think that the registration officer will act unreasonably in that way. We expect there to be a process of negotiation between landlords and registration officers and that if, for example, the landlord can demonstrate that the multiplier was too high in some part of the year there will be room for some give and take to ensure that, broadly speaking, the amount that he is due to pay for the year as a whole comes out about right.

There may be a more real fear that a small number of landlords will routinely seek to recover collective community charge contributions from all their residents, thereby hoping to make a profit. They will be required to keep records and issue receipts, and the residents may well be applying to the local authority for rebates, so it is unlikely that the registration officer will remain in ignorance of the situation for long, and he will then be able to adjust the multiplier.

We accept, however, that where hard cases arise it is important to ensure that individual residents have proper rights of redress and that is why this provision is being written in, following the comments made in Committee. It ensures that an individual who pays a personal community charge contribution to his landlord in circumstances where he was not liable to do so can recover it from the landlord. That point was specifically raised in Committee. Where an individual has difficulty in doing so, he would be able to take the case to the sheriff who will, under the new system, be the avenue of appeals in relation to other community charge matters and will be well placed to deal with such cases.

Amendment No. 138 puts it beyond doubt that, in the more general case where payments have been made by way of community charge but were not, in fact, due, the levying authority should repay the sum in question. Such circumstances could arise, for instance, where a successful appeal had been brought against registration for liability for any of the community charges. Again, some concern was expressed in Committee that the provisions of the Bill as drafted would not in fact allow levying authorities to repay money in those circumstances. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) will remember the representations that were made. These amendments put the matter beyond doubt. They are useful amendments and I hope that the House will accept them.

Mr. Maxton: I welcome the amendments because they go some way towards solving the problems that we raised

[Mr. Maxton]

in Committee. We made those problems clear in Committee but they were largely pooh-poohed as being irrelevant, unnecessary and every other word that the Minister could find. He made no suggestion in Committee that he was prepared to consider amendments such as this.

Mr. Ancram: That is ungracious.

Mr. Maxton: Yes, I am ungracious because that was the Minister's attitude throughout the Committee stage. If he expects me to start being gracious now, he can think again. These are welcome provisions. However, I am not quite sure how individuals will be traced or what obligation there is on an owner to ensure that people are traced and the money repaid. Perhaps we shall have to find that out by due practice.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 14

Community Charges Registration Officer

Amendment made: No. 66, in page 13, line 5, at end insert—

'(3) A regional or islands council may appoint such additional number of depute registration officers as they consider necessary to enable the registration officer to perform his functions under this Act, and any depute registration officer so appointed shall have all the functions of a registration officer.'.—*[Mr. Ancram.]*

Clause 15

Community Charges Register

Mr. Home Robertson: I beg to move amendment No. 69, in page 13, line 13, leave out from beginning to end of line 15 and insert—

'(1) There shall be two community charges registers for each registration area. The public register shall specify.'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take the following: Government amendment No. 70.

Amendment No. 71, in page 13, line 38, at end insert

'The private register shall specify such other matters as may be prescribed.'.

Amendment No. 72, in page 13, line 39, leave out paragraph (e).

Mr. Home Robertson: This proposal would provide for two separate sets of information for the poll tax register. There will inevitably be a mass of peripheral information associated with the register, some of which should be treated as confidential. The sort of points I have in mind are whether a person has a second house or another address, whether someone is a student, whether someone is in hospital, whether someone is in prison and, indeed, the date of birth of the person concerned. That is not the sort of material one would want to see on a publicly available register. It would be useful if the Minister could acknowledge that such peripheral information could be maintained as confidential information.

Included in this group of amendments is the Government's intriguing amendment No. 70 which states:

"Page 13, line 34 *[Clause 15]*, at end insert—

'*(d)* in relation to each natural person registered in the register, his date of birth;'."

I would be grateful if the Minister can take this opportunity to say what is meant by a "natural person" and whether there are any unnatural persons in Scotland for the purposes of this legislation or anything else. Will he also say if, whether they are natural or not, he would want their birthdays to appear on the public register?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) was right to say that there are some details relating to the entries in the register which are confidential and which it would not be desirable to disclose. His approach to the matter is somewhat different from the Government's.

These amendments appear to be designed to establish what registration details for community charge purposes should be made public and what should not. These matters are dealt with in clause 22 rather than in this clause. I must first explain that, while we accept that some parts of the register should be open to public inspection and others should not, we consider that it would be an unduly inflexible approach to specify that there should be two separate registers. Instead, the approach embodied in clause 22 allows for a single register which is available for inspection to different degrees depending on the need and desirability for different categories of people to have access to different parts of the register. We envisage that the names and addresses contained in the register should be available for public inspection. That is right, since it is in the general public interest that a public record should be available for all those who are liable to pay any of the community charges: for the same reasons, the valuation roll is at present open to public inspection.

These amendments would, however, extend the scope of the public register by allowing it to reveal also which of the community charges was payable by each person, and the date of each person's liability. We do not consider that it is necessary for these details to be publicly available. It would, indeed, be positively dangerous for details of which community charge was payable by each person to be publicly available, since that would allow anyone to establish clearly where a standard community charge was payable, and, therefore, where houses could be found which were likely to be empty for considerable periods. That would come very close to being a burglars' charter, and for that reason, if for no other, we cannot support the amendments.

The contents of the register which we envisage being prescribed under paragraph (e) of subsection (1) includes such points as whether a person is a student for the purposes of clause 10(4) and (5), and whether child benefit is payable in respect of any person listed in the register. We shall be considering in due course, in consultation with local authority interests, what other details need to be specified in the register. But we are clear that the power of prescription will not be used to add further details which will be publicly available. Clause 22(2)(a) clearly sets out the restriction on the public availability of information, and the power of prescription will not be able to change that.

Amendment No. 70 stems from further consideration of the requirements for the detailed content of the register. In this we have been assisted by the views of local authority practitioners as expressed through the Rating and Valuation Associations rating forum.

It has been pointed out to us that in order to assist the identification of individuals it would be desirable for the register to record in all cases the date of birth of people who are liable to pay any of the community charges. In the

simplest instance, this would allow people at one address who shared the same name to be clearly distinguished. For instance, there might be three John McTaggarts, father, son and grandson, at a single address and for billing and collection purposes it should be made clear which is which. The information would also be useful to check the identity of a person when he moves from one local authority area to another, otherwise it would be difficult for the registration officer in the new area to be sure that the John McTaggart who was recorded as having arrived in the area——

It being Twelve o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *proceeded, pursuant to Orders, to put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair.*

Amendment negatived.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *then proceeded to put forthwith the Questions on Amendments moved by a member of the Government, of which notice had been given, to that part of the Bill to be concluded at Twelve o'clock.*

Amendments made: No. 70, in page 13, line 34, at end insert—

'*(d)* in relation to each natural person registered in the register, his date of birth;'.

No. 156, in page 13, line 39, at end insert—

'(1A) There shall not be specified in the register any information relating to a person's liability, by virtue only of section 10(6) of this Act, for a personal community charge.'. —*[Mr. Ancram.]*

Clause 17

AMENDMENT OF REGISTER

Amendments made: No. 73, in page 14, line 17, after 'that', insert—

'*(a)* the maximum period for which an amendment can be made with retrospective effect is three years; and *(b)*'.

No. 74, in page 14, line 19, leave out from 'premises' to the end of the subsection and insert

'shall be made or take effect until three months, or such other period as may be prescribed, after the date when the current entry is made or takes effect, whichever is later.'.

No. 75, in page 14, line 27, leave out 'five' and insert 'three'.—*[Mr. Ancram.]*

Clause 18

REGISTRATION APPEALS

Amendments made: No. 76, in page 14, line 46, leave out from 'who' to 'to' in line 48 and insert 'is registered in the register as being liable.'.

No. 77, in page 15, leave out lines 1 to 5 and insert—

'*(a)* against any entry or amendment of an entry in the register in respect of his liability to pay any of the community charges,'.

No. 78, in page 15, line 9, leave out 'the sheriff' and insert

'any sheriff of any sheriffdom which wholly or partly falls within the registration area.'.

No. 79, in page 15, line 21, leave out from 'sheriffdom' to the end of the subsection and insert

'which wholly or partly falls within any of the registration areas.'.

No. 80, in page 15, line 32, at the beginning insert 'Subject to subsection (7A) below'.

No. 81, in page 15, line 35, at end insert—

'(7A) Where a person is registered as being liable to pay the personal community charge in two or more registers and he has appealed against one or more registration, he shall be required to pay only the personal community charge relating to the first registration made, pending the determination of the appeal.'.

No. 82, in page 15, line 39, leave out '18(3)' and insert '18'.—*[Mr. Ancram.]*

Clause 19

DUTIES IN RELATION TO REGISTRATION

Amendments made: No. 83, in page 16, line 21, leave out subsection (5) to (12).

No. 162, in page 16, line 22, leave out 'responsible'.

No. 163, in page 16, line 25, leave out subsection (6).

No. 164, in page 16, line 42, leave out subsection (9). —*[Mr. Ancram.]*

Clause 20

OBTAINING OF INFORMATION FROM INDIVIDUAL RESIDENTS

Amendments made: No. 84, in page 17, line 42, leave out 'and may request the registration officer to amend the entry.'. —*[Mr Ancram.]*

Clause 21

EFFECT OF REGISTER

Amendments made: No. 85, in page 18, line 27, at the beginning insert

'Subject to the provisions of sections 18 and 29 of this Act,'.

No. 86, in page 18, line 33, leave out from the beginning to 'in relation' in line 34 and insert

'specified in the register as having effect'.—*[Mr. Ancram.]*

Clause 22

INSPECTION OF REGISTER

Amendments made: No. 157, in page 19, line 8, leave out paragraph *(d)*.

No. 87, in page 19, line 38, after 'copy', insert

'(other than a copy made available for sale under subsection (4) above)'.—*[Mr. Ancram.]*

Bill, as amended (in the Standing Committee), to be further considered this day.

Housing (Bradford)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Malone.]*

12.2 am

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Tonight in Bradford, families have gone to bed in 32,000 homes that are in need of major renovation. There are about 8,000 men, women and children on the council's waiting list. In 5,000 so-called homes without running water, an inside toilet or a bathroom, people wonder how much longer they will have to endure such conditions. Hundreds of tenants with children have been rehoused after being moved from homes that were structurally defective.

There are thousands of council tenants whose homes are in urgent need of modernisation and repair, and there are tenants anxiously awaiting a transfer. The homeless are being shunted around poor bed and breakfast hotels, hostels and other poor accommodation. Thousands of low-income owner occupiers desperately want improvement grants to provide their homes with basic amenities. Elderly people, single people and families and private tenants in multi-occupation accommodation are living in conditions which are often dangerous, and those people often face harassment and extremely poor living conditions.

These stark and simple facts spell out the gravity of Bradford's housing crisis. About 7,000 council homes in Bradford have been sold, and building programmes come nowhere near replacing the homes that have been sold. The local newspaper, the *Telegraph and Argus*, in a dramatic series of articles last December, printed the figures for new house starts and completions in Bradford, and they clearly show the decline in building in the city.

In 1977-78 there were 975 starts in local authority building, and in each year since then the number has fallen. The figures are: 998, 297, 290 and in 1981-82 there were no starts whatever. In 1982-83 there were 42, in 1983-84 there were 59, in 1984-85 there were 45 and in 1985-86 there were just 50. For most of that period, certainly since the beginning of this decade, the local authority was under the control of a Conservative, SDP-Liberal alliance. The city's population is increasing dramatically and authoritative forecasts say that by 1996 we shall need to provide homes for an extra 11,000 people.

The latest estimates are that we need to build 1,400 houses a year in addition to the normal building level.

Bradford needs more money from the Government to build more new homes and to make more improvement grants available to improve and renovate older homes. We need agreement from the Government to spend more of the money received from the sale of council homes and land so that Bradford can spend more of its money on better housing provision in the city. Bradford needs permission to use private finance, for example from building societies, to finance the building of new homes and the renovation of older homes, many of which are well-built and large. They represent desirable accommodation for larger families and could help to regeneate the inner city and persuade more people to stay in the city.

I much regret that the Prime Minister recently refused my request to meet a broadly based deputation, which consisted of the city council, the chamber of commerce, the trades council, the university and the ethnic minority organisations, to discuss the full range of the city's problems, including our housing crisis. Had the Prime Minister agreed to the meeting, she would have heard that, in parts of Bradford, it now costs more to build a new home than the price at which that new property may be sold. A three-bedroomed semi-detached house in Manningham would now cost at least £10,000 more to build than the price at which it could be sold. That is the major deterrent to any developer—public or private—building new homes in inner-city Bradford.

When I wrote to the Prime Minister to request the meeting I explained the difficulties that Bradford faced in providing homes for its people. On 23 February the Prime Minister replied:

> "As in 1986/87, Bradford's initial HIP allocation may be supplemented by additional allocations for schemes on rundown council estates drawn up in conjunction with the Department of the Environment's Estate Action team. In 1986/87 Bradford has received additional approvals for Estate Act schemes amounting to £2·4 million and I would expect the Council to look to this opportunity to supplement is housing allocation again in 1987/88."

That is welcome, but it is wholly insufficient to meet the problems that we face.

The total dependence in Bradford on free market forces creates monstrous obstacles to our people's ability to live in the inner cities in either council or private homes that they can afford to rent or in homes that they can afford to buy.

The verdict of the market place on property values reflects many factors—levels of employment, levels of economic activity and levels of economic prosperity. Bradford and many of its people are extremely poor. One in five of my constituents are unemployed, and in parts of the district unemployment soars to 50 or 60 per cent. A third of the population are in receipt of benefit. Workers in west Yorkshire receive the lowest pay of any region in the United Kingdom.

Hence, on a day when we hear that property prices have increased by record amounts in London and the south-east, and Conservative Members in the south are protesting about property development in their plush and prosperous areas, I must come to the House to tell the Minister for Housing, Urban Affairs and Construction that in inner-city Bradford houses now cost more to build than the price at which they can be sold. So much for the north-south divide. It is in housing that that divide is most grotesque.

A sensible, caring, compassionate Government with genuine concern about our people's quality of life would recognise that they must intervene in the market if families in Bradford will be able to live and hopefully work in the inner city. If all our people are to be properly housed, the Government must be forced out of their uncaring complacency.

At Question Time today a visitor from Mars, having listened to Ministers, might be forgiven for thinking that our housing crisis could be solved if only councils let every empty house, rent controls were swept away and hundreds of hostels were provided for the homeless. We desperately need new thinking, new ideas and new approaches. Above all, we need homes for the homeless and good homes for all those living in desperate housing need. We must urgently devise new ways of funding inner-city housing. Local councils should no longer be in the straitjacket of annual housing programmes with the 60-year loans and conventional interest rates.

Why cannot there be some new machinery such as a revamped Public Works Loan Board, offering finance at preferential interest rates for new building and renovation? It would require a dynamic and flexible approach, working in full partnership and co-operation with local councils. A decent home, at a rent or price that can be afforded, is surely a modern right, as central to any civilised society as the right to work, to food and warmth, to free health and to universal education. Far too many of my constituents and other citizens of Bradford are living in rotten housing conditions and have no work. Because they are forced to stay in a lot, their electricity and gas bills are extremely high. Many have their fuel supplies disconnected because of arrears that they are unable to pay. Their children go to schools that are crumbling and in some cases literally falling down. Illness, nervous stress and marriage break-ups are becoming of increasing concern.

Many of these people hear the chairman of the Conservative party tell them to get on their bikes and go to where the work is. Those who do find work away usually cannot find anywhere in which they can afford to live. Today, the Secretary of State for the Environment, in his laid-back way, advised the homeless in London to move north, to where there are plenty of empty homes available. My constituents want to live and work in Bradford. They want a decent home and a decent pay packet. Far too many of them, alas, now have neither.

Everybody but the Government sees that spending much more on investing in building new homes and improving older homes makes good sense. It gives people better homes and it provides work directly for builders, plumbers and electricians, and for others indirectly—for example, all those who work in providing building supplies and materials. Already, in Bradford there is concern that when the building programme starts, there will be serious skill shortages, which will hold back progress.

Tonight, as thousands of my constituents spend another night in overcrowded, cold, damp and dingy homes, I hope that the Minister will give those people some hope. I hope that he will engage in a genuine debate and seriously address the issues that I have raised regarding the housing crisis now gripping Bradford.

I began by referring to an excellent series of articles in the *Telegraph and Argus*. The editorial coming at the end of that series said:

"If Bradford makes about £8 million in a year by selling council houses, land and other assets, it should be allowed to spend the lot building new houses—not restricted to just 20 per cent. of it per year.

Surely this would be one way of injecting the local economy with funds, creating much-needed work for the construction industry. Bradford urgently requires new houses, and the updating of several thousand pre-1919 properties.

Lastly, thousands of houses in the private sector need to be improved and modernised. Unless they are, they will quickly be degenerating into slums. If that happens Bradford's crisis will be even worse, requiring vastly much more money than is the case at present.

Surely, cutting improvement grants back to the bone is false economy: whatever short-term savings on the Public Sector Borrowing Requirement are made now will only cause much greater long-term expense in the future."

That is the authentic voice of concern about the housing crisis in Bradford.

I ask the Minister, rather than giving a litany of the shortcomings of the last Labour Government, which is the predeliction of so many Conservative Ministers when replying to debates such as this, to address himself to the problems of the past and the challenge of the future. I hope that he will have something positive to say, and will be able to give my constituents and the other citizens of Bradford who are now worried and desperately anxious about their housing conditions, some hope of better things to come.

12.14 am

The Minister for Housing, Urban Affairs and Construction (Mr. John Patten): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) for initiating the debate on housing in Bradford as it provides me with an opportunity to outline the housing policy of the Government as it applies in an inner-city authority such as Bradford. I am glad to have listened to the hon. Gentleman's speech; I am equally glad to see my hon. Friends the Members for Bradford, North (Mr. Lawler) and for Keighley (Mr. Waller), who are showing their characteristic interest in housing matters in the area.

We are well aware of the housing problems in Bradford; they have not sprung up overnight; neither have they sprung up since 1979. We have annual housing investment programme meetings between our Yorkshire and Humberside regional office and the city council. My Department's Estate Action team has visited Bradford no fewer than six times in the last 18 months. I went to Bradford in March 1986. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey), visited the city on 12 November and 14 December 1986. Alas, only ill-health has prevented him from being here tonight to answer the debate. I wish my hon. Friend a speedy recovery so that he can take his accustomed place at the Dispatch Box answering Adjournment debates such as this. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister also recently visited Bradford.

The hon. Gentleman made one very interesting suggestion that we should look, root and branch, at the way in which we fund housing in the public sector. That is a massive topic and is not suitable, in any great detail, for discussion in an Adjournment debate, but the hon. Gentleman has made some interesting points. The way that we respond depends on our view of the future role of councils in the provision of housing.

That having been said, in the short term I do not think that there will be much change in the next few years. I do not think that we could reform the way in which local authority housing is funded so that, instead of being limited, for example, in the amount that they can spend each year they would be able to plan programmes over a period of years. We recognise how important it is that local authorities should run their capital programmes efficiently and cost-effectively, but nonetheless the management of the economy and the control of public expenditure—something that we hear a lot about from the Opposition Front Bench—depend on the Government being able to review the position and take the most appropriate action on capital expenditure, on matters such as housing, on a year-to-year basis.

Capital expenditure on housing is a large part of the total capital expenditure of local authorities and a significant proportion of total public expenditure. It would be difficult, under the present system, to commit the Government, more than about a year in advance, to a view about how much can be spent on housing in a given year at any one time. That is a superficial glance at the interesting topic that the hon. Gentleman has raised, which is of general interest.

[Mr. John Patten]

I shall turn now to the funding of housing and housing development in the country and in Bradford. Nationally, we have increased — despite the impression that Opposition Members would give us — the gross provision for local authority housing capital expenditure by £200 million in the current year to £2,532 million—an increase of 9 per cent.

On 7 November 1986 I announced a further increase in the provision of £390 million up to a total of £2,922 million for 1987-88—an increase of 15 per cent. in provision for housing. I also announced that allocations through Estate Action—what used to be known as the urban housing renewal unit—would be increased from £50 million in the current year to £75 million next year. Some significant investment through Estate Action has and will be flowing into Bradford, thanks to the Government's action. There will be a reserve allocation of some £14 million for authorities with special difficulties implementing housing defects legislation—a matter which has not been the subject of much discussion today.

Bradford has done relatively well out of the housing investment programme allocation recently. For 1987-88, its HIP allocation is £12·903 million of the initial resources available for allocation in Yorkshire and Humberside. That is 11·6 per cent. of the region's allocation, which is an increase on its share this year. That is some recognition of its problems.

Bradford also has its share of capital receipts. I estimate that about £5 million should be available. Bradford could therefore have a programme of £18 million or a little more in the coming year.

Bradford's share of the region's allocation has been well in excess of that indicated by the generalised needs index, on which many of our calculations are based. It could, however, show more interest in applications for urban development grant, which can be used for housing. I do not think that Bradford has been as forthcoming as other northern Labour-controlled authorities which have been keen on urban development grant, sometimes to solve certain housing needs.

The hon. Gentleman's constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, North have many minority communities with larger than average families. In ideal circumstances, they would have a four or five bedroom house. Other Labour-controlled authorities in the north have encouraged development with private developers using urban development grant to provide housing for such people. That is an important trend.

Mr. Geoff Lawler (Bradford, North): The hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) talked of low house values in Bradford, which are a problem. Urban development grant can be used to make it worth while for private developers to develop. Bradford's Labour-controlled council has occasionally not been very enthusiastic about that, but Sloane square in the hon. Gentleman's constituency shows the go-ahead nature of the scheme and the Government's determination to do something about inner-city housing.

Mr. Patten: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. When used well, urban development grant can bridge the gap between profitability and impracticability.

The visits by Estate Action have produced substantial benefits for Bradford. The Department's priority estate project consultants are working closely with Bradford and establishing how they can help with housing management.

The picture is not as bleak as the hon. Member for Bradford, West implied. When I was in Bradford last March, I announced approval of a package of measures at the Holmewood B estate involving the establishment of a local estate office and an additional HIP allocation of £1·2 million in this year alone for new doors, windows, heating systems and an external insulation system for the walk-up blocks of flats. We also approved a community refurbishment scheme to improve the environment of the estate, involving the expenditure of about £685,000 from the urban programme and £855,000 from the Manpower Services Commission's community programme. We are employing estate-based persons to do up the estates in which they live, a concept that I think we would all consider to be thoroughly agreeable. A high proportion of those working at the Holmewood estate have been recruited from it. That shows how we can begin to target resources on problem areas and improve the employment picture in the area as well. The Government are determined to try to continue implementing that approach, the fruits of which can be seen already. We have tried to create job opportunities through the community refurbishment scheme and there has been a noticeable decrease already in the number of tenants who wish to transfer away from the estate. This form of intensive management is the way in which to turn estates around.

In December, I approved two further schemes at the Hutson street estate and the Woodhouse estate in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley. These schemes involve an additional HIP allocation amounting to £1·2 million in the current year for environmental and security works and new windows. Of the £50 million of expenditure through estate action nationally in 1986-87, no less than 30 per cent. has been directed to the improvement of security for those living in large estates of the sort to which I have referred.

The Woodhouse scheme involves the opening of a local housing management office on the estate, which is something that should be welcomed widely.

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): In the past, areas such as Bradford and Keighley have not been well served by the building of massive impersonal estates. With the assistance of the sort of money that is flowing for the Woodhouse estate, and through co-operation between the local authority, the police and the tenants, who have formed their own groups, there is a feeling among the tenants that they have a stake in the community and that co-operation bodes well for the future.

Mr. Patten: My hon. Friend is right. I think that there is all-party agreement that none of us wants to see any more of these large estates built again. That makes me so chary of suggestions and requests for large sums to be expended to solve overnight, as it were, the problems of a particular city. That approach is mistaken. The approach that we wish to take through estate action is the best one. I say that because it is based on the community, related to the community and involves the community, and that is critical.

Mr. Madden: It is right that none of us wants to see a return to the system building of the 1960s and 1970s. Does

the Minister accept, however, the population projections which I gave in my opening remarks? If he does, how are we to provide decent homes for the many who will be seeking them in future? We must take into account also the many thousands who are now living in urgent housing need. There are demands for enormous sums to be expended, but that does not mean necessarily a return to system building. It means instead a major programme of housebuilding and home improvement.

Mr. Patten: We recognise the need to help Bradford city, and I have referred to the dilapidated and rundown estates that went wrong. It would be wrong for me to attribute blame to any one political party. Governments and councils of all political parties must share the blame.

I have the great disadvantage of knowing a little about population projections. I am bound to say that I used to give rather good lectures on the subject at the university of Oxford. Few of the projections of population increases or decreases of even 10 or 15 years have been correct because of the mobility of the society in which we live. I do not believe that we can have firmly based projections of the population of Bradford or anywhere else in the year 2000. At the same time, I recognise that Bradford's population is increasing.

This has been a rather lively debate by normal Adjournment standards and I must tell my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State to get well soon and return to enjoy debates of this sort on the Adjournment. We have had a useful discussion, but it is unfortunate that I have not had the chance to list the many schemes that we have funded, or will fund, in our attempts constructively to help Bradford with the housing problems that it faces.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at half-past Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 5 March 1987

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

ROYAL ASSENT

Mr. Speaker: I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified Her Royal Assent to the following Acts:

1. Coal Industry Act 1987
2. Ministry of Defence Police Act 1987
3. West Glamorgan Act 1987
4. County of Cleveland Act 1987

PRIVATE BUSINESS

YORK CITY COUNCIL BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

CITY OF WESTMINSTER BILL *(By Order)*

TEIGNMOUTH QUAY COMPANY BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON DOCKLANDS RAILWAY (BECKTON) BILL *(By Order)*

Orders for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time upon Thursday 12 March.

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

Fire Authorities (Staffing)

1. **Mr. Nellist** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to review staffing levels in fire authorities; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Douglas Hogg): We are currently reviewing the staffing levels of the seven fire and civil defence authorities as part of the process of making and approving their establishment schemes for 1987-88. This is in accordance with the provisions of the Fire and Civil Defence Authorities (Establishment, Support Services and Management Schemes) Regulations 1985. More generally, the staffing levels in fire authorities are among the matters considered by Her Majesty's inspectors of fire services during their annual inspections of brigades. Where appropriate Her Majesty's inspectors give advice to us and to fire authorities about the effective, efficient and economic use of resources.

Mr. Nellist: Is the Minister effectively announcing a cut in the staffing levels of fire authorities by not giving sufficient finance for them even to maintain their present staffing and training levels? Is he aware, for example, that south Yorkshire — an area that traditionally has had good standards — because of the present financial restrictions will be 124 fire fighters short even of his Department's own statutory levels? Why does the Minister put people at risk in that way?

Mr. Hogg: There is no question of people being put at risk. In south Yorkshire, the authority will have no difficulty providing adequate cover. The right hon. Gentleman will be pleased to know that, in the west midlands, an area which concerns him most intimately, expenditure for the coming year, as implied by the maximum precept, is 7·6 per cent. above last year's budget. That is substantially in excess of the rate of inflation and significantly in excess of the cost of the fire workers' pay settlement. In the circumstances, the hon. Gentleman's observations are a trifle ungenerous.

Mr. Conway: Is my hon. Friend aware that morale in the Shropshire fire service was extremely high when I visited it on Monday and that its response to the rail crash in Shropshire on Monday night was extremely efficient? Will he take this opportunity to thank employers in rural areas who enable retained part-time firemen to take time off from their business duties to help those in rural areas who do not have the full-time fire service that is available in built-up areas?

Mr. Hogg: I greatly welcome what my hon. Friend said. I am sure that his visit was much appreciated by the firemen in his area. I entirely agree with what he said about retained firemen who make a significant contribution to fire cover in his area and, indeed, in my constituency of Grantham.

Mr. Meadowcroft: Is the Minister aware that we in west Yorkshire are prepared to accept staffing levels and levels of service that are laid down by his Department, but is he aware also that the Secretary of State for the Environment refuses to allow a sufficient precept level to enable the county to maintain the staffing levels and levels of services that are set by the Home Office? How does the Minister reconcile that?

Mr. Hogg: We are wholly satisfied that the standard of cover in west Yorkshire is adequate for the purpose of providing an adequate fire service.

Mr. Favell: Will my hon. Friend examine the cost of council involvement in fire and civil defence authorities? In greater Manchester, for example, there are five committees, all with various sub-committees, involved in what would appear to be a service that should virtually run itself.

Mr. Hogg: I shall always consider any submission that my hon. Friends care to make to me on this and related matters. In Manchester there is no problem as the expenditure increase implied by the precept is more than generous.

Mr. Dubs: Apart from the fact that both west Yorkshire and south Yorkshire cannot reach the fire cover standards of the Home Office, will the Minister confirm that as part of the review there are plans to reduce the opening hours of fire stations in many areas from 24 hours to nine, and that one of them is Godstone fire station, which provides a vital service to the M25? If the cuts are implemented, they will result in serious danger to life.

Mr. Hogg: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman. Expenditure increases for 1987-88, as implied by the precepts, are in a band of 7·5 per cent. of 6·1 per cent. over the 1986-87 budget. The hon. Gentleman has referred to a particular fire station. If he requires an answer on that, he must table a specific question.

Crimes Against the Elderly

2. **Mr. Fisher** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department, in respect of each year since 1978, what were the numbers of crimes known to his Department to have been committed against persons over 60 years.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Mellor): The only information I can give the hon. Member comes from a survey carried out in 1984. This suggests that, in England and Wales that year, some 13,000 people aged 60 or over were victims of violent crime, which represented 7 per cent. of the total of 182,000 such offences.

Mr. Fisher: Does not the Minister understand that those figures suggest that elderly people have had seven years of misery under this Government? Many elderly people are genuinely anxious about stepping outside their homes and are afraid to go out at night. What does the Minister intend to do about that? Will he discuss the problem with his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment to ensure that the basics are done, that estates are properly lit, that secure locks are placed on doors and that there are decent social services to support elderly people? Unless that is done, more elderly people will live in more and more misery.

Mr. Mellor: Of course, all those things are happening. Some 6,000 places on this year's community programme —with an expenditure of £40 million—are involved in providing such protection for pensioners' homes. Another scheme has been introduced allowing basic protection to be installed for under £40. There is also provision for a wide range of other assistance for the elderly. As the hon. Gentleman well knows, of course, a great deal of what he is asking for is the responsibility of local authorities. Conservative authorities, such as my authority in Wandsworth, provide such things for the elderly. The hon. Gentleman may have noticed what happened in Greenwich and Knowsley and recognise that local authorities have fallen down on their responsbilities. That is not the Government's responsibility.

Mr. Cash: Has my hon. Friend noted the recent disgraceful and appalling murder of two ladies in their 80s and 90s? Will he take note of the very strong feeling on the Conservative Benches for the reintroduction of capital punishment?

Mr. Mellor: Obviously, opinions about the remedy will vary. I gather that we shall have the opportunity to debate this matter at a later date. I deplore those murders and deplore the circumstances wherein elderly people are put at risk.

Mr. George Howarth: Does the Minister accept that if authorities like Knowsley were given resources to protect elderly people they would dearly love to do that job?

Mr. Mellor: That is a pathetic excuse. It hardly washed with the hon. Gentleman's electorate and it will not wash in here.

Mr. Dickens: Is the Minister aware that the two elderly spinsters, Susan and Florence Egerton, aged 92 and 81, who were savagely and barbarically killed, lived in my constituency? Does the Minister believe that the state is sufficiently protecting its citizens? Will he pay particular regard to the initiatives that I have sent to the Home Office? Will he also pay particular regard to the way he votes on the clause for the reintroduction of capital punishment when the Criminal Justice Bill returns to the House this month?

Mr. Mellor: The Government are extremely solicitous about the welfare of elderly people and everyone else in relation to violent crime. For that reason, the resources available to the police have been increased, represented by an extra 15,500 officers over the past seven years. A great deal has been done to strengthen the penalties available for violent offences and the availability of parole to violent offenders has been restricted. The spiralling growth of neighbourhood watch schemes means that people are able to protect themselves by taking a communual interest in one another's welfare. We shall continue to pursue those policies.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Are the figures that the Minister has just given duff figures in relation to Kent? Have they been doctored by the Kent constabulary? In the light of yesterday's news that someone else has come forward to reaffirm that the clear-up figures in Kent were doctored, what action do the Government intend to take or is the issue again to be dumped?

Mr. Mellor: I am not sure what tenuous link this has with the main question. The Police Complaints Authority is investigating the matter and I can say nothing more.

Mr. Mark Carlisle: I share the abhorrence expressed by my hon. Friends at the murders of the two people concerned but, does my hon. Friend appreciate that many of us do not believe that the return of capital punishment is the answer?

Mr. Mellor: Yes, and I am one of them.

Mr. Corbett: Does the Minister appreciate that behind the ever-rising crime figures are literally millions of elderly people living in terror behind their front doors, especially in inner city areas? Will he reconsider making crime prevention grants available to help those at risk and those with most to fear so as better to ensure their safety?

Mr. Mellor: I have already detailed the enormous amount of work that the Government are doing through development of the community programme and through issuing advice to the elderly about basic security methods that cost under £40 to employ. I appreciate that as part of its policy of trying to bribe the electorate with their own money the Labour party has come up with a scheme for home security grants, but there is no sign of how it would be able to afford it, and one suspects that there is no prospect of its coming about.

Mr. Lawrence: Does my hon. Friend think that the over-60s would be better protected if the police were placed under the political control of councillors such as Bernie Grant and starved of resources as they were last time the Labour party was in power?

Mr. Mellor: My hon. and learned Friend is, as always, quite right.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I regret that the next question to be answered today, through a printer's error, which I have asked to be investigated, has been left off the Order Paper. It is in the name of the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) and I ask him to read out the text before the Minister replies.

Fresh Start

2A. **Mr. Tom Cox** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions his Department has had with the Prison Officers Association on fresh start; and if he will make a statement.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Douglas Hurd): Officials have had extensive discussions with representatives of the Prison Officers Association about fresh start in recent months. I myself had a constructive meeting with the national chairman and the general secretary of the association last Monday, when I was able to welcome the national executive committee's recent decision to allow branches to co-operate with development exercises under way in prisons. I hope to announce shortly a revised offer to all the trade unions concerned, as a basis for an agreed implementation of fresh start.

Mr. Cox: I welcome the Home Secretary's reply, but the fact that he is revising his proposals is surely ample evidence that the original proposals were not good enough for what he is attempting to persuade the prison officers to accept? If fresh start is to have any success, is he aware that there must be substantial increases in staffing levels in prisons and a realistic pay settlement without the conditions that fresh start sought to impose?

Mr. Hurd: We have proposed to revise our offer in the light of the discussions that we have had with the unions concerned, including the POA. I hope that that will lead to agreed implementation, which is crucial. More staff will continue to be required, but we must get away from the present system, which relies far too much on overtime and, as we know, means that about 15 per cent. of the money that Parliament votes for the running of prisons is wasted. With the fresh start proposals, we shall be able to put together a reformed prison service with much more reasonable practices and much better terms of service for all those who work within it.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: I am sure that my right hon. Friend will accept that prison officers carry out a difficult job, often in difficult circumstances. Does he agree that he went to the nub of the problem when he talked about overtime? Will he try to ensure that in the new deal which I hope will be negotiated prison officers will not lose pay as overtime is phased out and the new pay arrangements are introduced? That is important. Unless that assurance can be given, there will be continuing difficulty.

Mr. Hurd: Obviously, one of the features of the package must be an understanding about take-home pay as overtime is reduced. To return my hon. Friend's compliment, that is exactly the nub of the negotiations. When we put the revised offer to the POA—I hope that that will take place shortly—I hope that it will recognise the valiant efforts that we have made to meet the points put to me by the POA and by my hon. Friend.

Immigration

3. **Mr. John Mark Taylor** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received concerning recent irregular attempts to gain entry to the United Kingdom, particularly by persons who destroyed their passports en route.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Waddington): I have received various representations on this issue from Members of the House, from the general public, and from organisations involved in refugee matters in this country.

Mr. Taylor: Is not the destruction of passports a clear sign of bad faith on the part of such people? Will my right hon. and learned Friend accept that many of my constituents will have misgivings about the measures that he is introducing? It is not that they do not want them, but they cannot understand why they have taken so long.

Mr. Waddington: The simple answer is that the situation has got much worse in the past year or two. There have been more irregular movements and forged documents, and more abusive applications. To use the language of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, there were 150,000 irregular movements in Europe in 1985-86. In Belgium, where the UNHCR decides who are refugees and who are not, its advice cannot be accused of being biased. It had no fewer than 7,500 applications for refugee status and granted only 52. In this country, in February alone, 233 applications were made at the ports for refugee status, 185 by people with false documents.

Mr. Madden: Has the Minister had any second thoughts on the revised procedures that he outlined recently on the basis of the serious criticisms made of those revised procedures by people with long experience of trying to help those trying to seek political asylum in this country?

Mr. Waddington: We made it plain that people claiming asylum must have no expectation that their cases are bound to be referred to the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service. The present arrangements do not involve reference in all cases. That is quite clear from my letter to Lord Avebury of 1 August 1983, and in future there will be cases where early removal will be essential and no reference will be made. There will be a meeting with UKIAS, but it will not be possible to spell out all the circumstances in which reference will not be made, so intending claimants will have no legitimate expectation that their cases will be heard.

Mr. Jessel: Will my right hon. and learned Friend look into the allegation that I have sent to him that photographs are removed from British visitors' passports sold in post offices when the gum is still wet and later replaced by photographs of other persons? Will he see what can be done to stop this?

Mr. Waddington: I invite my hon. Friend to let me have full details of that allegation. I will certainly look at that with all care and expedition.

Mr. Meadowcroft: Does the Minister believe that the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service or the British Refugee Council would connive in facilitating the entry of irregular visitors?

Mr. Waddington: All I know is that a few days had elapsed before an order was made by a court and two weeks had elapsed by the time that my right hon. Friend made his statement in this House. There is no doubt whatsoever that by the time that my right hon. Friend made his statement we were caught in what many people might describe as a legal morass. Goodness knows how long it would have taken us to extricate ourselves from it.

I must tell right hon. and hon. Members who are for ever saying that they are in favour of firm control, but as soon as there is any evasion of that control they say that they are unable or unwilling to do anything about it, that one of the main problems in this area is that if there is delay in removing people, very often the opportunity for removing them is lost for all time. No fewer than 17 Tamils were returned to southern India in the past month or two and were sent back by the Indians on the argument that they had been longer in this country while our procedures were followed than they had been in India.

Mr. Watts: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that many people consider it ludicrous that those who seek to enter our country by deception should have access to UKIAS, a body funded by the British taxpayer, which can then help them in persisting in their deception?

Mr. Waddington: I have made it absolutely plain where we stand on this matter. The present arrangements do not involve the reference of all cases to UKIAS. There are bound to be circumstances and cases where, in the interests of firm immigration control, it will not be right to refer cases.

Mr. Nellist: The Minister of State said some minutes ago that the situation had become much worse over the past two years. Does he not recognise that that is because the situation in Sri Lanka has become much worse in the past two years? Did he not see the report in yesterday morning's *London Daily News*, which reported that 60 British mercenaries recruited by KMS, many of them ex-SAS officers, have resigned from training the Sri Lankan army——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must not go into that. This question is about passports destroyed en route to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Nellist: Mr. Speaker——

Mr. Speaker: Order. There is a later question on that point.

Mr. Nellist: Mr. Speaker, several times in the Minister of State's replies he referred to Tamils at Heathrow. The question arises—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must complete his question and make it relevant to Question No. 3.

Mr. Nellist: The reason why people have destroyed passports when trying to enter this country, given the worsening situation in Sri Lanka, was evidenced by the fact that those 60 ex-SAS mercenaries, none of them soft, resigned because——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Mr. Waddington.

Mr. Waddington: The hon. Gentleman obviously does not have the faintest idea how refugees arrive in this country. The vast majority of people who apply for refugee status in this country have been here for a long time. They entered this country as visitors or students and then decided that they did not want to go back to their own countries or they are people who have made applications to our posts abroad. In the case of Sri Lankans, applications are actually made at our high commission at Colombo into which any Tamil can walk and outside of which only one policeman stands. It is the most natural thing in the world for a genuine refugee to go to the nearest safe place and not travel three quarters of the way around the world.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: My right hon. and learned Friend receives many representations from Opposition Members. Can he tell us how many he has received about the inhumanity of the Sri Lankan regime which——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That question is also wide of the destruction of passports.

Mr. Howarth: How many representations has my right hon. and learned Friend received about conditions in Sri Lanka?

Mr. Waddington: I cannot answer that question now, but if my hon. Friend tables a question to that effect, I shall do my best to answer it. I can tell him, however, that my postbag has been heavy during the past week or two with letters from constituents and others saying that it is about time that the Government did something about evident abuse.

Sentencing Policy

4. **Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received seeking legislation to impose minimum sentences for certain crimes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: I have received such representations from some hon. Members and members of the public, but we believe that minimum sentences would hinder the courts' ability to take account of the widely varying circumstances of particular cases.

Mr. McNair-Wilson: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the depth of public concern about the present statistics for England and Wales for 1985, which show that the average sentence served in prison by people guilty of murder is 10 years, by those guilty of manslaughter 21 months, by those guilty of rape 20 months, and those guilty of wounding five months? How can we convince the general public that we really intend to crack down on the perpetrators of these terrible crimes if the sentences given in court are reduced to such minimal periods in prison?

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend will know that there is a lot going on in the direction which he seeks. He will know that this Parliament has increased the maximum sentences available to courts for a range of violent offences such as attempted rape and now, in the Criminal Justice Bill, the possession of firearms for the purpose of crime. He will know the system of guideline judgments and he may well have seen the figures that have recently been published, which show how the sentences for rape have increased since the Lord Chief Justice gave his guidelines in the Billam sentences.

My hon. Friend will know what we are doing in clause 29 of the Criminal Justice Bill to deal with the dangers of allegedly over-lenient sentences, He will also know that I

am continuing the system announced by my predecessor under which parole is not normally granted for violent offenders who are serving more than five years, and that the most serious murderers will expect to serve at least 20 years.

We have a range of measures which distinguish between the violent offenders, to whom my hon. Friend rightly draws attention, and less violent offenders who choke up our prisons and for whom non-custodial sentences would sometimes be better.

Mr. Ron Brown: Since Saunders and Co. of Guinness fame make the Great Train Robbers look like petty thieves, will the Home Secretary ensure that the real crooks — the financial crooks — get a minimum of 30 years in gaol, or is this too sensitive a subject for the Tory party? Do the Government protect their own kind?

Mr. Hurd: One of the distinguishing features of the Government's programme is the attention that we have paid to serious fraud. If the hon. Gentleman had been a member of the Committee considering the Criminal Justice Bill, he would have seen how we have pressed forward stricter measures and how they have been greeted tepidly, and sometimes with resistance, by the Opposition Front Bench.

Mr. Cormack: Is my right hon. Friend aware that people in Britain are worried about violent crime and that we want mandatory minimum sentences for some of the more revolting crimes?

Mr. Hurd: I know that there is a feeling to that effect, but I ask my hon. Friend to consider that, if Parliament set about trying to work out minimum sentences which would apply in all cases, however much there were mitigating circumstances, we would either turn up a figure which was so low — because it would have to take account of every conceivable mitigating circumstances— that our constituents would think we had gone dotty, or we would pitch on a higher figure, which would mean that people would start to be acquitted when there were mitigating circumstances even though they had committed a serious offence. I do not think that we want either of those things to happen.

Mr. Kaufman: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that senior police officers, when questioned about what is the most effective deterrent to crime, do not talk about sentencing but about the certainty of being caught? They have told me that again and again, and as recently as last weekend. That being so, when will the Government take action to increase the clear-up rate from its record low level of 35 per cent. to which it has sunk by 17 per cent. since the Government came to office? What is the use to talking about sentences when, under the Tory Government, two out of three criminals get away with their crime?

Mr. Hurd: The right hon. Gentleman has failed to notice that the question is about violent crime. He will be glad to hear because he does not seem to know — *[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend's supplementary was about violent crime, and the clear-up rates are much higher for crimes of violence. They are 73 per cent. for violence and 72 per cent. for sexual offences, and in all the circumstances those are reasonable achievements by the police.

Incitement to Violence

5. **Miss Fookes** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will review the law relating to incitement to crimes of violence in the light of the publication of magazines and manuals giving explicit instructions on methods of attacking and killing human beings, copies of which have been sent to him; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: Extending the law on incitement would be difficult. I understand that one of the publications that my hon. Friend has in mind has been referred by the police to the Director of Public Prosecutions, who is considering it.

Mr. Fookes: Does my hon. Friend accept that there is a real difficulty in an increasingly violent age if manuals and magazines such as those have a wide circulation and fall into the hands of irresponsible young people? His answer is not good enough.

Mr. Mellor: My answer simply tells my hon. Friend what the present state of the law is. It would be premature to judge that law as inadequate while the most offensive of those magazines are still being considered by the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Mr. Chris Smith: Does the Minister intend to take any steps against a book entitled "The Poor Man's James Bond" which is on widespread sale in London and which not only tells people how to commit acts of violence but encourages them to do so? As it is an imported book, could not the Customs Consolidation Act be used against it?

Mr. Mellor: I will look into what the hon. Gentleman says.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels: Will my hon. Friend accept that there are a number of these weapons of death, martial arts magazines and especially magazines promoting crossbows, which definitely encourage people to take the law into their own hands? Will he do everything possible to reinforce what my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Drake (Miss Fookes) has said? We must outlaw such magazines and stop people being violent and being tempted to use glamorous weapons, which are really used by cowards.

Mr. Mellor: I am afraid that I cannot add anything to what I said in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Drake (Miss Fookes).

Mr. Soley: Will the Minister look again at the proposal that we put to Conservative Members on a number of occasions saying that there should be a standing committee in the Home Office to make recommendations on this type of thing? It is precisely because this matter is difficult to legislate on that the Government are in a mess. As long as they have policies which undermine the social fabric they will continue to have a high and rising rate of crime and threats of violent crime. If we are to get round that, we need some sort of licensing system. The Home Secretary could set up something today to look at that.

Mr. Mellor: The Government are not in a mess. We have applied the law and will consider, once the Director of Public Prosecutions has had the opportunity to consider those matters, whether anything further needs to be done.

Before the hon. Gentleman comes to the Dispatch Box and talks about law enforcement being in a mess, he should ensure that he can influence those Left-wing council leaders in London who are doing more damage to law and order in the capital than anyone else I can think of.

Oakham Police Station

6. **Mr. Latham** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department for which financial year he proposes to authorise the construction of a new police station in Oakham, following the application in that regard by the Leicestershire police authority.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: All being well, we hope to be able to give the Police Authority approval next year to start this project in 1991-92.

Mr. Latham: I am grateful for the answer and I hope that all will be well. Is my hon. Friend aware of the bad state of that building in which policemen and civilians are working very hard? If there is the slightest doubt about all being well, will he come with me to have a look at the station so that we can get it right in the queue of priorities?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend's constituents would wish to pay credit to the way in which he has argued this cause. He will know that considerable works are going on in Leicestershire at the moment. Phase 1 of the force headquarters is under way and a sub-divisional headquarters is currently under construction. More generally, in 1986-87 the capital allocation on police buildings in England and Wales was up in real terms by 70 per cent. over the 1979-80 allocation.

Tamils

8. **Mr. Meadowcroft** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Tamils have applied for and how many have been granted, political asylum or refugee status, since 1983; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: Statistics are kept by nationality, rather than by ethnic origin. In 1983, 380 Sri Lankans applied for asylum. None was granted refugee status under the terms of the 1951 United Nations convention or asylum, but 13 were allowed leave to remain on exceptional grounds. In 1984, 548 applied, two were granted refugee status, none asylum and 31 exceptional leave to remain. In 1985, 2,032 Sri Lankans applied, 33 were granted refugee status and 907 exceptional leave to remain. Final figures for 1986 are not yet available. Provisional estimates for 1986 show that in the course of that year about 1,300 Sri Lankans have applied for asylum, five have been granted refugee status and approximately 1,600 have been granted exceptional leave to remain. Since July 1984, there has been no distinction made between the grant of "political asylum" and "refugee status".

Mr. Meadowcroft: Will the Minister reflect on his earlier answer about UKIAS and the British Refugee Council in relation to the Tamils and refugee status? Does he accept that the task of those bodies, as would be mine, whatever our individual views about the present law may be, is to determine which applications are acceptable under our present conditions? Therefore, will he accept the bona fides of UKIAS and the BRC to assist in determining that? There is no case not to refer to those bodies in due course those who wish to come. There should be some form of appeal against the capricious action of his officials.

Mr. Waddington: I do not think that my officials are ever guilty of capricious action. Our refugee unit in the Home Office has always had the confidence of UNHCR and with good reason. I see the hon. Gentleman's point and I have already made it plain that I shall discuss all these matters with UKIAS. However, I must repeat that there are bound to be occasions when, in the interests of immigration control it will be necessary to take prompt action and it will not be possible to refer to UKIAS.

Mr. Forth: Does my right hon. and learned Friend believe that the public will fully understand the high numbers that he has just given to the House of those being allowed to stay in the country under the heading of "exceptional leave to remain"? Is he satisfied that there is a proper distinction between applications being granted for refugee status and the large numbers being granted under another heading? Will he do anything about that?

Mr. Waddington: We have done something about it. The explanation for the high figures is that prior to the introduction of the visa requirement in the summer of 1985 there was a big influx of people from Sri Lanka. That was a reason for the introduction of the visa requirement. During the past 12 months or so we have had to deal with all those people who came here, particularly in May 1985, and that is the explanation of the high figures.

Mr. Ashley: After his earlier statements in the House will the Minister retain his office if any of the famous 64 Tamils is eventually allowed to stay in Britain?

Mr. Waddington: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has said that he will consider these cases afresh and that is precisely what he will do.

Police Building Programme (Lancashire)

9. **Mr. Robert Atkins** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received about the police building programme in Lancashire.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have received letters from seven hon. Members including one from my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins) in support of representations made by Lancashire county council about a start date for a new sub-divisional headquarters at Leyland and the number of minor police building projects approved for 1987-88.

Mr. Atkins: Is my hon. Friend aware of the delay in the construction of the new Leyland police station to 1989-90 although it was originally planned in 1982? Is he further aware that Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary described the Leyland police station as the worst building in the county and urged something to be done about it at the earliest opportunity? Will he give me an assurance that something will be done to ensure that the police work in proper, modern conditions?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend is a formidable advocate of his constituents' interests. We accept the need for a new police building at Leyland and we have given the county council approval to plan it. We hope that later this year, all being well, we shall be able to offer a start date for Leyland in 1990-91.

Drugs

11. **Dr. Twinn** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers are now specifically allocated to drugs work; and how this compares with 1979, 1982 and 1985.

Mr. Mellor: By April of this year, a total of 1,157 police officers will be serving in force drugs squads, drugs wings of regional crime squads and the national drugs intelligence unit. On 31 December 1985, 833 officers were serving in force drugs squads and the national drugs intelligence unit. On 31 December 1983 the equivalent figure was 600. Force drugs squads were first established in every force in 1983 and information for earlier years is not availble.

Dr. Twinn: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Is he aware that the increase in police officers specifically dedicated to the fight against drugs has been very widely welcomed? Can he tell the House how the increase in police officers has affected the number of drug seizures? Can he confirm that the Government will continue to place emphasis on the fight against drug demand as well as drug suppliers?

Mr. Mellor: Yes, indeed we will. Last year, if police and the custom figures are taken together, there were record numbers of people arrested for trafficking in drugs. I know we would all like to congratulate the police on making, a few weeks ago, the largest single seizure of cocaine in this country—34 kilos in one seizure alone.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Hardy** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her offficial engagements for Thursday 5 March.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House I shall be having further meetings later today, including one with a delegation from the National Pensioners' Convention.

Mr. Hardy: Does the Prime Minister appreciate that throughout the whole of our recorded history, Britain has never experienced such an increase in crime as has occurred since she was first elected to office on the platform of law and order? Is she further aware that the intensity of crime — which does seem to match the Conservative party's commitment to greed — is now at such a level that millions of our people, many of them elderly, have to live with gnawing anxiety as well as the financial hardship that they have experienced during the Prime Minister's tenure of office?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman is aware, crime has been steadily rising, not only in this country but throughout the western world. That makes it all the more important for Governments to do what this Government have done — provided more police, better equipment, and supported them and the courts in their difficult decisions.

Mrs. Roe: Will my right hon. Friend find time during her busy schedule today to consider the news that at least three Labour-controlled borough councils are planning to increase their rates by 50 per cent.? Does my right hon. Friend agree with me that this will provide a substantial burden—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady's question must be related to the Prime Minister's responsibilities.

Mrs. Roe: I did preface my question by saying that it was connected with the schedule of the Prime Minister's diary today. Does my right hon. Friend agree that this will prove to be a substantial burden, particularly for small businesses, which will definitely result in a loss of jobs?

The Prime Minister: Yes. That is one further piece of evidence that Labour is the high-tax party. I agree with my hon. Friend that high rates make it very difficult for small businesses to prosper in those areas and therefore affect the prospects for jobs.

Mr. Kinnock: Is the Prime Minister aware that because she broke the link between pension rises and average earnings, pensioner couples in Britain are now £11·40 a week worse off and single pensioners are now £7·20 a week worse off than they would have been if she had maintained the link? Will she restore that link since it is so obvious that some of the poorest people in Britain have been seriously deprived as a consequence of her policies? Or does she think that those people, desperately needing every penny that they can get, can afford to go on losing hundreds of pounds a year?

The Prime Minister: No, we will not restore the link to average earnings. We undertook that we would price-relate pensions and we have. Pensions have gone ahead faster than the increase in prices. If the right hon. Gentleman takes a true comparison he should compare the standard of living of pensioners today with the standard of living of pensioners as a whole during the lifetime of the Labour Government. The fact is that between 1979 and 1985 the average weekly net income of pensioners has risen by 18 per cent. in real terms, more than twice the increase for the population as a whole. When one compares that with the record of the Labour Government one finds that it is an average increase of 2·7 per cent. a year compared with 0.6 per cent. a year between 1974 and 1979.

Mr. Kinnock: The Prime Minister know very well that the first set of figures that she quoted is attributable almost entirely to the inclusion of the state earnings-related pension scheme. She has a real cheek, as an individual and as the Prime Minister, in seeking to destroy that scheme. Is it not the case that with the losses sustained by pensioners as a result of breaking the link, the record of the Labour Government of a real terms increase of 20 per cent. compares favourably with the increase under the right hon. Lady of 4·5 per cent.? Will she not do her duty to the pensioners of Britain instead of letting the Chancellor give away money in a fortnight's time to people who do not need it when there are people in real need in this country?

The Prime Minister: What the right hon. Gentleman wants is for pensioners to have no income other than that which they get from the state. That is what he wants, basic pension and SERPS. I have given him the true figure for the standard of living. He says that it is totally related to SERPS. It is not. About 4 million people now have occupational pensions which on average nearly double the basic state pension. Many of them own their own homes. Pensioners' incomes from savings have increased by 7·3

per cent. per year in real terms. This is the real standard of living of pensioners, and it is far better than it was in his time.

Mr. Kinnock: If the Prime Minister believes all that will she answer two points? First, if she thinks that people should be independent of the state, why is that under her Government 2 million more pensioners have to rely on supplementary benefit because they have been pushed farther down into poverty? Secondly, if she really believes that pensioners are better off, why does she not go to them and ask them if they can afford to lose £11 a week because she has broken the link with earnings?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is not getting it right. There is a basic pension in this country and there must be a second pension. Part of it is either the supplementary earnings-related pension from the state, or an occupational pension. Some pensioners have savings, some have houses and some have other sources of income. Which of the figures that I have given him does the right hon. Gentleman challenge?

Sir Paul Bryan: Is my right hon. Friend aware that her visit to Moscow will bring reassurance throughout the free world because of her standing as a leader, and a leader who can negotiate from strength?

The Prime Minister: I hope that we shall show in Moscow that this Government are prepared not only to stand up for freedom of speech, but, in action and words, for defence policy.

Mr. Steel: Yesterday, the Secretary of State for the Environment advised the young homeless in London to go somewhere else to find a home. Does that not contradict the advice given by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster that they should leave their homes to find a job? What advice does she give to the young jobless and homeless other than perpetual travel?

The Prime Minister: As the right hon. Gentleman is aware, a considerable number of council houses are empty all over the country. Indeed, in England 112,000 houses and flats are empty, of which 27,000 have been empty for more than a year. The Government have taken many steps to tackle homelessness. We have allocated the Housing Corporation an additional £20 million next year for a scheme under which housing associations can combine 30 per cent. grant from private finance to provide more accommodation for rent. The Government will also give local authorities the power to provide financial assistance to the private sector—up to 30 per cent.—for the cost of a new scheme to encourage the provision of rented housing. We have offered £4 million to the Department of the Environment's estate action programme to bring empty and run-down council homes back into use. That is to try to tackle the problem of homelessness. The right hon. Gentleman will be well aware that there are over 1 million more homes in this country than there were in the lifetime of the Government that his party supported.

Mr. Mates: As to the criticism in *The Times* today about the state of the British Army, will my right hon. Friend agree that, while real problems remain in equipping all three of our services and the conventional threat to NATO continues to grow, it is the massive increase in resources that we have made available in the last seven years that has enabled the Army, through pay and equipment, to continue to meet that threat professionally? Anybody who advocates, or even contemplates, putting the defence of this country in the hands of any or all of the Opposition parties needs their head examined.

The Prime Minister: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I agree with my hon. Friend. The Labour party does not have an effective defence policy for Britain. The Government have spent a total of £2,000 million more in real terms on the Army than if expenditure had been left at its 1978-79 level. We are carrying out a massive re-equipment programme for the Army, including main new battle tanks, new armoured personnel carriers, new artillery, defence missiles and new communications equipment. Furthermore, the Government have also implemented in full — *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask the House not to shout in this manner.

The Prime Minister: The Government have also implemented, in full, eight successive reports on service pay from the armed forces pay review body, with phasing for only a matter of months in just two of those years. That is an excellent record.

Q2. **Mr. Jim Callaghan** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 5 March 1987.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Callaghan: Is the Prime Minister aware that the Select Committee on Education, Science and Arts is investigating the implementation of the 1981 Education Act, which deals with children who have special needs? Is she aware that, despite the valiant and superb attempts of teachers and local authorities to implement the Act, the experts tell us that, because of the total lack of Government funding, the Act is failing? Will the Prime Minister, therefore, instead of paying lip service to the needs of those children, who are blind, deaf or mentally and physically handicapped, direct her Chancellor in his Budget speech to transfer the tax hand-outs from the rich to those children who are in need of the extra money?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman is aware, it is for local authorities to decide how they disburse their moneys. May I point out to the hon. Gentleman that spending per pupil is up by 19 per cent. in real terms in the lifetime of this Parliament, and that the pupil-teacher ratio is far better than ever it was. There are more teachers, they have fewer pupils and there is more money spent on each pupil. Beyond that, it is for local authorities to decide how they disburse the moneys available.

Q3. **Mr. Patrick McLoughlin** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 5 March 1987.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some 10 minutes ago.

Mr. McLoughlin: Will my right hon. Friend take time today in her busy schedule to consider the prospects of a large rate increase that are facing my constituency? Last year, we suffered a rate increase of 26 per cent., imposed by the Labour-controlled county council. The Liberals wanted a 24 per cent. increase. Does my right hon. Friend agree that a rise such as this will only damage householders, depress job prospects in Derbyshire and do

great harm to old-age pensioners, about whom the Opposition seem to care so much ? Will she reaffirm her Government's intention to abolish the present rating system?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend that the increase that has been made by Derbyshire county council is indefensible. Derbyshire county council's rate is already 25 per cent. above the average for shire counties, and a further 26 per cent. increase on top of that must mean that it is planning a further massive spending increase, which will damage small businesses, at the expense of ratepayers in that area. I assure my hon. Friend that during the first Parliament after the election we shall be introducing our rates reform Bill for England and Wales.

Q4. **Mr. Austin Mitchell** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 5 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Mitchell: Will the Prime Minister take time in her busy day actually to read the letter on pay limitation in *The Times* today from Lord Morpeth, in which he announces that he is resigning his commission to protest against the Government's cuts in the Army, Navy and Air Force and says, inter alia, as they say in Grantham:

"Vehicles breaking down"——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must not quote please.

Mr. Mitchell: ——in which he says that vehicles breaking down cannot be replaced, that the efficiency of the finest volunteer fighting force in NATO is being impaired and that vehicles purchased in the 1960s will still be being used at the turn of the century? Instead of giving the Army nothing but her excuses to fight with, will the Prime Minister send a message to Lord Morpeth saying—"Hang on. Labour's coming"—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. We had better just hear the end of this.

Mr. Mitchell: Instead of cutting the conventional forces to buy Trident, Labour will build up our conventional strength so that a conflict does not escalate into a nuclear conflict straight away.

The Prime Minister: The Labour party does not have a defence policy worthy of the name for this country. The conclusion to be drawn from the hon. Gentleman's question is how very much worse things would have been had the Labour party been in power. It would have spent £2 billion less in real terms on the Army than we have and it would never, never have honoured all the pay increases from the armed forces pay review body, which we have. It should be thanking its lucky stars and the voters that they voted this Government into power.

Business of the House

3.31 pm

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): May I ask the Leader of the House to state the business for next week?

The Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Biffen): Yes, Sir. The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 9 MARCH—Opposition Day (10th Allotted Day). Until about seven o'clock there will be a debate on prospects for the removal of intermediate nuclear weapons from Europe in the light of Mr. Gorbachev's willingness to conclude a separate INF Agreement, on a motion for the Adjournment of the House. Afterwards there will be a debate entitled "The Disparity of Opportunities within the United Kingdom" which will arise on a motion in the names of the leaders of the Liberal and Social Democratic parties.

Motion on the Parliamentary Constituencies (England) (Miscellaneous Changes) Order.

TUESDAY 10 MARCH — Until about seven o'clock, Second Reading of the Debtors (Scotland) Bill *[Lords]*, followed by remaining stages of the Parliamentary and Health Service Commissioners Bill.

Motion on the Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order.

WEDNESDAY 11 MARCH—Until seven o'clock, Estimates Day (1st Allotted Day, 1st Part). There will be a debate on Estimates relating to assistance to the coal industry; details will be given in the *Official Report*.

Afterwards there will be a debate on a motion relating to the motor vehicle industry and on the Industry Act 1980 (Increase of Limit) Order.

Consideration of Lords amendments that may be received to the Local Government Finance Bill.

THURSDAY 12 MARCH—Until about seven o'clock there will be a debate on the arts on a Government motion.

Motion on EC documents relating to the agreement between the Community and the United States on the trade consequences of Community enlargement. Details of the documents concerned will be given in the *Official Report*.

Motion on the Industrial Training Levy (Engineering Board) Order.

FRIDAY 13 MARCH—Private Members' motions.

MONDAY 16 MARCH — Second Reading of the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Bill.

[Wednesday 11 March

Supply Estimates 1986-87, Spring Supplementary Estimates, HC 160, Class 6, Vote 1.

Thursday 12 March

Relevant European Documents

(a) Unnumbered Settlement of Trade Dispute with USA

(b) Unnumbered Settlement of Trade Dispute with USA: Implementation

Relevant Reports of European Legislation Committee

(a) HC 22-ix (1986-87), para. 2

(b) HC 22-xi (1986-87), para. 2]

Mr. Kinnock: On the motion on the Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order to be debated next Tuesday, is the Leader of the House satisfied that sufficient time has been allocated for the House fully to discuss this important item of business? Why will the Lords amendments to the Local Government Finance Bill be debated so late on Wednesday night? Can the Leader of the House even now provide time earlier in the day on Thursday, or even in the week after next, to increase the possibility that this important debate will be fully and publicly reported? Why the rush with this legislation?

Recalling the Secretary of State for the Environment's sneering advice yesterday that the young homeless should "go to somewhere where there is a home, rather than to sleep rough in London"—*[Official Report, 4 March 1987; Vol. 111, c. 866]*,

will the Leader of the House arrange a debate in Government time on the subject of homelessness, so that the Secretary of State can give full vent to his views in this United Nations International Year of Shelter for the Homeless?

Hon. Members on both sides of the House will have met workers from the Caterpillar plant in Uddingston who are lobbying hon. Members about the future of their tractor plant where the company proposes a closure and the loss of 1,200 jobs. The company has refused requests from the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Scotland to reconsider the closure. Surely it would now be right for the Government to make a positive response to my previous request that Government time be given for a debate on this proposed closure which will clearly have devastating consequences for the work force and for thousands of other workers who are empioyed by component suppliers.

Last week I asked the Leader of the House for a debate on foreign affairs. May I once again press him on that, in the light of President Reagan's statement today about the provision of arms to Iran and to the Contra terrorists in Nicaragua, as well as the other matters of great significance which remain on the international agenda?

Later today the House will continue its debate on the Abolition of Domestic Rates etc. (Scotland) Bill, which introduces the community charge poll tax. I understand that the Tory Reform Group will issue a statement tomorrow which warns that the proposal is "misconceived" and that the

"new tax will undermine local self-government whilst not achieving the financial and political accountability that is now seen to be necessary for local government".

In view of that frank advice from a Conservative group, will the Leader of the House, even at this late stage, prevail on his Government colleagues at least to extend the period of consideration of the Bill so that the Tory Reform Group Members of Parliament can put their compelling case to this House?

Mr. Biffen: I shall take the points raised by the right hon. Gentleman in the order presented. First, I believe that it will be possible so to arrange affairs on Tuesday as to enable consideration of the Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order to have an appropriate amount of time.

Secondly, on the question of the Lords amendments to the Local Government Finance Bill, as the right hon. Gentleman will appreciate, those are precisely the sort of issues that lie at the heart of usual channel consultations. I shall make sure that his anxieties on that point are further known.

On the request for a debate on homelessness, to which I am sure the right hon. Gentleman would add the consideration of the more effective use of the national housing stock, I am certain that that is a debate which could take place in this Chamber as a preliminary to the wider debate that we all anticipate with such good nature and zeal later this year or early next—*[Interruption.]* I

shall bear in mind the nervous laughter of Labour Members at that speculation, but of course we shall look at that through the usual channels.

I appreciate that the right hon. Gentleman is anxious that the Caterpillar plant should be considered and in terms which put it aside from the debate upon the motor industry. That is something that we might possibly consider in the context of the Budget debate.

The right hon. Gentleman also mentioned his concern that there should be a reasonably early debate on foreign affairs. I accept his concern on that matter. Again, I am sure that he will realise that the timing must be related to the immediate demands upon parliamentary time that will be taken up by consideration of the Budget.

The right hon. Gentleman gave a charming indication of the anxiety that has entered his soul about his recent loss of numbers. His concern to recruit to his aid the Tory Reform Group must surely be the gesture of a fairly desperate Leader of the Opposition. Although I have never been a member of the Tory Reform Group, I have always kept a close association with it, and I shall try to do what I can by way of good endeavours to put him in touch with a future political home.

Mr. Mark Carlisle (Warrington, South): My right hon. Friend will be aware that next Monday, 9 March, is Commonwealth day. May I draw his attention to early-day motion 670?

[That this House joins with all other parliaments throughout the Commonwealth in the observance of Commonwealth Day on Monday 9th March; and recognises the importance of the work of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association which brings together parliamentarians throughout the Commonwealth who share a community of interest, respect for the rule of law and a commitment to promote the positive ideals of parliamentary democracy.]

The motion is supported by right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House and it draws attention to the importance of the Commonwealth and of the work of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. May I ask my right hon. Friend as Leader of the House, particularly at a time when we are entertaining many parliamentarians from other parts of the Commonwealth here in Westminster, to reiterate and confirm the Government's continuing support for the Commonwealth and the work of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association?

Mr. Biffen: The whole House will have noted my right hon. and learned Friend's comments. With the meeting of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association taking place in this country, we recognise the important part that this institution has played in the association's evolution. I hope that in our discussions—private and public—we will establish for this country the right to have every bit as much of an independent policy as any other member of the Commonwealth.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): Further to his reply to the leader of the Labour party, does the Leader of the House realise the urgency of the problem of homelessness, with 100,000 people presenting themselves as homeless this year, and with Shelter estimating that by the summer no temporary hostel accommodation will be available for the homeless? Therefore, will the right hon. Gentleman reconsider the urgency of that matter and try within the next couple of weeks to arrange a debate in the House on homelessness?

Mr. Biffen: The matter has been debated recently, but I agree that that does not detract from the importance of the topic. However, I cannot go beyond the fairly generous reply that I gave to the Leader of the Opposition.

Sir Peter Mills (Torridge and Devon, West): Has my right hon. Friend seen early day motion 703 about the conduct of the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron)?

[That this House calls upon the honourable Member for Rother Valley to withdraw his allegations in the House on 26th February that there was any impropriety in the decision relating to public access over Maltby Commons and accept that his allegations were wholly unfounded.]

May we have a debate on that motion? Will my right hon. Friend start to talk through the usual channels until that unsatisfactory position has been cleared up properly?

Mr. Biffen: I have read the exchanges. I regret very much that they took place. I am sure that it will be possible for the matter to be resolved without all the ponderous consequences of debate. I shall bear in mind exactly what my hon. Friend has said.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell (South Down): Is the Leader of the House aware that the Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order is a major piece of substantive primary legislation, and that to describe it as "appropriate" to attempt to deal with it in two or three hours by a procedure which gives no opportunity for proper consideration is a prime example of the cynical injustice with which the Government deal with the affairs of the Province?

Mr. Biffen: It was precisely because I hoped that affairs could be arranged that day so that more time would be allocated than stated by the right hon. Gentleman that I felt entitled to use the word "appropriate".

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): Does my right hon. Friend recall that last Tuesday the House gave leave for the introduction of a Bill, of which I am a sponsor, by the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) to amend the powers of the General Medical Council? I appreciate that the Government do not give special time for private Members' Bills, but is my right hon. Friend aware that there is grave disquiet and anxiety about the number of tragic cases between patient and doctor, including cases in my constituency? Would it be possible to have a debate on that subject in the not too distant future?

Mr. Biffen: I note what my hon. Friend says. He is right to observe that no Government time would be made available for the passage of that private Member's Bill, but I suggest that, meanwhile, he takes advantage of the fact that the Department of Health and Social Security will be top of the list for Question Time next Tuesday.

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): Is the Leader of the House aware that conditions in our prisons are becoming explosively bad, and that Her Majesty's inspector of prisons has expressed his concern? Is he further aware that the Prison Officers Association has said that there are rats as big as cats in our prisons, which are infected with vermin? The reason for that is Crown immunity. Therefore, may we have a debate next week on the abolition of Crown immunity in our prisons?

Mr. Biffen: The right hon. Gentleman is a persistent and effective campaigner on the issue of Crown immunity, but I am not entirely convinced that the circumstances of the prison that he has described can be related solely to that factor. However, I will, of course, draw the attention of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary to the points that he has made.

Mr. Robert McCrindle (Brentwood and Ongar): Following the welcome rejection by the Secretary of State for the Environment of the application to develop a new town within the metropolitan green belt and the subsequent indication by the housing spokesman for the Opposition that under a Labour Government some element of development within the green belt might be contemplated, does not the Leader of the House believe that the time has arrived for the whole subject of the future of the metropolitan green belt to be discussed in a full debate?

Mr. Biffen: Clearly, if such a debate could give full and appropriate ventilation and publicity to those remarks that have been uttered on behalf of the Labour party, I w'd agree with my hon. Friend. The only thing that I cannot do is hold out the prospect of an early allocation of Government time. But there are many other ways in which my hon. Friend can secure greater publicity for this matter, and I wish him well.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): Is it not totally inadmissible for blindness to be ridiculed in a publication for which a Minister in the Government has ultimate responsibility? Will the Leader of the House ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, in a statement next week, to dissociate himself from the insulting treatment of that severe handicap in the current issue of Conservative *News Line?*

Mr. Biffen: I imagine that the right hon. Gentleman may not already have contacted my right hon. Friend to secure his observations upon the matter, but he will, I am sure, be satisfied when he knows the official remarks that have been made.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): As we are not overburdened with legislation, and as we are now in the season of Lent, does my right hon. Friend think that we could have a debate on the future of the Church of England so that that body can be made aware of the strong feelings on a number of matters held in the House before the Synod makes its final decision?

Mr. Biffen: I do not think that I can agree, alas, with my hon. Friend that the parliamentary timetable is relatively free of pressure for the next few weeks, particularly when we come to the Budget. I am sure that on reflection he will realise that I am right to hold that view. I will of course bear in mind the point that he makes, which is one of great substance for many people.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): Will the Government allocate time pretty soon to discuss the Anglo-Irish agreement? In view of the fact that there is a new Prime Minister—Taoiseach—in Dublin, and as it is a London-Dublin agreement and he has strong views about it, surely we ought to discuss it here and make our views clear.

Mr. Biffen: I understand the right hon. Gentleman's point and I will see that it is conveyed to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. Meanwhile, the right hon. Gentleman might take advantage of the fact that Northern Ireland questions will be first on Thursday of next week.

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): I think from several rather oblique hints that he has given that my right hon. Friend is favourably disposed towards a debate on agriculture and the environment. Is he getting any nearer to actually fixing one? If he is thinking of leaving it until after the White Paper appears later this month, will he please not leave it too long? We do not want a long period of consultation; we want a debate.

Mr. Biffen: I understand the point that my hon. Friend makes. I assure him that the prospect of a debate is at least one week nearer than it was this time last week. It is not entirely over the brow of the future. There are real reasons why I believe that the Government would wish to present their policy to the House and the House to endorse it.

Mr. Nick Raynsford (Fulham): May I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to early-day motion 675 on the important and serious matter of insider dealing?

[That this House, noting the movements in the share price of Marler Estates over the past seven months during the period in which Marler Estates was acquiring or seeking to acquire an interest first in Fulham Football Club and subsequently in Queen's Park Rangers Football Club, and noting the involvement of Mr. Terry Ramsden, Chairman of Glen International, Mr. Robert Noonan, Chief Executive of Marler Estates and Director of SB Property Company and Mr. David Bulstrode, Chairman of Marler Estates and Fulham Football Club, in the purchase and sale of Marler Estates shares during this period, calls on the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to appoint an Investigator under the powers contained in section 177 of the Financial Services Act 1986 to establish whether a contravention of section 1 and/or 4 of the Company Securities (Insider Dealing) Act 1985 may have taken place.]

In the light of the clear prima facie evidence, much of which has been reported in the press, that there may have been insider dealing in the shares of Marler Estates, a company which has been involved in a notorious asset-stripping attack on Fulham football club, will the right hon. Gentleman urge the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to make a statement on this matter as a matter of urgency?

Mr. Biffen: I note what the hon. Gentleman says, and I have noted the considerable popular interest that has attended the future of the football club. He might reflect upon the desirability of making available the information that he has to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

Sir Ian Lloyd (Havant): It will not have escaped my right hon. Friend's attention that the report on civil research and development produced in another place has initiated a major and most significant debate throughout the press in this country. Is it not anomalous that this is the only place in which no debate on this subject has yet taken place? Should we not have an opportunity to express our views on this most important topic?

Mr. Biffen: I will certainly bear in mind that request, but I am sure that my hon. Friend will bear in mind the difficulties under which I labour. I do not mean to be in

any sense dismissive when I say that the Budget debate will give opportunities for making many of the points that he would wish to make on this occasion.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): In view of the conclusion of discussions in Brussels in the early hours of yesterday morning on the future of the CAP, which is of critical importance to dairy and livestock farmers, and in view of the fact that no statement has been made in the House today on the discussions, will the Leader of the House assure hon. Members that there will be a statement next week and that some assurance will be given to dairy and livestock farmers in Wales who, because of recent developments, are fearful of the future?

Mr. Biffen: I understand that my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food believes that a satisfactory deal has been made in the negotiations. I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's disappointment that there has been no statement to the House, but the truth is that one must have regard to the other pressures upon time. I shall certainly pass on his comments to my right hon. Friend the Minister.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): In view of my right hon. Friend's earlier statement — perhaps inadvertent — that the remaining length of the Parliament may not be indefinite, to put it gently, will he seriously consider the proposal already put to him by my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Sir I. Lloyd) about the need for a serious and lengthy debate in the House on the state of civil research and development, especially that which is conducted by the private sector, which is inadequate and needs to be increased?

Mr. Biffen I am absolutely confident that any examination of *Hansard* tomorrow — I realise that *Hansard* will be thoroughly examined tomorrow — will demonstrate that I said that the election will come either later this year or some time next year. That covers all disagreeable possibilities. Of course, I take note of what my hon. Friend said about the desirability of having a debate on research and development in the public and private sectors. I cannot go beyond the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Sir I. Lloyd), but that in no sense means that I am not fully conscious of the desire for a debate.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): In view of the continuing high level of unemployment in Liverpool and on Merseyside, despite the fact that Liverpool city council has built 4,300 houses in the past three years and has taken on 11,000 construction workers, will the Leader of the House give us an opportunity to discuss at the earliest possible moment unemployment on Merseyside? Will he consider also the letter that I have sent him about the new proposals regarding taxis for hon. Members?

Mr. Biffen: I shall refer the hon. Gentleman's observations on the first point to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment. Secondly, I have only just received the hon. Gentleman's letter, but I have a feeling that I could reasonably anticipate its contents. The decision taken by the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee to examine the matter was not taken on its initiative. It was as a result of many representations to it about the unsatisfactory way in which the arrangements were working.

Mr. Michael Marshall (Arundel): Will my right hon. Friend undertake to provide time for a debate on British space policy? Will he take this opportunity of saying that such a debate might usefully be founded on decisions taken in the long overdue response by Her Majesty's Government to proposals from the British National Space Centre, which I trust he can confirm were made this morning?

Mr. Biffen: Of course I shall refer my hon. Friend's observations to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. I shall take into account my hon. Friend's anxiety that we should have a debate upon the topic. For the moment, there certainly is no prospect of a debate in Government time.

Mr. James Hamilton (Motherwell, North): I underline the request made by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition for a debate on the drastic closure of the Caterpillar tractor factory in my constituency. As the right hon. Gentleman is aware, it has been widely reported that the Prime Minister sent two letters to the company in America. Can the right hon. Gentleman or the Prime Minister divulge the company's reply so that hon. Members may know whether there is any hope of the company resuming full employment?

Mr. Biffen: I shall refer to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister the points that the hon. Gentleman has made that relate specifically to her. I quite understand why he makes known his concern about Caterpillar. I cannot say any more to him than I have already said to the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. John Stokes (Halesowen and Stourbridge): Now that the playing of games and sport in our state schools seems to be coming almost to an end, will my right hon. Friend arrange a debate on this important subject? Surely sport and games are most important for character building and for creating proper team spirit.

Mr. Biffen: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. I see from the good-natured beneficent smile of the Leader of the Opposition, a great champion of schoolboy Rugby Union football in the valleys, that he is at one with me. I agree with my hon. Friend that it would be a useful topic to debate, but such a debate should be generated by a private Member using the advantages that are available to private Members. Currently, there is a shortage of Government time for such a debate.

Mr. Clement Freud (Cambridgeshire, North-East): When the Broadcasting Bill *[Lords]* returns to this Chamber, will the Leader of the House give an assurance that his Government will not try to overturn the one amendment that was carried with support from the members of all three major parties?

Mr. Biffen: I have no wish to begrudge the hon. Member his legislative triumph. He knows that I am not in a position to make any such commitment. I shall ensure, however, that his anxiety is conveyed to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary.

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): Did I hear my right hon. Friend aright when he said that the motion in the name of the alliance on defence and arms control will arise on the Adjournment? How shall I know which way to vote at the end of the debate? Am I to vote for or

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against? Is it the position that the alliance does not know and that it cannot make up its mind on a Supply day what substantive motion to place on the Order Paper?

Mr. Biffen: If one has disagreeable problems, the classic formula is to try to opt for nice people. That is the touchstone of so many alliance Members. We shall be presented with a supreme example on Monday. We shall be confronted with some of the most disagreeable choices in defence policy, and the option is to adjourn. It hopes one day to be joined by a reformed Leader of the Opposition, but that is another story. As for how my hon. Friend should vote, keep close by me.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will the Leader of the House arrange for the appropriate Law Officer to make a statement next week on the number of times that cases have been dropped because of lack of money or inability to pursue the alleged culprits? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that a startling example was provided by an announcement made by the Lord Chancellor in another place this week? It appears that the case involving Unimar and others connected with it — a gigantic fraud at Lloyd's — that led to more than 1,000 people being cheated out of money has been dropped deliberately by this Tory Government because they say that it is too expensive to pursue? Why was not that the position when they were pursuing the miners' money in five or six different countries? Was not that an expensive operation? Is not the truth of the matter that this Tory Government have one law for their friends in the City and another for those like miners and pensioners, who might be hauled before the courts for having a tin of salmon from Sainsbury?

Mr. Biffen: I do not think that is the motivation of the Treasury Bench. None the less, if this will help the hon. Gentleman, I shall refer his request to my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General so that he may consider the issue that he has raised.

Mr. John Whitfield (Dewsbury): Does my right hon. Friend share my increasing concern at the tendency of Left-wing local authorities to rename famous landmarks and streets in English towns and cities that are under their control after African terrorists? The latest example of this civic-sponsored graffiti is to be found at the town hall in Dewsbury, which the Kirklees metropolitan district council decided last week to surround with a road that is to be named Mandela way. I ask my right hon. Friend to make time available soon for a debate on a motion urging the Government to bring forward as fast as possible their reform of rates so that Left-wing authorities such as Kirklees council become more accountable to their ratepayers and less accountable to African terrorists.

Mr. Biffen: My hon. Friend raises a narrow but none the less very powerful instance of action on the part of local authorities that reveals so much of their underlying commitment. Alas, I cannot offer him any Government time for the matter to be debated, but I hope that he will take advantage of all the other available opportunities in the House to ensure that it is given further consideration.

Mr. Robert Parry (Liverpool, Riverside): Has the Leader of the House seen early-day motion 654?

[That this House deplores the sacking of 270 bus drivers and other workers by the Crosville bus company in Liverpool; notes the sacking followed a strike by drivers of long experience for refusing to drive old second-hand non-power steering buses; also notes that more than 150 drivers had between 10 to 25 years service including one driver who had more than 30 years service and was only two years off retiring age; further notes that none of the sacked workers received any redundancy payments; supports the Transport and General Workers Union for its efforts to have the men re-instated; calls upon Her Majesty's Government for a full investigation into the dispute; and considers similar disputes could have serious consequences for bus drivers, passengers, pedestrians and other road users, justifying the Labour party's opposition to the de-regulation of buses.]

It relates to the sacking of 270 transport workers in Liverpool. Will the Leader of the House refer this matter either to his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport — bus deregulation was the cause of the dispute — or to the Paymaster General, because the moves of the Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service were torpedoed by the intransigence of the Crosville bus company? The matter is urgent and is of paramount importance because it may affect bus drivers, bus companies and road safety throughout the country.

Mr. Biffen: I believe that the hon. Gentleman has raised this matter with me in the past. I shall reconsider the points that he has just made to see how my right hon. Friends might help.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East): When may we have a debate on the use and abuse of diplomatic immunity? Does my right hon. Friend agree that, although the Jordanian Government have been most honourable in establishing the precedent of removing the diplomatic shield from someone, a chef, who should not have had diplomatic immunity in the first place, there is a growth industry in the number of people claiming diplomatic immunity and escaping justice and the rule of law? A debate on that matter is essential.

I hope that my right hon. Friend will respond in as quick a way as he did to my question last week concerning the Towers hospital in Leicester and its secure unit. I am grateful to him for bringing to the attention of the Minister for Health the four people who escaped from that unit.

Mr. Biffen: I thank my hon. Friend for his remarks relating to his second point. On his first point, I will certainly see that his observations are drawn to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Stretford): The Leader of the House will be aware that, two days ago, there was a statement on prescription charges. However, he may not be aware that the Secretary of State did not inform the House that one in three prescriptions paid for cost less than the prescription charge of £2.40. Given that that is new information, will the Leader of the House pass it to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and explain to him that with so much money to give away in the Budget it might be a good way of cutting taxes to cut this nasty tax on the sick?

Mr. Biffen: I believe that the information to which the hon. Gentleman refers was widely known. Perhaps he would like to reflect upon the fact that prescription

charges are the subject of an instrument that may be prayed against and will almost certainly come before the House.

Mr. Derek Conway (Shrewsbury and Atcham): The reason for the motion on defence policy tabled by the SDP for Monday to adjourn the House is that it cannot agree with its Liberal friends on that subject. Therefore, will my right hon. Friend undertake to ensure that the excellent service of video recordings available to hon. Members is restored so that, before the debate, we may watch a video of the Liberal conference that went unilateral and a video of the interview with the leader of the SDP on "This Week Next Week" when he thought that perhaps three rather than four submarines for Trident may be an alternative policy? As the SDP and the Liberals are in total disarray about this matter, the House should see the recordings before Monday's debate.

Mr. Biffen: After my hon. Friend's powerful advocacy, I believe that no organisation on my part is neded.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): May I return to the answers given to the Leader of the Opposition and the important question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, North (Mr. Hamilton) regarding Caterpillar? What has been said? Will the Treasury make a statement?—That is the impression that the Leader of the House gave. If the Chancellor of the Exchequer is involved, so much the better because, frankly, he is involved with Caterpillar and the issue of Golden Wonder in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) and exactly how the City is operating regarding profitable firms in Scotland. Will the Treasury take charge of this policy, because that is what the Leader of the House suggested?

Mr. Biffen: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising this matter as it will enable me to clear up an unintended misconception. It is my judgment that the topic can be debated, subject to the Chair, during the Budget debate. It was certainly not my inention to give the impression that a statement would be made by any Minister during such a debate. I was particularly anxious to point out the virtues of the Budget debate, rather than a debate on the motor industry, as being the debate during which to refer to the matter.

Mr. John Mark Taylor (Solihull): Can my right hon. Friend explain why the SDP and the Liberals have chosen for next week's debate the title: "The disparity of opportunities within the United Kingdom"? Has that something to do with the fact that Bill Rodgers, Shirley Williams and Mike Thomas have deserted the northern seats for southern ones? Can it be that they do not fancy their chances in the north of England?

Mr. Biffen: My hon. Friend has pointed to yet another fascinating dimension to the north-south problem.

In truth, I cannot make any satisfactory comment upon why the topic chosen has been drafted in such terms. I am sure that we will have an enjoyable debate.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Does the Leader of the House agree that as, yet again, the draftmanship of legislation has been called into question by the courts because its meaning is not clear and the Government keep losing court cases, now would be an opportunity to find time for a debate on the whole question of parliamentary draftmanship. In that way, even if Ministers cannot understand legislation, we, the ordinary Members, may do so in due course.

Mr. Biffen: I shall say that the hon. Gentleman is optimistic rather than arrogant. It is a most extraordinary assumption that any of us, in any corner of the House, can understand so much of that which is now produced as legislation. I shall certainly consider what the hon. Gentleman has said, but I am sure that he will appreciate that there is little time available for general debate within the Government's keep.

Mr. David Crouch (Canterbury): In view of the difficulties that have recently arisen about showing video films in the precincts of the House, may I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the fact that I am proposing to show next week a revealing film produced by the Soviet authorities of the recent visit paid to the Soviet Union by the Inter-Parliamentary Union? That group was led by my noble Friend Lord Whitelaw and the deputy leader was the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey). I know that it will be revealing, but I hope that my right hon. Friend will take note of the fact that it will also be interesting.

Mr. Biffen: And free. My hon. Friend is too modest to remind the House that he was also a member of that delegation. Doubtless the House will have noted what he has said.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Is the reason why the Government have refused to take legal action against Mr. Wallace and Captain Holyroyd that they are concerned that if the case were brought to court matters might be raised in the witness box which would be embarrassing to the Government in relation to the activities of the security services?

In the light of Captain Holyroyd's statement made at midday on Ulster radio and his further allegations, we do not know whether they are to be believed. However, in so far as they are embarrassing to the Government and talk of attempts to destabilise the Government of the Irish Republic during the 1970s, the parliamentary answer given the other day is insufficient. Surely we should have a full statement from the Dispatch Box so that every Member of the House can question Ministers. We need to know the truth. Are the allegations true or false?

Mr. Biffen: I believe that the written answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) was perfectly adequate to answer the questions raised by the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Reg Freeson (Brent, East): Taking another aspect of the north-south issue to which the Leader of the House referred a moment ago, despite the much vaunted prosperity of the south-east is the right hon. Gentleman aware that there are nearly 400,000 people out of work in London? That is the second highest regional figure in the country. There are many other problems associated with that by way of social and economic decline. Will the Leader of the House arrange, exceptionally, for a debate on the situation in London, which would provide a rare opportunity for the House?

Mr. Biffen: I shall bear in mind the right hon. Gentleman's request, but I cannot be optimistic in my response, because, although the capital and the south-east

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are of great national significance, there is not the prospect of that amount of Government time to make such a debate an early prospect.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): Will the Leader of the House consider his motion on short speeches and bring it to the notice of the House so that we can have a debate? My hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Mr. Coleman) raised this matter some weeks ago. We have waited patiently for the motion, and the amendments on it, to be debated. Most hon. Members feel that when we put our names down to speak and we are not called it is because many Members take such a long time to speak. Is it not time that we had a debate on this issue? Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman should pay attention to the fact that, when the Prime Minister is answering supplementary questions at Prime Minister's Question Time, rules on short speeches should be applied to her as well.

Mr. Biffen: I hope that this topic can return to the Floor of the House soon. It has been no wish of mine that it should not be considered. There has been much discussion to see whether there could be a more broad and common front about its implementation. Nevertheless, it will come back to the House for consideration.

Sir Kenneth Lewis (Stamford and Spalding): Has my right hon. Friend noticed that the Governor of the Bank of England is doing his best to bring interest rates down? Therefore, will my right hon. Friend encourage my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to follow that example and bring interest rates down now rather than waiting for the Budget, as that will please every person who pays a mortgage, industry and the farmers?

Mr. Biffen: I thank my hon. Friend for what I am certain is well-intentioned advice, which I believe is also sound advice.

Rate Support Grant

4.11 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. **Nicholas Ridley**): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about rate support grant.

I have today appealed against the court judgment in a case brought by Greenwich borough council. That judgment would mean that I could not correct an acknowledged error in the 1986-87 settlement, which deprived some London authorities of their full grant entitlements. As a result of that judgment, it is necessary now to amend the rate support grant figures I announced in January for 1986-87 and 1987-88 so that grant can be paid from the beginning of April. I have sent the revised figures to local authorities today. They are available in the Vote Office and the Library.

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): Is the Secretary of State aware that his statement is completely inadequate in that it seeks to disguise the serious nature of the situation resulting from the incompetence of this Government in their handling of local government finances? This is truly unprecedented. The Secretary of State has now announced to the House that all the figures for the current financial year and the coming financial year are again to be affected by changes as a result of Government and ministerial ineptitude. Is he not trying to disguise, by his lack of candour and of detail in the statement, the reality of the wide-ranging implications of what he has had to say?

When, if ever, will there be an end to the legal defeats for this Government in the courts, resulting from their continuing incompetence in this crucial sector of local government finance? If the Secretary of State intends to carry through his appeal against the Greenwich decision, why is he already announcing his decision to amend the rate support grant figures? How many changes result from his decision today? How many local authorities will be affected?

Do the Government intend to make more grant available in total, and how many authorities are likely to lose grant as a result of what he has announced today? Does he recall that in July last year the Minister for Environment, Countryside and Planning, the hon. Member for Bristol, West (Mr. Waldegrave) said that the legislation introduced then was necessary to provide local authorities with certainty about present and past entitlements? Since then there have been three more local government finance Bills, and countless statements by the Secretary of State on the same subject.

Is it true that the Conservative borough of Bromley, having made its rate and announced its budget, will be in an unlawful position if the changes that the Secretary of State has announced today are carried through? Are not many other local authorities likely to be in the same difficulty, because of the necessity to fix precepts by 10 March, which is next week, and to fix their rates by 1 April?

Is the Secretary of State aware that the changes that were sneaked out in a letter last week resulted in major confusion? For example, the city of Newcastle upon Tyne had to make no fewer than 160 changes in its budget. The Tyne and Wear fire authority had to call an extraordinary meeting last week, costing hundreds of pounds, because of

this incompetence. The London borough of Hounslow incurred almost £1,000 in administrative costs because of those changes.

Today, further massive changes and their costs will fall on local authorities in England and Wales. Even as we speak, the Greater Manchester fire authority, having met today to fix its precept, cannot take any decisions because of the confusion caused.

Does the Secretary of State stand by today's announcement by the Tory Reform Group, in a press notice, which is endorsed by the right hon. Members for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker), for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) and for Witney (Mr. Hurd), by the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) and by Viscount Whitelaw:

"Government was acting in a haphazard way, making up these decisions as it went along. It had no clear idea as to why it had to intervene so constantly, what was so fundamentally wrong in local government and how to put it right."

Does the right hon. Gentleman think that he retains the confidence of his colleagues who put their names to that statement?

Is the Secretary of State aware that any other Minister with such an abysmal record of unlawful action, defeats in the courts, administrative incompetence and lack of frankness with the House would be considering his position?

Mr. Ridley: I thought you were tolerant of the hon. Gentleman, Mr. Speaker. Not only did he range over matters irrelevant to the statement, but he described it as a legal defeat. I made it clear that I have appealed—the appeal papers were lodged. The hon. Gentleman is wrong, and he is prejudicing the appeal by saying such things. Until the appeal is determined, the law is as it is left by the High Court judgment. It is for that reason, and that reason alone, that it is necessary to amend the rate support grant figures in accordance with the judgment. I have to tell him, because he got it wrong again—he gets so many things wrong that I do not know where to start—that this is the result not of what he called Government ineptitude, but of a court judgment. If he cannot make the distinction between those two things, I suggest that he has much to learn.

No more grant will be available as a result of this judgment. The hon. Gentleman knows that the system is close-ended. Certain boroughs will lose as a result of this judgment. Grants that will properly be paid to certain London boroughs for maintaining their roads will be switched to other boroughs which do not have responsibility for maintaining those roads. That is a quite inequitable situation, and I regret that the judgment means that I have to enshrine it in the new rate support grant figures. I am not clear how many of the authorities have actually made their rates, although I do not think that many have done so yet. If any have made their rates, they can apply to the court to quash a rate if they find that it is insufficient, in the light of the revised information deriving from this judgment.

Mr. Colin Moynihan (Lewisham, East): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is disgraceful that Greenwich has sought to find a loophole in the law to hold on to money which does not belong to it, to the detriment of other authorities?

Mr. Ridley: I agree with my hon. Friend that it is inequitable that grants which this House has determined should go to authorities for specific purposes should have been changed to go to authorities which do not have to discharge those responsibilities.

Mr. Sydney Bidwell (Ealing, Southall): Does this Greenwich victory mean that the hard-pressed Labour-controlled borough of Ealing, where people are facing a steep rates rise as a consequence of the local authority's battle to meet the needs of the hard-pressed people of the borough, especially in Southall, can expect better behaviour by the Government and a higher rate support grant?

Mr. Ridley: I do not believe that the borough of Ealing is affected by what I have just announced. However, I believe that it has set an enormously high rate increase, which has nothing to do with my announcement.

Mr. John Hunt (Ravensbourne): Is my right hon. Friend aware that Bromley's rate calculations for last year and this year have been made on the basis of the clearest commitments given to me and to the council by Ministers and the Secretary of State's officials? Will he confirm that if the amendment to the rate support grant to which he has referred this afternoon means that Bromley is now to be deprived of the money that it expected—which would have a catastrophic effect on the ratepayers—he will endeavour to compensate ratepayers in some other way for the loss that will be incurred?

Mr. Ridley: I confirm what my hon. Friend has said. Bromley has lost about £3 million as a result of the interpretation of the law in the judgment. I have appealed against that judgment. We must wait and see the result of the appeal. However, I share his view that it is completely inequitable for grants determined for one purpose for one authority to be switched to another authority that does not have the same responsibility. I have always said that that is wrong with regard to Bromley. We will have to wait for the result of the appeal.

Mr. Michael Meadowcroft (Leeds, West): Is not the Secretary of State showing a rather desperate disingenuousness in trying to hang an appeal on a reported need to clarify the whole process of reallocating grants? Would it not be better for him to accept the court's judgment and receive the support of hon. Members on this side of the House to enable the matter to be clarified rather than go through the extended process? Is it not bizarre that he should accuse local authorities of inefficiency, yet write to them on 3 March presenting the relevant expenditure limits and telling them that he may be writing to them again in the near future with different relevant expenditure limits? Now apparently he will have to go through the whole process of appeal and the delay that that involves, and presumably there will be a third change of relevant expenditure. Surely local government is showing more efficiency than central Government.

Mr. Ridley: The Greenwich case was not about the specific allocation of grants; it was about a narrow interpretation of a point of law in the Rate Support Grants Act 1986. It is against that interpretation that I have appealed, and I suggest that we should not discuss the merits of that appeal until it has been heard. The inter-reaction of this constant litigation about points of law with the delicate timetable of the rate support grant mechanism causes a great deal of trouble. That is one of the reasons why we intend to abolish the rate support grant

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mechanism and the rates, and we hope that we have the hon. Gentleman's support in that. Depending on the result of the appeal, it may be necessary to go back on the rate support grant, but that is an inevitable consequence of litigation that takes place that can have such an effect, affecting the whole totals.

Mr. Peter Lilley (St. Albans): Does my right hon. Friend agree that this problem arises from inaccurate legal advice, creative interpretation of the law by the courts, and excessively complex legislation? Would he consider following the advice of Shakespeare:

"The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers"—

exempting, of course, my right hon. and hon. and learned Friends? If he is not prepared to be Shakespearean about this matter, will he at least privatise the provision of legislative advice? Secondly, would he submit draft legislation to the Simple English Campaign? Finally, will he rapidly introduce a measure to restore the situation to the status quo ante?

Mr. Ridley: We have to go through the legal processes to determine the precise meaning of the Rate Support Grants Act 1986, which was checked by outside counsel and was the result of a privatised lawyers' agreement. I do not think that that point would hold up. It is right to proceed to the appeal and learn the detailed result before making any comment on further action.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Is not the real reason for the Government's continuous embarrassment by litigation their basic policy? Is it not clear that mechanisms such as clawback, which replaced the historic system of local government support grant, show that the Government, instead of meeting the real needs of communities—especially those that are hard-pressed—are in principle against any local government expenditure? Will the Minister admit that that is the real reason behind his continuous series of inefficient legislation?

Mr. Ridley: No, the hon. Gentleman is quite wrong. This matter is about the allocation of the total of rate support grant through the GREA system; it is not about clawback. An error was made two years ago in the allocation of the grants for road maintenance between certain London boroughs and others. The attempt to correct that error has been upset by the judgment. It will not rest there. We have appealed, and it is highly questionable whether we might not prove to be right in our interpretation.

Mr. Roger Sims (Chislehurst): Further to my right hon. Friend's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Ravensbourne (Mr. Hunt), does he accept that he gave a firm unequivocal undertaking to the London borough of Bromley that it would receive grant to offset the costs of looking after GLC roads? From what my right hon. Friend has said this afternoon, he has reneged on that undertaking. He has left Bromley in the position where, after making a rate, it is now likely that it will have to find a further £3 million, and the whole issue will turn on the whim of the appeal court. Surely my right hon. Friend can take steps to ensure that his undertaking that Bromley will receive the money will be kept.

Mr. Ridley: No. Whatever undertaking my predecessor gave, I must say that I have not gone back on that. The judgment of the court has meant that I am unable to do that. I have gone to the length of appealing against the judgment in an endeavour to fulfil the undertaking given by my predecessor. It was never an undertaking that extra Government cash would be provided for Bromley. That would be quite wrong, because the rate support grant is close-ended. The activities of one borough have resulted in it and others receiving a share of the grant which was destined to go to Bromley and other boroughs. We are not talking about new cash; this is a redistribution of existing cash. I repeat that I remain concerned that the result of the judgment provides an inequitable situation for Bromley and other boroughs. I am seeking to put that right, but first I must have the Court of Appeal decide; otherwise the position will not be clear.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): Does the Secretary of State agree that, apart from the political implications of what the Government have done about rates recently, they have caused utter chaos to officers and treasurers of local authorities who are trying to fix a rate? Does he believe that, in a democracy, locally elected representatives and local government officers have a duty, if they think that there is something in the law which enables them to provide a better service for their community, to challenge the Government's interpretation through the legal system?

Mr. Ridley: Yes. Large numbers of authorities are taking cases to the courts for the reasons that the hon. Gentleman has given. They are perfectly free to do that, and I do not complain about it. It is odd how the Opposition are gleeful every time authorities succeed. The result of that process, however, is delay, uncertainty and confusion. That is not the Government's fault. It is the fault of those who insist on litigation on every possible occasion.

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): Is my right hon. Friend aware that in one month's time the new financial year will begin and rate demands will be sent out? When will local authorities know their entitlement to grant? Is this not a Kafkaesque situation? For how much longer will litigation go fiddling on?

Mr. Ridley: Because, as my hon. Friend rightly says, rates and precepts have to be set, I have today published a new settlement and sent it to local authorities. Because of the court judgment — it is not my choice, but I naturally comply with court judgments—I have to allow a short period for local authorities to comment on the changes. We are still in time to make the settlement by the end of the financial year and for precepting authorities to set their precepts. I must draw attention to the difficulty of sticking to the timetable and giving local authorities the time that they need to take their decisions against a background of constant litigation, some of which successfully upsets the orderly organisation of the rate support grant.

Mr. John Cartwright (Woolwich): What impact will the Secretary of State's statement have on the hard-pressed ratepayers of Greenwich, which is planning to jack up its spending by about 25 per cent. this year? Can the right hon. Gentleman confirm that the borrowing, the creative accounting and the financial juggling that is going on in Woolwich town hall, will eventually have to be paid for by my constituents and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich (Mrs. Barnes)?

Mr. Ridley: I agree that the ratepayers of Greenwich are extremely hard pressed. The new rate support grant that I have announced today will give them increased grant as a main settlement and in the first supplementary report for 1986-87. If the appeal goes another way, it will be necessary to revise the figures once again. That is what is unsatisfactory about litigation which affects rate support grant figures for several years and means changing them during the rate support grant cycle.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): Is it not clear that the fault lies not with my right hon. Friend but with the ridiculous rating system with which we have been burdened for far too long, which nobody understands—least of all the Opposition—and which is grossly unfair to ratepayers? When the Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc. (Scotland) Bill is passed, everybody will be eternally grateful for the early introduction of a similar Bill for England and Wales.

Mr. Ridley: My hon. Friend is quite right. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) must not draw attention to people who are not in the Chamber.

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) understands very little indeed. He even gave a press conference yesterday announcing his decision that the Government would not appeal against the Greenwich judgment. I have not heard one word of abject apology, which is what is needed, from the hon. Gentleman. I should be grateful if in future he would leave statements on behalf of my Department to me. It will be many years before he has an opportunity to have anything to say on behalf of any Government Department.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): How many court cases has the Secretary of State now lost while he has held various ministerial positions? Was it because of his incompetence that he was sacked by the previous Conservative party leader in the early 1970s, or were there other reasons of which we are not aware?

Mr. Ridley: On the latter point, the hon. Gentleman is wrong. I resigned. On his first point, I do not keep the statistics for which he asks, but I believe that a question about that subject was answered quite recently.

Mr. John Heddle (Mid-Staffordshire): I accept that my right hon. Friend's statement relates to London, but does he agree that there is something rotten in the state of local government when the Leader of the Opposition's local authority—Ealing—meets tonight to set a rate which is about 80 per cent. higher than last year's and when the chairman of the independent Audit Commission identifies eight Labour-controlled inner-London boroughs which are inefficient and profligate? Does my right hon. Friend agree that now is the time for a root and branch reform of the local government finance system?

Mr. Ridley: My hon. Friend is right. This rate support grant system has got to be replaced. The Leader of the Opposition will be one of our most enthusiastic supporters when we introduce a new system, because it will save him an absolute packet of his good money which the borough in which he lives wastes in the profligate manner that my hon. Friend described. I understand that Ealing is to increase its rates by about 80 per cent. That, not the system, is the real disgrace.

Several Hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind the House that we are operating under a timetable today. I shall allow questions to run for a further four minutes and then I will call the Front Benches.

Mr. Eric Deakins (Walthamstow): What will be the impact on the rate-making process in London boroughs which are affected adversely or advantageously by the court judgment if the Secretary of State wins his appeal after rate notices have gone out to ratepayers?

Mr. Ridley: The rates will have to be set long before it is likely that any judgment will come from the Court of Appeal. The rates will therefore have to be set on the basis of the new figures that I am publishing and sending to local authorities today. If there is a change in those figures, due to the result of the appeal court's judgment, adjustments will have to be made in the first supplementary report, or, possibly, the second supplementary report. The hon. Gentleman knows full well that grant figures are adjusted in supplementary reports year after year. We are still dealing with supplementary reports for several years ago.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): Does the Secretary of State agree that the Government have denied millions of pounds to ratepayers in Waltham Forest and elsewhere? Does he further agree that the Government have penalised especially heavily Labour-controlled councils which are trying to make good the problems that they inherited from their Tory predecessors who left the financial cupboard bare? How much will Waltham Forest get back because of the court action taken by a Labour-controlled council?

Mr. Ridley: I do not think that has anything to do with the statement. The borough of Waltham Forest is barely affected and the hon. Gentleman's question was not about that. I can confirm, however, that he is living in an extremely inefficient and extravagant borough which is increasing its rates by, I think, 68 per cent. for no good reason whatever.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): Does the Secretary of State agree that, following this week's statement on local government and local government finance, he should take this opportunity to consider resigning? Should the Secretary of State not step back, without falling over, and seriously consider stopping this vendetta against local government? The only thing wrong with local government is central Government. We should return to the sensible financial arrangements that we had prior to 1979.

Mr. Ridley: On this occasion the London borough of Greenwich is conducting a vendetta against other boroughs. It is trying to extract money for grant to boroughs that do not need to spend it. That has nothing to do with me and I am not responsible for the actions that have been taken. The result of the judgment leaves an inequitable situation.

Mr. Nick Raynsford (Fulham): Instead of giving waffling and evasive answers, interspersed with political propaganda, will the Secretary of State tell the House precisely what the financial impact of the statement that he has made today will be on the London borough of Hammersmith and Fulham? If he is not in a position to give that statement clearly and unequivocally, will he admit that that is the product of his own and his

[Mr. Nick Raynsford]

predecessor's absurdly complex system of local government finance which would make Byzantium look simplicity itself by comparison?

Mr. Ridley: The London borough of Hammersmith and Fulham is not affected in any way by the statement that I have made. The hon. Gentleman can quickly check that when he considers the papers that are in the Vote Office. There may be a small effect on the borough, but it will certainly not be a major one.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): Is the Secretary of State serious in describing proceedings before courts of law in this country as vendettas? Does he not understand that vendettas are carried out by the Mafia in Italy as an alternative to court proceedings? Is he trying to suggest that the learned judge in the court, Mr. Justice Taylor, is to be likened to a Mafia boss? Is that his view and his contempt for the judicial processes of this land? Will he confirm that Greenwich and every other borough has a right to take the Secretary of State to court for his failure to observe the law? Does he agree that another reason why he has been so rattled today is that he had to explain to the Prime Minister this morning that Barnet was to lose more than £1 million as a result of his failure, Bexley £500,000, Bromley more than £3 million, Kingston £1·5 million, Merton £600,000, Harrow £1 million and Redbridge £1 million? Finally, will the Secretary of State stop squealing, because once again he has been found out by the court, and accept the word of the judge in that court that he had been
"hoist with his own petard"?

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Gentleman's comments go very close to prejudicing the appeal. He is quite wrong to come to conclusions about the eventual decision in this matter, which is now before the Appeal Court. I was accused of pursuing a vendetta against local government. If that colourful language is not thought to be offensive when it is used against me, I can hardly believe that the London borough of Greenwich would feel it offensive if I described it in that way. The borough has every right to go to court, as I said earlier, but it is going to court not to my disadvantage or loss, but to the disadvantage and loss of other boroughs in London. As I have said, it has created an inequitable situation in those boroughs.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. As we share the same legislative root, may I ask what doubts this raises about the legal basis of the Welsh rate support grant? Have not the Welsh local authorities reached the most sensitive time for their rate-setting duties?

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the hon. Gentleman has a long list of questions, he must take them up with the Department concerned. It really is not a matter for me. On a point of order, he should ask me whether there will be a statement, or something like that.

Mr. Jones: I was about to make my point of order, Mr. Speaker. In the absence of the Secretary of State for Wales, who should have been here showing courtesy to the House and who should have made a statement about the consequences of this serious statement, is it possible for the Secretary of State to come to the House and make a statement, tell us where we stand in respect of the rate support grant in Wales and say whether any changes are to be made? The Secretary of State for Wales is a Cabinet sidekick of the Secretary of State for the Environment, and we have lost confidence in him.

Mr. Speaker: That comment will have been heard by the Front Bench. Patently, these are not matters for me. I cannot answer whether Wales will be affected. That is not a matter of order.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I apologise for being late for the statement that was important for my constituents. I should like to explain to you, Mr. Speaker, and to the House——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must not do that. I should have called him if he had been here.

Mr. Donald Coleman (Neath): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. The Secretary of State for Wales left the Chamber without staying to hear what the implications would be for Wales, and that is a discourtesy to the Chamber.

Mr. Speaker: That is not a matter of order, and it is not a matter for me.

BILLS PRESENTED

Landlord and Tenant (No. 2)

Mr. Secretary Ridley, supported by Mr. Secretary Hurd, Mr. Secretary Edwards, Mr. John MacGregor, Mr. John Patten and Mr. Richard Tracey, presented a Bill to confer on tenants of flats rights with respect to the acquisition by them of their landlord's reversion; to make provision for the appointment of a manager at the instance of such tenants and for the variation of long leases held by such tenants; to make further provision with respect to service charges payable by tenants of flats and other dwellings; to make other provisions with respect to such tenants; to make further provision with respect to the permissible purposes and objects of registered housing associations as regards the management of leasehold property; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 98.]

Control of Mergers (Wales)

Mr. Dafydd Wigley, supported by Mr. D. E. Thomas, presented a Bill to rename the Welsh Industrial Development Advisory Board; and to make provision as to its functions in relation to the monitoring of mergers in Wales, industrial policy, and other matters: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 3 April and to be printed. [Bill 101.]

Control of Mergers (Scotland)

Mr. Gordon Wilson, supported by Mr. Donald Stewart, presented a Bill to provide control of merger situations affecting Scotland; to rename the Scottish Industrial Development Advisory Board; to make provision as to the functions of a Scottish Mergers Board and the monitoring of industrial policy and other matters: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 24 April and to be printed. [Bill 102.]

Orders of the Day

Abolition of Domestic Rates etc. (Scotland) Bill

[2ND ALLOTTED DAY]

As amended (in the Standing Committee), further considered.

Schedule 2

LEVY, COLLECTION, PAYMENT AND RECOVERY OF COMMUNITY CHARGES

Amendment made: No. 130, in page 31, line 41 after 'standard', insert 'community'.—*[Mr. Ancram.]*

4.48 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Michael Ancram): I beg to move amendment No. 131, in page 32, line 14, at end insert—

'(1A) Where a levying authority are satisfied that a person liable to pay a community charge in respect of a financial year has (for whatever reason) not been issued with a demand notice in respect of that liability they shall, notwithstanding that the date prescribed under sub-paragraph (1) above in relation to that year has passed, cause a demand notice to be issued to him.'.

This amendment corrects an omission from the Bill. Subparagraph (1) of paragraph 2 of schedule 2 to the Bill provides for the issue of demand notices in respect of community charge liabilities before such date in relation to each financial year as may be prescribed. This provision is adequate for the ordinary case of demand notices issued in relation to a liability starting on 1 April for payment for one of the community charges by a person who is already registered as liable at the prescribed date. However, there will be circumstances in which it will not be possible for an authority to issue demand notices at the prescribed date — most obviously, in relation to liability for the personal community charge which only arises later in the financial year as someone moves into the area from elsewhere. The amendment therefore provides that where a person liable to pay community charge has not been issued with a demand notice after the prescribed date a demand notice should nevertheless be issued to him.

This is a reasonable amendment and I hope that the House will support it.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 132, in page 33, line 13, leave out 'any instalment' and insert 'the instalments'.

No. 133, in page 33, line 14, leave out 'this paragraph' and insert 'sub-paragraph (1) above'.—*[Mr. Lennox-Boyd.]*

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Ian Lang): I beg to move amendment No. 134, in page 33, line 36 leave out sub-paragraph (9) and insert—

'(9) Where—

(a) a community charge is payable by a person in accordance with sub-paragraphs (1) to (8) above;

(b) any three instalments thereof are due but unpaid; and

(c) the levying authority give the person notice in writing of the effect of this sub-paragraph.

then, if these instalments have not been paid within seven days of the sending of that notice, the whole amount of that charge for the financial year in respect of which it was imposed shall, so far as not paid, thereupon become payable by him.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take the following amendments: Government amendment No. 135,

Amendment No. 168, in page 33, line 47 leave out paragraph 5 and insert—

'(5) The levying authority may make arrangements with any housing body for the community charge of a tenant and spouse to be collected by that housing body.'.

Government amendments Nos. 136 and No. 137.

Mr. Lang: The first and fourth of these amendments, Nos. 134 and 137, relate to sub-paragraph (9) of paragraph 4 of the schedule. The paragraph gives those liable to pay the community charge a right to pay by 12 monthly instalments. The effect of sub-paragraph (9) is that where an individual is three months in arrears he loses the right to pay by instalments and becomes liable to pay the whole of the amount outstanding both for the period of arrears and for the remainder of the financial year. This provision parallels the present situation in regard to rates, where individuals have the right to pay by 10 monthly instalments, five in the first half of the year and five in the second. If an individual is four months in arrears at the mid-point of the financial year—that is, at the end of September—he loses the right to pay by instalments and becomes liable to pay the whole amount.

In consultation with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities officials last summer, the need to maintain this provision and adapt it to the circumstances of the community charge was clearly identified. It was argued that it would be unrealistic to provide that, where substantial arrears arose and the local authority had to go to the trouble and expense of taking legal action to recover the debt, it could proceed only for the precise sum outstanding. It would often be fairly clear that recovery of that amount, while at the same time securing normal payment of the remaining instalments, was simply not a practical proposition. In such circumstances, as happens with rates at present, the first step would be for the local authority to offer rescheduled payment arrangements aimed at recovering the sum outstanding and the amount of community charge due for the remainder of the year by somewhat higher instalments.

Only if that approach failed would the authority normally take legal action and once again it makes sound common sense for the relevant warrant to refer not just to the arrears but to the sum due for the remainder of the year so that a sensible schedule of payments can be worked out. The advice of COSLA officials was that in the circumstances of the community charge it would be more appropriate to have a shorter period of delay than under the rating system where, effectively, nothing can be done until the half-year stage.

So much for the background to the provisions of paragraph 4(9). When this was considered in Committee the point was made that it was unreasonable to take action on the lines implied in the sub-paragraph without giving people due warning. On consideration, the Government accept that there is a valid point here, and the amendments seek to meet it. Thus, amendment No. 134 provides that the local authority must give notice in writing and that the provisions of the sub-paragraph shall not become operative until one week after that notice has been given. It is a matter of judgment how long the period of notice

[Mr. Lang]

should be, and in considering the adequacy of the proposed period of one week account must be taken of the fact that the existence of arrears will, in most normal cases, not be news to the individual involved—nor, indeed, in most cases will the consequences of not paying up be news to him or her. On the other hand, it is important that local authorities should not be unduly handicapped in their attempts to get the money in. We consider that one week strikes a reasonable balance.

Amendment No. 137 sets out to achieve the same result in relation to housing bodies collecting the community charge from those resident in houses which they own. In such cases, the responsibility for taking legal action for debt recovery will rest not with the housing body but with the levying authority — that is to say, the regional council. But since day-to-day contact with the community charge payer—or, in this case, non-payer—will be a matter for the housing body, it seems sensible to provide that it is the latter who should give notice. The technical difference between amendment No. 137 and amendment No. 134 is that, because the collection arrangements by housing bodies are not tied to 12 monthly instalments but are designed to provide greater flexibility, the amendment cannot simply refer to three monthly instalments, but refers instead to one quarter of a year's liability for the community charge. I consider that these amendments represent a sensible response to a reasonable point raised in Committee which I recall undertaking to reflect on, and I commend them to the House.

Amendment No. 135 addresses a problem which was identified in Committee. It has always been envisaged that where some difficulty was encountered with the normal instalment arrangements for payment of a community charge the remainder of the charge could be rescheduled by agreement between the person liable and the levying authority. Thus, if someone started to pay a personal community charge by 12 monthly instalments, but got into arrears, it should be possible for the authority to reach agreement with him to reschedule the outstanding debt before any question of formal recovery procedures arose.

Concern was expressed in Committee that the Bill as drafted would not allow for this. The amendment meets the point by providing that sub-paragraph (10) of paragraph 4 of schedule 2, which suspends the ordinary instalment arrangements in cases where agreement to that effect has been reached between the person liable and the levying authority, applies to cases not only of a community charge for the whole year but to any outstanding balance of it. It thus puts beyond doubt the fact that levying authorities will be able to enter into informal arrangements for debt rescheduling with persons liable for community charge payments.

Amendment No. 136 remedies an omission in the Bill. It has always been intended that housing bodies, when they collect personal community charge payments from people resident in the houses they let, should determine the instalment arrangements which will apply. The ordinary instalment arrangements for community charge payment are disapplied in these cases by sub-paragraph (10)*(b)* of paragraph 4 of the schedule. In the Bill as drafted, however, there is no explicit provision for instalment arrangements when a personal community charge is payable to a housing body. The amendment remedies this omission. It will be for housing bodies to determine what instalment arrangements are most appropriate. In the case of tenants, it may well be that they will wish to collect personal community charges at the same time as rent, and institute parallel arrangements for the collection of personal community charges from non-tenants who are resident in the houses they let. But that will be a matter for them to decide in the light of operational considerations.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): First, I welcome amendment No. 134, as it is in line with what we said in Committee. Normally, if a Minister has anxieties he expresses them in Committee and does something about them on Report. My memory may be shorter than the Minister's, but I do not recall him saying anything at that time.

Amendment No. 168 deals with paragraph 5 of schedule 2 which lays on the district authority and other housing bodies — the Scottish Special Housing Association and the new town development corporations —the responsibility for collecting the personal community charge from all who are resident in houses that they own. It is worth spelling out what that means.

At present housing bodies collect rent and rates from their tenants or joint tenants. In other words, someone who rents a house from a local authority pays rent and rates at the same time. That is provided for under the Housing (Amendment) (Scotland) Act 1976 and it is a duty laid on housing bodies. However, there is a clear difference between a personal community charge and rates.

The Bill seeks to set up a different tax system from the present one. The whole idea is to break the link between tax and property. It is justifiable to say that rent, which is a charge on a property—one pays rent for the use of the property—and rates, which are a charge on the property for the services provided to that property, may be collected together, and it is perhaps right that they should be paid by the tenant in one bill. Indeed, if there are rent and rate arrears, a local authority may take the tenant to court on both sets of arrears jointly. However, what the Government are doing is completely different. They are saying that a personal community charge is the responsibility of each individual and has nothing to do with the house in which he lives. Individuals will pay it wherever they live. Therefore, in principle it seems wrong, especially if the Government are to be consistent, to keep this link between tax and property.

This measure will create enormous administrative problems for the district authority and other housing bodies. In Committee the Minister made it absolutely clear that the housing authority could not collect this sum with the same bill, even from its tenants and those paying rent, but had to send two separate bills. The Minister is nodding. Therefore, the housing authority must set up a collection service for this particular community charge.

5 pm

Mr. Jim Craigen (Glasgow, Maryhill): My hon. Friend must not look for consistency in the Government's position. Has he managed to elicit from the Minister any indication of the extra cost that will fall on local authorities, the Scottish Special Housing Association and other housing bodies because of administration?

Mr. Maxton: No. Throughout the whole Committee stage we kept pressing for the costs of collection. We found it impossible to get an answer. The Ministers said they had

to consult the local authorities and other bodies before they would know exactly the final cost. My hon. Friend is right. There will be great expense.

First, the housing authority will have to establish a collection service for the personal community charge separate from collection of rents. We are talking about not just tenants or joint tenants and their spouses but about every person who lives in a local authority house—the children, grandparents, grandchildren of tenants, lodgers, and other people as well. The Government estimate that 350,000 or 400,000 people live in local authority housing who are not responsible for paying rent or rates but from whom the local authority will have to collect. Over half the people who live in council houses at present are non-ratepayers, and the Government will have to collect from them by a totally separate system.

That will be very expensive. The housing authority is being given no powers to take action against anyone who falls into arrears. Collection of arrears goes immediately to the levying authority, which is the regional authority. There is a clear differentiation between people who live in council houses and those who live in other types of housing. The Minister, explaining this in Committee, said that part of the community charge goes to the district anyway, so it is right that the tenants and those who live there should be responsible for payment.

I pointed out that everyone, whether living in a council house or not, pays a portion of the community charge to the district. No one except council house occupiers will pay anything else directly to the district. They pay to the regional levying authority. The Government admit that for the regions to establish machinery to collect the personal community charge will be much more expensive than the collection of rates.

The Minister is shaking his head. I have never heard any denial that this process will be a much more expensive procedure to establish than the collection of rates—*[Interruption.]* I thought that the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth) wanted local government costs to be kept down. It would be cheaper to make the region responsible for the collection of all community charges and not create a second tier of bureaucracy for the collection of the community charge from people in district authority housing.

Two separate authorities will have to be established with their own systems of bureaucracy to collect this tax. That is part of the administrative nightmare that has emerged in debate on the Bill, which I am delighted to see reinforced by a document published by the Tory Reform Group, which has used that same expression. Part of the administrative nightmare is the peculiarity of having the district collecting the tax. The district authority does not have responsibility for anybody but its own tenants; therefore, it should not be asked to take on the job of collecting the tax.

Following the Government's logic behind the Bill, why not introduce legislation to enable the local authority to collect electricity bills for the electricity board, gas bills for the gas board, telephone bills for the telephone companies, or TV licences? I could go through a whole list of housing-related services, the bills for which, on the logic of this measure, could very well be collected by the local authority.

The amendment at least allows local authorities to take that decision whether or not tenants and their spouses might pay the community charge jointly with their rent. That is something for local authorities only to decide. The Government make great play of wanting to see bureaucracy reduced in local government. They ought to look again at this part of the Bill and consider my amendment seriously.

Mr. Barry Henderson (Fife, North East): I was delighted to hear that the hon. Gentleman seemed to be advocating the whole concept of contracting out of services where that would be most effective.

Mr. Hugh Brown (Glasgow, Provan): I draw attention to the fact that since the Committee stage we have had what I regard as one of the best submissions on the Bill from the Rating and Valuation Association, representing the views of the Scottish branch, which includes housing authorities, local government and people in the business of valuation. I do not suppose the Minister will accept the amendment, even at this late stage of the proceedings. Whether the amendment is defective or not I do not know, but I cannot understand why the Government do not take on board the philosophy of trying, wherever possible, to make a clean break from the established practice of collection of rates. This is a whole new tax.

This is not a region versus district argument, but why not use a wee bit of imagination and leave to it to the regional authorities, which are the levying authorities? They would obviously consult district authorities if that was thought to be desirable. Why not leave to those bodies the decision on the best way of levying and collecting this tax. I hope the Minister has read the submission. The worst aspect of dealing with two Ministers is that we are never sure who is dealing with it or who has done all the homework. — [AN HON. MEMBER: "Do not be patronising."] I am not being patronising. I know the difficulty only too well when one is not entirely in charge of a Bill.

Paragraph 15.3 of the document, which I assume has been read by the Minister, states:

> "The collection of community charges from residents in Housing Body houses generated considerable debate among Forum members. Presumably, the Government's intention in placing a duty on housing bodies to collect rates from residents in their houses is that the tenant's charge would be collected with rent and a separate bill (the demand notice) would be issued to non-tenants. This intent is surprising in the light of the Government's philosophy that Community Charges are personal taxes as opposed to property taxes."

That seems to fit in with my idea. Whether the Government will have the power over the next two or three years to change this is a matter for debate; but if they do have that power, why not use it and take the opportunity to make a clean break from the existing practice of the collection of rent and rates by housing bodies? This is a new tax with a different purpose. It will be levied on more people directly and individually. Therefore, this seems a good opportunity to make a clean break.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) has referred to the electricity boards. I am just guessing, but I do not suppose that there is a single house in Scotland that does not have electricity and an electricity bill to pay. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) is muttering something. Have I said something wrong?

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): Not all houses have electricity.

Mr. Brown: Some of the hon. Gentleman's farm cottages still have oil lamps, and I suppose that is a

[Mr. Brown]

reflection on rural landlords. My hon. Friend the Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) had better not say anything, although I suppose all his tenants have an electricity supply. Why not use the electricity boards to collect this money? The boards cover all houses. That would be an easier way of doing it than having more than 40 housing bodies in Scotland involved in collecting the money.

From whom will the money be collected? Will it be collected from the tenant, the tenant and his wife jointly, and severally from other individuals as well? I do not think that this has been thought out.

Mr. Michael Forsyth (Stirling): The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting and exciting suggestion. If the responsibility is on the regional authority, on his reading of the Bill what objection would there be if it decided to contract out the service to the electricity board? Surely there would be nothing to prevent the authority from doing that?

Mr. Brown: I have an open mind on the matter. I cannot see any ideological reason—if that is what the hon. Gentleman is trying to extract from me — or practical reason why the levying and collecting authority should not use any means that it wants to use to collect the money. I am saying that it is not the responsibility of a housing authority. The Government should make a clean break with the existing practice. I think that the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities wants it left to the discretion of local authorities. I do not know whether I am right in that, because I have forgotten whether we got submissions from COSLA about that. I hope the Minister will at least give some assurance that in consultation he will be willing to look at this.

It is almost impossible to go back over all the suggestions that I and other Committee members made. The Bill might go through, but, even at this late stage, will he consider with the relevant authorities whether there is merit in the suggestion of leaving it entirely to the levying and collecting authority to decide, after consultation, the best way to approach the matter?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) spoke about what I had or had not said in Committee when dealing with matters covered by the earlier Government amendments. By implication, he accused me of discourtesy for failing to show a degree of understanding of his point. For the sake of the record, I draw his attention to column 1155 of the Committee proceedings on 12 February. Admittedly not in response to arguments by him but in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Corrie), I said:

"My initial resistance to the amendment was diffident, as there is something in the case of the hon. Member for Cathcart. Mine was perhaps a probing resistance.

If the hon. Member for Cathcart will withdraw his amendment, I shall reflect on the points that have been made and see whether it is possible to find a form of wording that will ensure that a person is made fully aware of his debt." —[*Official Report, First Scottish Standing Committee*, 12 February 1987; c.1155.]

I do not think that I could have trailed my sympathy for his case more clearly than that.

5.15 pm

Mr. Maxton: I unreservedly withdraw any remark that I made against the hon. Gentleman. It was said in the Committee that the hon. Gentleman had considerably more grace than his hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Ancram)

Mr. Lang: I hope that my subsequent remarks in the debate will not ruin my record. I might even suffer the fate that I suffered from the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan), who said that he could do business with me.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): Will the Minister say whether he or any of his Front Bench colleagues are now or ever have been associated with the Tory Reform Group?

Mr. Lang: I am a broad member of a broad church in this party. I am not a member of the Tory Reform Group.

Amendment No. 168 would change the arrangements whereby housing bodies, district councils, the Scottish Special Housing Association and new town corporations would be required by the Bill to collect the personal community charge payable by residents in houses let to them. The amendment would make such arrangements subject to the discretion of the levying authority, and would restrict them to the collection of the personal community charges of tenants and their spouses. As the hon. Member for Cathcart said, these issues were fully debated in Committee and I accept that he persists in a different view from that expressed by the Government at that time.

At present, housing bodies are responsible for collecting the rates along with the rent on houses let by them. In considering the arrangements for the collection of personal community charges from people living in council houses and similar accommodation, it seems sensible that housing authorities should continue to deal with the personal community charge liability of the present rateable occupiers of their houses and the spouses of such people.

The amendment raises three questions — whether these arrangements should be mandatory, or, as the amendment proposes, at the discretion of the levying authority, and whether housing bodies should be required or enabled to collect the personal community charge from people living in the houses which they let, other than tenants and spouses. On the question whether the arrangements should be mandatory or discretionary, we think that the advantages of certainty about how the system should operate outweigh the argument that some flexibility would be desirable.

As I shall mention again later, the arrangements that we propose broadly allow for the equal division of the burden of collection of personal community charges between districts and regions. There is clear advantage in that provision being set up throughout the country. The hon. Member for Cathcart spoke about administrative complications. It was precisely with that in mind that we decided on a sensible approach. I am reluctant to accept that different arrangements should apply in different areas.

Mr. Craigen: Ministers have always said that this is a personal tax and not an in-house tax. They do not accept that there are likely to be more administrative difficulties under the new system than there are under the existing system. Therefore, why is he so resistant to a discretionary arrangement in this instance?

Mr. Lang: Administrative simplicity and certainty are better secured by the approach that we are taking. The Opposition constantly raise the bogy of administrative difficulties. They are overstating those difficulties and in Committee it became increasingly apparent that the administration will not be as complicated as they fear.

Mr. Maxton: The Minister will admit that housing authorities cannot use exactly the same system to collect the personal community charge as they use to collect rents. Therefore, each housing authority will have to establish a collection service for the personal community charge. If that is the case, how can he possibly say that there will not be a large administrative cost and large numbers of people employed to administer the scheme?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman raises undue difficulties. Of course the system is different and is not a direct parallel to the collection of rents. In administrative terms it is sensible to take the approach that we are taking, because it will be less complicated than the hon. Gentleman anticipates and there will be far greater overlap in the administration than he suggests.

The right hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Millan) asked about the Rating and Valuation Association's submission. I should certainly be willing to consider further the association's comments to see whether there is substance in them. On the matter of whether all residents in local authority and similar houses should have the personal community charge collected by housing bodies, we must consider, first, the extent to which this would as a matter of principle be a sensible arrangement, and certainly we would need to consider the caseload involved.

As a matter of principle, a decision must be taken as to whether non-dependants who are living in council houses should be dealt with, for community charge purposes, by the levying authority—the regional council in the two-tier areas—or the housing bodies. In all cases, these people will represent a new group, since they will not, at present, be responsible for making any payment towards local taxation.

We have taken the view that it would be sensible for housing bodies, rather than the regional council, as levying authority, to have the responsibility for collecting the personal community charge in such cases. There are two main reasons for that. First, it would be strange if non-dependents in council houses were to receive community charge bills from a different authority from the tenants and their spouses, and they then had to pay the personal community charge by a different instalment system from that which applies to tenants and their spouses. That would lead to confusion in people's minds as to what the personal community charge was and when payments became due.

Secondly, housing bodies will already have some information—I accept, not comprehensive information—on non-dependants living in houses, since they are already responsible for administering housing benefit. The presence of non-dependants is relevant to the assessment for housing benefit purposes of the tenant. If an argument is a good one, it bears repetition, but obviously it has not got through to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton).

I accept that these arguments, although strong, are not conclusive, and I would have been prepared to consider whether the personal community charges of non-dependants in council houses should be collected by the levying authority if it had been clearly shown that the other arrangement would have radically altered the balance of responsibility for collection of local tax payments as between the two tiers of local government. That is not the case at present.

Of the 2 million ratepayers in Scotland, slightly fewer than 1 million live in council houses and have their rates collected by housing bodies. We estimate that, of the total number of non-dependents in Scotland from whom the personal community charge will have to be collected, about half live in council houses. Thus, if the responsibility for collection is to be divided in the manner that we propose, housing bodies will continue to be responsible for just under half of the total caseload. We consider that that is fair and equitable. It reinforces our conclusion that the division that we have proposed is right.

I must resist the hon. Gentleman's amendment and urge the House to support the Government's amendment.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 135, in page 33, line 40, after 'charge', insert

'(or any outstanding balance thereof)'.

No. 136, in page 34, line 4, at end insert

'in such instalments and at such times as the housing body may determine'.

No. 137, in page 34, line 19, at end insert—

'(4A) Where—

(a) a community charge payable by a person in accordance with this paragraph is payable by instalments.

(b) instalments amounting to a quarter or more of that charge are due but unpaid; and

(c) the housing body give the person notice in writing of the effect of this sub-paragraph,

then, if these instalments have not been paid within seven days of the sending of that notice, the whole amount of that charge for the financial year in respect of which it was imposed shall, so far as not paid, become payable by him.'.—*[Mr. Ancram.]*

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): I beg to move amendment No. 169, in page 35, line 20, leave out paragraph 7.

As the House will have gathered—this is not a complex matter—this amendment deals with the collection of the community charge. We tabled the amendment because we wish to ask some questions and get some further advice from the Minister about the recovery of arrears, which is a controversial matter and one which has raised a good deal of foreboding among many people who have a good deal of experience in this sector. Clearly we do not expect the Minister to remove the power to collect arrears; that would be going a little too far, although a more adequate measure might be put in at another stage if this amendment were accepted.

Our main purpose is to find out a little about a subject which is fraught with difficulty. I do not say that in a sarcastic manner, but there are problems involved.

The main way in which community charge arrears will be gathered is by use of the summary warrant. The Minister will say, almost certainly, that that is a well-tried procedure which has been used in the case of rates arrears for a long time and which has led to few problems. As the Minister will appreciate, the community charge is a substantial matter. It is difficult to make estimates, but the Society of Messengers-at-Arms and Sheriff Officers, in a memorandum, considered that the increase in warrants

[Mr. Donald Dewar]

would be fourfold. We shall be talking about a large number of warrants. Summary warrants will be flying around all over the place. The question is, once they have been issued, can and how will they be enforced?

The Minister would make great virtue of the fact that an enormous number of people are being brought into the local taxation system for the first time. Not only are they large in number; they are mobile in a sense that a householder is not. One of the virtues of rates—even those who are glorying in the possibility of the domestic rates system being abolished will accept this—is that they are easy to collect because they are a tax on property, which, by and large, is static. Therefore, the number of people involved is limited to the householder, who is tied to the house. The amount of money involved is likely to be higher in each case than with the community charge.

The community charge will have a scatter effect which, I suspect, will produce a large number of cases of arrears, some of which will involve extremely small amounts. We are thus in a completely different situation in terms of practicalities. That destroys the perhaps too easy answer that we are creating fears where they need not be because we are using an existing system which is familiar to all rating authorities.

I want to stress the point about the amount of the community charge. It is not just that the community charge will be smaller than the average rates bill but paid by a larger number of people, but in many cases—not necessarily because of this reform but because of the activities of the Department of Health and Social Security—people will face the prospect of paying only 20 per cent. of the community charge. No one knows the exact figure, but that is the rule of thumb that even Ministers have been using for illustrative purposes. Therefore, it is not unfair to advance that example.

In my constituency, probably more than 50 or 60 per cent. of the adult population will qualify for some form of rebate, and many of them will be paying as little as 20 per cent. Therefore, we are looking at a proliferation and multiplicity of debts that may, in the early days of the community charge system, the early 1990s, merely be debts of £30, £40 or £50. The problems that that will create will be considerable.

It may be even more complicated than that. The Minister will recognise that, and I hope that he will say how he expects it to be dealt with. I am sorry to take a parochial example, but it is one that is familiar to me. I represent and live in a constituency on the edge of Glasgow. It is often referred to as a peripheral housing estate. There is an enormous amount of coming and going between, for example, the Drumchapel housing estate and Clydebank. That takes the form of social movement and, in the good old days, it used to take the form of employment movement. A large number of my constituents used to work for Singer sewing machines, for example, and in the yards at Clydebank, UIE and John Brown.

It is not unusual—I frequently come across this—for families to be split between Clydebank and my part of Glasgow. It is not uncommon for a youngster to move, for no sinister purpose—I am not trying to construct a conspiracy to avoid the poll tax—between his grandparents in Clydebank and his parents or other members of the family in Garscadden. The result of that may be that someone will be due to pay 20 per cent. of his poll tax for two thirds of the year in Glasgow and one third of the year in Clydebank.

We are thus talking about the apportionment of a small percentage of only part of the poll tax in each area. Presumably the debt still has to be honoured. It may be, for various reasons, that the debt will not be honoured. That may be more due to inattention and carelessness or a failure to have due regard to the provisions of section 20 of what will by then be the Act. That will throw up substantial problems of recovery, which the Government have brushed aside with the suggestion that we are squawking a little too much about something which, with a little ingenuity, could be handled comfortably. However, I want to make it clear now that I do not think that it will be handled very comfortably indeed. I invite the Minister to look at these matters again with some care, and, I hope, some sympathy.

I was not a member of the Committee which considered the Bill. Inevitably, someone in that position tends to drop out of the day-to-day developments in the argument and I make no apology for that. However, problems still remain and it would be useful if the Minister addressed himself to some of them.

As I understand it, it is proposed that a summary warrant will be applied for. The levying authority will apply to the sheriff asserting that there is a debt. It will have to establish, presumably by means of recorded delivery slips and so on, that written notice has been given to the debtor requiring payment within 14 days and that that period has expired without payment being made before it can go ahead.

5.30 pm

That is rather more plausible as a method when talking about one householder in a house which is his residence. It is much more difficult to be satisfied that that message has been delivered to the 19 or 20-year-old who may be working on a building site but whose home may originally have been, and may nominally still be, 15 Smith street or 63 Brown street, or wherever the bill has been sent. There will be considerable difficulties in establishing beyond doubt and satisfactorily that written notice has reached the young person concerned. No doubt the Minister dealt with that point in Committee, but I am not entirely happy that that will be as watertight as some of us would like.

There is little doubt that the summary warrant will be issued if application is made, but then there will be the problem of enforcing it and what diligence is used. The methods are:

"*(a)* a poinding and sale;

(b) an arrestment and action of furthcoming or sale."

I can remember—this was referred to in our debates before the Bill was discussed in Committee—that considerable reservations were expressed by the Society of Messengers-at-Arms and Sheriff Officers about the present legal situation. The Minister may be able to assure me that those have been fully dealt with, but they are worth mentioning in passing. The practical one is simply identifying the goods that can be poinded. It is not always immediately obvious what is owned by a householder and what may be owned by the rest of the family—the young man concerned or by his siblings. It will be extremely difficult for the sheriff officers to act in such circumstances.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): A further point occurs to me, which may have been dealt with in Committee. Under the present rating system, if a summary warrant is sought the jurisdiction for the sheriff granting that is heritable property within his jurisdiction. As the community charge is a personal matter, has the hon. Gentleman or the Minister given any thought to what the basis of jurisdiction will be if the person upon whom the community charge is exigible as levied is no longer within the shrieval jurisdiction?

Mr. Dewar: That is the sort of exchange that makes me regret that I was not a member of the Committee. I probably have not given enough thought to that. It is an interesting point. It puts rather more neatly what I was fumbling towards when I referred to the difficulties of ensuring that the 14-day notice has been served on someone who may not be at home or may be moving between a variety of different premises.

Furthermore, there is the problem, as I said, once we get to that stage, of identifying the goods. No doubt the sheriff officers' point has been answered, but I remember that they had some doubts about their legal right forcibly to enter premises. That was based upon the fact the debtor was the householder. I am not sure whether that point has been adequately met, but I have no doubt that the Minister will be able to reassure me on that.

Let me move on to one of the main issues that I wish to raise. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Brown) that we had a useful memorandum from the Rating and Valuation Association quite late in the day—it was dated 13 February. I know that the Government will not dissent from that because the Secretary of State was praying it in aid yesterday as an example of support for his amendment introducing the clean break and getting rid of the transitional period.

In its memorandum the Rating and Valuation Association raises several general and specific points about the collection and recovery of arrears which we are entitled to put to the Minister because they arise in the paragraph that the amendment seeks to excise. Let me remind the Minister that paragraph 16(5) of the memorandum says:

"The Government should be in no doubt that the relative yield from Community Charges will be considerably less than that from Domestic Rates. Community Charges will be easily avoided and considerably more expensive to collect than domestic rates."

We should always bear that point in mind because it strikes at the certainty of revenue expectation for the local authority and it adds considerably to the administrative costs.

Many of the calculations that Ministers have been making, assuming that the community charge was in operation in the current year, have, I suspect, been based on optimistic assumptions of what the yield and collection will be. I suspect that a considerably higher community charge would have to be imposed to allow for the almost inevitable shortfall given the sort of complications and difficulties to which I have been referring. Certainly the Rating and Valuation Association has no doubt that that is a considerable problem.

In paragraph 15(4) of its memorandum, the Rating and Valuation Association says:

"It is considered that recovery of Community Charges will be considerably more difficult than recovery of rates, particularly from non-tenants/owners (especially those in receipt of unemployment and supplementary benefit, many of whom will have little or no poindable assets. The Government's stated intention is that everyone will be expected to pay a minimum of 20 per cent. of the charge; if this is truly the intention, local authorities will require the power to arrest unemployment, supplementary and other state benefits or alternatively statutory provision being made to allow, at the request of the local authority, deduction at source of community charges from state benefits. If either of these alternatives are not acceptable it is considered that recovery of community charges from such cases will prove to be virtually impossible."

"Virtually impossible" is strong language from a rather sober group of people.

I had correspondence with the Secretary of State on this matter at the beginning and he made it clear to me—I presume that there has been no change in the official position—that there was no question of, for example, compulsory deduction from benefit at the request of the local authority; that any such arrangement would have to be voluntary, entered into after arrears had arisen, and there would be no question of it being done unilaterally by the local authority on the basis of a summary warrant. I also understand that there would be no possibility either of arrestment of benefit which would clearly be an extraordinarily serious matter given the financial circumstances of people who are dependent upon benefit.

I am not trying to misrepresent the Minister's position. I presume that he is taking the sensible view that both those requests from the Rating and Valuation Association cannot be granted, although we all understand why that has been raised. The association is saying that if those doors are closed, in its view the collection of the community charge from a large number of people will be virtually impossible.

That is something which the Minister must take seriously. The amendments invites the Minister to go away and think about the matter ab initio. Given those comments, he should consider his position carefully.

The Rating and Valuation Association continues:

"The administrative costs falling on local authorities in implementation of the Bill will be considerable and authorities must be given sufficient additional resources which will enable them to implement the provisions of the Bill."

I fear that that is knocking at a door that is firmly bolted and barred, but it is a fair point for the Minister to consider.

There are two other minor points. One relates to the main issue that I raised, the association's view that a local authority should have the right to waive collection—I would call it the introduction of a de minimis rule—if the debt is below a certain amount.

My final point is a small detail. In the association's document there is an inquiry about the provision for the repayment of community charges paid in error. As the Minister knows, there is such a provision in the Local Government (Financial Provisions) (Scotland) Act 1963. I am informed that there is no apparent parallel provision in the legislation. I should be interested to hear the Minister's comments on that. I say that with some feeling, having been fortunate enough to have had returned to me by post two £12 cheques for parking tickets that had apparently been paid twice. I am unlikely to make that mistake with my community charge, but if I did so I should like to think that I could get the money back. I commend that point to the Minister.

However, the serious point that I am making concerns the spread of debt that is likely to result from this measure and the problem of properly getting a summary warrant.

[Mr. Dewar]

The undoubted view of the Rating and Valuation Association is that that will not be possible without powers which this House would be unwilling to grant and that, to be fair, Ministers would be unlikely to want. However, without those powers, it would not be possible to administer the system. I put that point to the Minister because it is important that he gives some thought to it.

I have also been reading—it is interesting that it should come from this source—the now well-known memorandum that was published today by the Tory Reform Group. I have no doubt that this will crop up later——

Mr. Rifkind: The English group.

Mr. Dewar: Yes. I am glad to see that the Minister is such a strong devolutionist when expediency drives. Perhaps that is a reversion to first principles. I agree that the Scots have different views. I do not for a moment dispute their right to those different views, but the arguments, the biting analysis from that particular source, cannot easily be shrugged off. The point that I was about to make was that they too express grave doubts about the way in which these matters will work in practice. They express doubts especially about the 20 per cent. rule. They make the simple point—with which I certainly have some sympathy as it restates the point that I have been hammering during the past 10 minutes—that, in effect, the 20 per cent. amount will be so small that the administrative cost of recovery will be larger than any conceivable yield that would be forthcoming. I quote that additional source as something that the Minister may wish to consider.

I have raised one or two of the many points that could have been raised under this amendment, but I have given a flavour of the doubts that we have about its practicality. I hope that the Minister can say something to reassure me that a little more thought has gone into this Bill in general political principles than is apparent and that he can deal with some of the real and substantial technical objections which are still there for all to see and are being pressed upon him by sources that he may feel are slightly less partial than me.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): I am glad that this amendment has been moved by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) because it enables us to return to matters that were considered at some length in Committee. As they were considered at length in Committee, it is not necessary to expatiate on them and to cover the same ground today, but I wish to take the opportunity that this amendment offers to ask the Minister whether he has given any further thought to whether the clause which the amendment seeks to delete, which provides a permissive power to the levying authority to pursue the recovery of arrears, is adequate to meet needs and whether the permissive power can be used to enable a local authority to pursue a policy of not seeking to recover arrears from classes of people who are liable to pay the community charge, and to whom a notice has been issued?

Mr. Maxton: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman, like myself, was slightly surprised, following the debate in Committee, that there was not an amendment from the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth) replacing the word "may" with the word "shall", as he expressed considerable concern that local authorities might opt out of taking people who owed them £50 to a sheriff's court.

5.45 pm

Mr. Maclennan: I am surprised at that, in view of the debate that we had in Committee. I am also rather surprised by the absence of the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth) from our deliberations today. However, I am more concerned with the attitude of the Government and their view on this.

I wish to put to the Minister a point that was not made in Committee. Earlier, he argued that there might be a fiduciary duty on the other payers of a community charge to seek to recover a debt even though only a permissive power is given by the Bill. However, because of the extreme complexity of the task and the difficulty of administering a tax of this sort, when so many of those to whom it applies are mobile, there must be cases in which it would be unreasonable for a local authority to seek to pursue the debt because the cost of pursuing the arrears would rapidly exceed the amount owed.

Is the Minister prepared to say that the procedures set out in paragraph 7 are not expensive in view of the sums of money at stake? Not having been a practitioner at the Scots Bar, I should be interested to know what it would cost to go through the full procedure of diligence described, the seeking of a summary warrant and the pursuance by diligence of "a poinding and sale" or "an arrestment and action of furthcoming or sale." How much will it cost to go through all that for one defaulter who has failed to pay an instalment of community charge?

Mr. Gordon Wilson (Dundee, East): I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's point, but what the Bill involves in relation to collection already happens in relation to non-payment of rates. The unfortunate factor is that if someone defaults on payment and poindings and sales are carried out, the costs are borne by the debtor.

Mr. Maclennan: Yes, they are borne by the debtor, but that presupposes that it is possible to track down the debtor. I fully defer to the professional expertise of the hon. Gentleman, but——

Mr. Maxton: The hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Wilson) is right. When the sheriff's officer goes to poind, collect and sell the goods, he must write his own expenses out of that. In many cases, especially with young people, the sort of goods that they have will not even cover the community charge that they owe, let alone any costs that may be involved in that process. Therefore, the local authority will have to bear the cost.

Mr. Maclennan: That is precisely the point. Many young people moving around the country, sometimes from one family home to another, have no more than what they stand up in, and they will not yield arrears because they have nothing to yield. I should very much like to know what is supposed to happen in those circumstances. What duty is there on a local authority to pursue such people? Was it to cover this situation—to allow the local authority not to pursue arrears—that the paragraph was originally couched in permissive rather than mandatory language?

Mr. Wallace: I do not wish to labour the point after the speech by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), but what will be the basis of jurisdiction for the sheriff in any such case? My hon. Friend the Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) referred to the costs of diligence being executed, and the costs having to be borne by the defender. I am sure that it will come as no surprise to hon. Members to know that in my constituency it can often be a considerable cost when one takes into account not only the fees but the outlays. On occasion, there have been complaints—usually from the creditor rather than from the debtor—of the infrequent visits by sheriff officers and messengers-at-arms to the islands communities.

In pursuing one such case I was made aware that in the 1960s some form of diligence was proposed which would have made enforcement easier in remote rural communities. I have not been able to track down the report, and I do not expect the Minister to reply to this now, but I should be grateful if he would agree to consider ways of making the enforcement of community charge debts simpler in remoter communities. At present, particularly when one takes into account the outlays that might be incurred, the outlays could be greater than the community charge that gave rise to the initial debt. If the Minister will consider ways in which the outlays and expenses might be reduced, I should be grateful.

Mr. Ancram: I am sorry that the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) has left the Chamber for the moment. I shall try to leave my response to his questions until he returns.

The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) raised again on the Floor of the House the same point that he raised with some force in Committee. He referred to the duty on a levying authority to recover outstanding community charges. In Committee, during consideration of schedule 2(7), the question arose as to whether a levying authority was under a duty to recover arrears of community charge. The point was made, and accepted, that there is no express provision in the Bill to that effect, nor is there any express statutory provision in relation to the recovery of rates under section 247 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1947. But there is well-established case law, which starts with the case of Roberts *v.* Hopwood in 1925—to be found in All England Reports 2, page 24—that a local authority is under a duty to carry out its functions in a businesslike manner, with reasonable care, skill and caution and with a due and alert regard to the interests of its ratepayers. That is what is normally referred to in England as the fiduciary duty. The levying authority is required to comply with its duty in exercising its functions to collect rates, and of it fails to do so, the ordinary remedy against a local authority for failing to comply with its duties will be available—judicial default action and audit control.

I see no reason why a levying authority would not be required to comply with a similar duty in exercising its function to collect the community charge. The levying authority will be required to discharge that function with reasonable regard to the interests of the community charge payers and, obviously, its ratepayers in a businesslike manner and with reasonable care and skill. For that reason, I am satisfied that there is no need to include any provision in the Bill on that point. Arguments were put forward in Committee that there should be a firmer provision requiring an authority to recover outstanding community charges, but as I said at the time, the effect would be either declamatory—I am not keen on seeing declamatory provisions in legislation and I doubt whether many others are—or it would impose an absolute duty —*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) apparently finds something funny in the idea of declamatory provisions. If he wishes to intervene, I shall be delighted to give way. I think that he is enjoying a recollection of some other matter. Perhaps he will let us into the secret later.

The only other option would be to have an absolute duty. I do not believe that any hon. Member would think that that was the right course because there may be occasions when it is clear that recovery would be impossible and an absolute duty would require an authority to pursue impossible debts regardless. Therefore, relying on what is referred to in England as a fiduciary duty appears to be the right way to proceed.

The hon. Member for Garscadden said that this matter might come up on other occasions today, so I do not want to go into detail. I have not had time to read the document fully, but the recommendations of the English Tory Reform Group——

Mr. Hume Robertson: English? It does not say that.

Mr. Ancram: If the hon. Gentleman reads the document, he will find that it refers to England and Wales.

Earlier, from a sedentary position, the hon. Member for Garscadden said that he thought that the document was splendid stuff and that it had cheered him up. That shows how easy it is to cheer him up and how much he needs to be cheered up. It struck me as slightly surprising because of the premise upon which the whole document is based, as far as I could see, and which appears on page 2. The document states that one of the reasons why the system needs reform is as follows:

> "The decay of local government can be traced to the loss of democratic accountability and the disintegration of the traditional Labour Party."

The document also states:

> "the Labour Party fell into decline and decay. As its local membership and vigour fell away, it came more and more under the control of tightly knit bands of left-wing extremists. This became very true of the inner cities, where Labour was strongest, and the old traditional Labour Party was at its most vulnerable."

I am glad that that cheers up the hon. Member for Garscadden. It shows his views on the behaviour of certain Labour councils in Britain today.

I return to the specific point about England and Wales. It may interest the House to know that the Scottish Tory Reform Group this afternoon issued its own statement, in which it avers its support for the community charge, as it always has done, and dissociates itself from the England and Wales report.

Mr. Wilson: When did the Minister contact Conservative Central Office with the request for it to issue an immediate disclaimer?

Mr. Ancram: If the hon. Gentleman follows Conservative politics in Scotland, he will find that the Scottish Tory Reform Group is in favour of the Bill. It always has been and has previously expressed concern about the line taken by the Tory Reform Group down south, which, equally, has always been against the community charge. There is nothing particularly new in

[Mr. Ancram]

the proposals or in the positions north and south of the border. If the hon. Member for Garscadden wishes to raise that matter later, I have several other interesting passages that I am sure he would like to hear about.

Reference was made to the repayment of sums not due. Government amendment No. 138, to which I spoke yesterday, made the provision that is sought. Government amendment No. 138 would put at the end of schedule 2 the heading:

"Repayment of sums not due"

and the words:

"A levying authority to whom there has been paid by way of any community charge any sum which (for whatever reason) is not due shall repay that sum or arrange for its repayment."

So that covers that particular point.

6 pm

Turning to the general debate, into which I think the question of the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) fell, I quite understand the concerns of hon. Members as to the effectiveness of the procedures proposed for the recovery of the arrears of community charges, particularly in relation to debts incurred by people who at present have no liability for taxation payments. However, I think that those concerns have been considerably exaggerated and I do not expect serious difficulties in those areas.

The first point that has to be made is that the system that we propose will discourage people from getting into significant arrears in the first place. The provision for the standard method of payment of the community charge to be 12 monthly instalments will mean that each payment will be a modest amount of money. In cases in which people on low incomes may nevertheless find difficulty in meeting the full community charge payment, the availability of rebates will further reduce the net payment to be made. In addition, each payment will be immediately due in the month in which it is incurred. This contrasts with the present arrangements for rates, whereby in many cases the date upon which payment becomes due is unclear and in practice authorities tend not to start recovery action in relation to any arrears until September of the financial year in which the rates are payable. This inevitably means that where arrears have built up they have already reached a considerable sum before recovery action can be taken. Under the community charge system, levying authorities will be able to initiate earlier and thus, by definition, more effective recovery action.

Mr. Maxton: I take the Minister's point in that somebody who is rebated may well be only £12 or £15 in debt at the end of, say, three months, but once that three months point is reached he may well be still in arrears under the terms of the Minister's Bill. Then, of course, the total amount for the whole year becomes liable to payment.

Mr. Ancram: The hon. Gentleman misses the point, which is that the simplicity of the system in many ways, compared with that which now exists, is more likely to ensure that people pay on a regular basis. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Garscadden for not putting the argument that somehow we would find vast numbers of people deliberately setting out to avoid payment of the community charge, because I would find that very hard to accept. I genuinely believe that in Scotland people by and large are prepared to pay what is due from them. The hon. Member for Garscadden puts his hands on his head, but I am sure that he would not suggest that the bulk of the Scottish people would deliberately set out to avoid paying the community charge.

We must therefore look at this in perspective. I shall not pursue the mystery, as far as I am concerned, of the hon. Member's parking tickets, but I am sure that on another occasion he will explain to me how that arose.

Mr. Dewar: I referred to the estimates of the community charges for current years on the assumption that the system was in being. Was any calculation built in for under-collection, for under-achieving, and the likely gap between the percentages achieved under the rating system and under the community charge system? Do the Government have any view on that?

Mr. Ancram: I do not think that it is possible to give definitive figures on a matter of that sort—I am sure that the hon. Member would be surprised if I tried to do so—but it is important to note that the new system is relatively simpler than the present system and thus more likely to be understood. There is a more regular system of payment, and so on, and this is likely, if anything, to reduce the estimates of default which were put forward by the Society of Messengers-at-Arms and Sheriff Officers and referred to by the hon. Member for Garscadden. I do not think that they took that strictly into account, but it is a valid point and we are having a serious debate, so it is important that we accept that fact.

In the relatively rare cases, therefore, in which people fall into arrears, the provisions that we propose will allow flexible response by the levying authority. There is provision, of course, for informal reminders, followed by final notices to people who still have not paid, and I believe that these are likely to secure payment in the majority of outstanding cases. In the remainder, the summary warrant procedure which, as the hon. Member for Garscadden admitted, is already well precedented for the recovery of rates debts, is a cheap and effective way of seeking payment. In only a few cases is it necessary to go through the full series of steps leading up to poinding and the possibility, in the last instance, of a warrant sale. A high proportion of those debts still outstanding will be settled as soon as a summary warrant is granted without the necessity for further steps. I should perhaps remind the House that last night when we dealt with the amendment on joint and several liability I made it clear that the summary warrant procedure would not be operated in those cases.

The assertions that I am making are not simply pious hopes because all the evidence from the rating system shows that the informal stages of debt recovery—reminders and follow-up action—together with the early formal procedures through the use of summary warrants will secure payment in the vast majority of cases. The evidence for this is contained in the Scottish Law Commission's report on diligence and debtor protection, which says that in Lothian and Strathclyde in 1979-80 and 1980-81, of the 7,500 cases in Lothian and the 38,500 in Strathclyde in which a summary warrant was obtained against a debtor, only seven cases in each region led to a warrant sale being executed. That shows that those preliminary stages are, by and large, effective. It is backed

up by more recent evidence from Strathclyde suggesting that, of the 131,000 ratepayers who fell into arrears in 1985-86, 82,000 paid the bill at final notice stage and a further 25,000 settled when summary warrants were obtained.

It would, of course, be wrong of me to suggest that there will be no problems in this area. It is one of the major objectives of the Bill to spread the local tax base, and that inevitably means that larger numbers of people will face local taxation bills. In the nature of things there is likely to be a larger number of people falling into community charge arrears than into rate arrears. But while nobody in the House can make a confident prediction of how large these numbers will be, I seriously contend that the fact that each bill will be considerably smaller than the average rates bill makes it most unlikely that the increase in numbers of cases will be very large.

A number of specific points were put to me and I will try to answer the main ones.

First, the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland intervened on the hon. Member for Garscadden to ask a question about jurisdiction. The bases of jurisdiction under the Civil Jurisdiction and Judgements Act 1982 are the debtor's domicile and the place where the debt was incurred. There will, therefore, be no difficulty even if the debtor changes his residence. That is an established form of jurisdiction which will continue to apply.

Secondly, there can be problems in the area of the ownership of goods. There are problems in this area at the moment, but I do not think that that would lead the hon. Member to suggest that the system for the recovery of rates is wrong. All sheriff officers in general poindings face the problem of identification of the owners of the goods. Basically, where this happens, I understand, the procedure is to ask those present who owns what, and by and large that produces a satisfactory response.

Mr. Wallace: I just want to clarify the position. Is it domicile "and" the place of the debt or is it domicile "or" the place of the debt? Domicile really relates to a country —one can be Scots domiciled or English domiciled. Are we talking about domicile in relation to a particular sheriffdom?

Mr. Ancram: They are alternatives, because it would otherwise be restrictive rather than expansive in terms of providing a base. Domicile in the sense in which I used it refers to the place where the person lives, particularly under this Bill. The registration of sole or main residence forms the basis of the Bill and will be taken, presumably, to be the place where the person lives.

Thirdly, the power of entry under a summary warrant is there and is for the purpose of executing a poinding. So sheriff officers can enter a third party's premises for that purpose.

There is a great deal of detail in the way in which summary warrants and so on are to be operated. As time is restricted, it is worth reminding the House that this whole area will be debated very soon when the Debtors (Scotland) Bill comes before the House, when the adjustments being made to the present system can be well canvassed and aired. Obviously, those procedures will be provided by that legislation and will form the basis of recovery under this Bill. I hope that the House will agree that, rather than go into the detailed aspects of how it operates, those matters should be raised when we debate legislation.

Mr. Hugh Brown (Glasgow, Provan): Does the Minister agree with the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) about the possible arrestment of social security benefits and the recovery of arrears through that source?

Mr. Ancram: The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) made it clear that he had already received a reply from my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State, and the position is as he set out in that reply. The answer is no, as the hon. Gentleman suggested.

It is inevitable that some people will slip through the net when the community charge is collected. It is difficult to think of any system of taxation that is 100 per cent. effective in either full collection or full recovery. We accept that there is a problem and that it may be slightly larger than that with the present rating system. The Bill provides a mechanism whereby recovery can be effected. Some of the assertions that have been made are exaggerated, and I am confident that the principles of the Bill will be effective in securing recovery of the community charges due. Therefore, I ask the hon. Member for Garscadden to withdraw the amendment—as I am sure that he will, in view of what he said in his speech.

Mr. Dewar: I do not wish to delay my hon. Friends. I shall withdraw the amendment, although I still feel unconvinced and somewhat gloomy about the prospects. No doubt there will be other occasions on which to argue these matters.

I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Amendments made: No. 158, in page 35, line 20, leave out '(4)' and insert '(3A) to'.

No. 159, in page 35, line 43, at end insert—

'(3A) Sub-paragraph (1)*(a)* above does not apply to the recovery from a person of arrears of community charge for which that person is liable by virtue only of section 10(6) of this Act.'.

No. 138, in page 36, line 22, at end insert—

'Repayment of sums not due

9. A levying authority to whom there has been paid by way of any community charge any sum which (for whatever reason) is not due shall repay that sum or arrange for its repayment.'.—*[Mr. Ancram.]*

Clause 24

REDUCTION OF COMMUNITY CHARGES

Mr. Home Robertson: I beg to move amendment No. 170, in page 20, line 4, leave out clause 24.

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): With this we shall take the following: Amendment No. 171, in page 36, line 23, leave out schedule 3.

Government amendments Nos. 139 to 143.

Mr. Home Robertson: The effect of amendment No. 170 is to delete clause 4, which in turn would delete schedule 3. The amendment deals with a mechanism whereby the Secretary of State can claw back grant and effectively take control of the budgets of local authorities in Scotland. At the same time, we are debating Government amendments Nos. 139 to 143, which represent a minor concession to points that were made in Committee. They remove the provisions in the clause which would enable the Secretary of State

"for the purposes of giving full effect to"

[Mr. Home Robertson]

this paragraph

"by order modify any enactment . . . in its application to the determination, calculation, levy, collection or payment of a community charge."

That seems an extraordinary power to put into the hands of the Secretary of State, let alone this Secretary of State. There should not be such open-ended enabling powers in any legislation. I am glad that the Minister is prepared to think again about that point. I suppose that we should be grateful for small mercies.

The intolerable basic principles of schedule 3 remain intact. I refer to powers that were established in the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Scotland) Act 1981, which have been made more and more draconian by a series of subsequent Acts, and which are being further refined in the Bill as they will affect the new community charge system.

Those powers strike at the very heart of the principle of local democracy in Scotland. The Secretary of State began by putting Scottish local authorities into a statutory straitjacket of guidelines. He then cut the rate support grant in successive years, up to a total cumulative value of Tory cuts in rate support grant since 1968 of £1,750 million. That is equivalent to more than a full year's rates bill for every ratepayer in Scotland. The Secretary of State left our local councils with an intolerable choice of either forcing up their rates or cutting important services, such as education, support for old people and the disabled and so on. It is humbug for the Government to suggest that they are protecting the ratepayers or the future poll tax payers, while year after year they cut the rate support grant.

6.15 pm

When some local authorities decided that they were not prepared to cut services and therefore had no option other than to increase the rates, the Secretary of State intervened to close that door. He gave himself the power to put orders through Parliament to fix the budgets of individual Scottish local authorities. That raised the rather bizarre prospect of this multinational Parliament turning itself temporarily into a town hall to strike the rates for individual local authorities.

Those ludicrous forays by the Secretary of State in pursuit of his vendetta against local authorities have been played out in this Chamber. Stirling district council was the first authority to catch it. Its rate support grant was cut on 20 July 1982. Then there was the night of the long knives on 21 July 1983, when the Lothian regional councils and the district councils of Stirling, and Kirkcaldy were subjected to collective action and asked to adjust their rates regardless of the wishes of the people who elected them. The Secretary of State has the power to ride roughshod over locally elected councils, and that power is now being transplanted into this poll tax Bill.

The whole selective action machinery turns on an assessment by the Secretary of State of whether a local council's budget is excessive and unreasonable. As the Minister keeps reminding us, those terms originated in the Act introduced by a Labour Government in 1966.

Mr. Ancram: Tell us about it.

Mr. Home Robertson: The Minister challenges me to tell him about it. Section 5 of the 1966 Act allowed the Secretary of State to take action against a local authority when he felt that its expenditure was excessive or unreasonable. The Act has other powers. It states that the Secretary of State could also take action if he was satisfied "that a local authority . . . has failed to achieve or maintain a reasonable standard in the discharge of any of their functions".

At least that was even-handed legislation, which is more than can be said for the way that the Government have handled this subject.

Of course, I do not suppose that back in 1966 anybody considered the possibility of there being in office such an excessive, unreasonable and unrepresentive Secretary of State as there is today.

Mr. Ancram: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that his party accepted in 1966—it must have, or it would not have passed the legislation — that there could be occasions when expenditure was excessive and unreasonable, and that therefore the Secretary of State should take action against that authority?

Mr. Home Robertson: That was the case then and that was the principle for which we legislated. Obviously, there is a need for such residual powers. However, I do not think that anyone envisaged that the powers would be exercised in the sort of circumstances in which the Government have exercised them.

I look forward to the day—although I hope that it will not be necessary—when a Labour Secretary of State for Scotland can intervene to ensure that local authorities that are defaulting on the standards of provision for their people come up to scratch. Let us consider all the circumstances——

Mr. Maclennan: I do not understand the logic of the hon. Gentleman's case. He has just criticised the Minister for saying that he would intervene to reduce unreasonable expenditure against the wishes of the local electorate. Is he saying that he would choose to intervene against the wishes of the electorate?

Mr. Home Robertson: I was simply drawing attention to the terms of the 1966 Act. I deplore any intervention, other than in the most extreme circumstances, against locally elected authorities. My party stands for democratic accountability and local democracy in Scotland.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Home Robertson: This Bill is guillotined and I am determined to continue with my speech in my own way. *—[Interruption.]* We are having some difficulty. I hope that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Sir A. Fletcher) will control himself. He is aware that, as the Bill is subject to a guillotine, we do not have as much time as we would like.

Let us consider the circumstances of the selective action taken by the Secretary of State against Glasgow district council in July 1983. It started with the report to the House that led to the reduction of Glasgow district council's budget. Initially, the Secretary of State claimed in his report that in his—possibly biased—opinion Glasgow district council's budget was "excessive and unreasonable". The district council responded and, in due course, both report and response were laid before the House. The debate on the Floor of the House lasted one and a half hours and the outcome was decided by a vote. The Division list for that vote makes very interesting reading.

The debate concerned the internal affairs of Glasgow district council. Not one Glasgow Member voted in favour

of the report, and 10 voted against. Only 17 Scottish Members of Parliament voted for it, and 42 voted against. The report exclusively affected Scottish interests — specifically Glasgow interests—yet it was approved by a majority of 45, thanks to the intervention of 203 Tory Members — whose informed interest in Scottish local affairs is well known.

Such action can serve only to undermine the principle of democracy. The Secretary of State for Scotland, who has no mandate in Scotland, is abusing this Parliament to suppress democratic local government in Scotland. That is the sort of irresponsible action that makes it more necessary than ever to establish a democratically accountable and evolved Scottish Assembly to deal with Scottish affairs.

Sir Alex Fletcher (Edinburgh, Central): I hope that the hon. Gentleman will join it.

Mr. Home Robertson: So do I.

The Secretary of State keeps telling us that the new poll tax will be such a masterpiece of accountability that there will never again be cause for central Government interference in local affairs. Indeed, such is his confidence that he is doing away with the somewhat inappropriately named guidelines that have been built into the system.

We shall have an opportunity later to consider the comments of the Tory Reform Group, which certainly rejects the belief that accountability will be achieved by this legislation. If the Minister really believes that the poll tax will provide such an effective check on the affairs of local government in Scotland, why has he left the clawback machinery in the Bill? Indeed, why has he taken the opportunity to make that machinery even easier to operate?

The right hon. and learned Gentleman has done that in three ways. First, he has removed the right of the targeted local authorities to make their side of the argument known to the hon. Members who will vote on their budgets. Instead, he can take the liberty of summarising local council's representations in his terms. Secondly, in fixing a new level of poll tax for an authority, he can take into account all aspects of that council's finances, rather than simply that expenditure that is alleged to be excessive and unreasonable. Thirdly, the charade of comparing the target authority with other councils will become even more farcical because the Secretary of State is now to relieve himself of the statutory obligation to make the comparison with authorities that are "closely comparable" or as closely comparable as possible with the authority concerned. The important words "closely comparable", which appeared in the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Scotland) Act 1981, are now to be removed.

The Government are completely indifferent to public opinion in Scotland. They are dismantling our economy and devaluing our democratic institutions. Even the so-called Tory moderates have a remarkably cavalier attitude towards Scotland. [HON. MEMBERS: "Name them."] They are scuttling at a great rate just now, but there is still the marvellous organisation called the Tory Reform Group, which is to publish an interesting document that comprehensively rubbishes the idea of a poll tax. The concluding paragraph states:

> "In an ideal world Ministers would have canvassed other ideas more comprehensively and studied first the results of the new system being introduced in Scotland."

That means, before introducing a poll tax in England and Wales. There we have it: Scotland is being used as a guinea pig for this disgraceful experiment. The introduction of the tax would be bad enough, but the continuation of the clawback mechanism would be intolerable.

I urge my hon. Friends to support the amendment and to remove this abhorrent provision from the Bill.

Mr. Henderson: With characteristic candour, the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) made it clear that the phrase "excessive and unreasonable", which is critical to the whole exercise, first appeared in legislation enacted by the Labour party and, I may say, voted for by the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan).

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): It appeared in 1929.

Mr. Henderson: Does the hon. Gentleman wish to intervene?

Mr. Douglas: The hon. Gentleman used the word "first". The phrase first appeared in the 1929 Act.

Mr. Henderson: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for telling us that the first use of the phrase was in 1929. But that does not mean that we can get away from the fact that it was used again in the 1966 Act, which was introduced by the Labour party and supported by the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland, who now seeks to distance himself from it.

The concept has been important in local government as a reserve power for the Secretary of State.

It is interesting that during the speech of the hon. Member for East Lothian the right hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Millan) decided to leave the Chamber. We all understand why; he did more to cut local government expenditure by diktat from the Scottish Office than any other right hon. Member. The right hon. Gentleman cut the staff of local government by 6,000 in one year, so it is not surprising that he should have left the Chamber when the hon. Member for East Lothian was suggesting that if the Labour party were in office it would allow all local authorities to spend as much as they liked at any time. The Labour party is out of office, and will remain out of office for a long time because of the double standard enunciated by the hon. Gentleman.

The hon. Gentleman talked about mandate, and I take it that he would apply the same principle to Fife regional council. There is not one Labour councillor in north-east Fife. Should Fife regional council never do anything in north-east Fife that is not approved of by the councillors from north-east Fife? That is the logic—if logic there is —in the hon. Gentleman's comments on mandate, and I hope that he will realise how foolish his argument is. He should not forget that one in six Labour candidates in Scotland lost their deposits at the last election. In my constituency the Labour candidate polled less than half the number of votes polled by the most disappointed Conservative candidate in the area of Glasgow with the strongest Labour support. When Labour Members talk about mandates in Scotland, they should remember that there is gy little of the geography of Scotland where their writ would run.

Mr. Maclennan: The two old political parties rival each other in their commitment to the centralisation of Government. It is hard to pick and choose between the

[Mr. Maclennan]

arguments that have been deployed by both Conservative and Labour speakers in this debate. Both parties would seek to intervene in the affairs of local government when it suited their political book to do so.

When I supported the 1966 Act 20 years ago, it never occurred to me that the power written into that Act could be so abused as it has been by the right hon. and hon. Friends of the hon. Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Henderson). I do not believe that it was abused, to be fair to the Labour party to which I once was proud to belong.

6.30 pm

The reality is that all governments of whatever hue engage in the business of cutting local authority power, imposing their views on people, and erecting a constitutionally obnoxious principle, despite the fact that Parliament has empowered local authorities to carry out the services that it has specified, and has made arrangements for the democratic election of their members. The judgment of local electors must be supplanted by the judgment of the Government.

Mr. McLoughlin (Derbyshire, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Maclennan: If the hon. Gentleman wishes to take up the time of the House, I shall give way.

Mr. McLoughlin: Is it alliance policy to give local government a blank cheque to allow it to raise the rate to any level and to take money from old people without any parliamentary responsibility? That is the impression that the hon. Gentleman gave by saying that the Government should not interfere in local government. It would be dangerous if the hon. Gentleman were to give local government a blank cheque. We have seen what local authorities will do.

Mr. Maclennan: It is the purpose of the alliance to seek to increase local accountability. Throughout the debate the Minister has alleged that that is the purpose of the Bill I am trying to point out that far from achieving that end, by reducing the amount of money available to local authorities by the introduction of the poll tax, which reduces the amount of money available to local government to a mere 13 per cent., the Minister will massively reduce local accountability. By increasing the proportion of grants that local authorities have as a result of the measure and their reliance upon grant, the Minister is taking away local accountability. That is a reversal of proper priorities. The consequence cannot be undone save by moving towards the introduction of a more broadly based, genuinely local tax. That is why the alliance party supports local income tax. Of course we recognise that there will be a need for a grant element to equalise resources; otherwise the system would be unfair.

Although I have some sympathy for the Minister and for the move, the difficulty is that the Bill will reduce finance at the hands of local authorities to such a small proportion of total expenditure that, by the gearing effect, any change in the level of service provisions will require a substantial increase in the tax rate. The Minister has constantly argued that, by a marginal increase or reduction, a local authority will be more responsive to public opinion. We shall have to wait and see whether that is so.

It is quite clear that local authorities will have little control over their own priorities and that real accountability is not about expenditure at the margin. Real local government is about policies, major issues and the provision of important services. It is not about adjustments at the margin, and that is what the Bill will achieve. It will destroy accountability, and that is one of the reasons of principle why we oppose it.

The amendment seeks to make sure that local accountability is not only damaged by a direct reduction in the amount of tax available to a local authority but is further eroded by an additional provision that enables the Secretary of State to intervene at his discretion to axe expenditure if he so chooses. It is a belt-and-braces provision that throws considerable doubt upon the Secretary of State's assertion that he believes that the introduction of the tax will increase local accountability. The truth is that he thinks that some local authorities will be prepared to accept the ratchet effect and accepts the fact that a local authority may wish to increase spending to, say, 10 per cent. above average and will need a tax rate of three times that amount to achieve it. It is perfectly possible that there are such local authorities, but it will be iniquitous if, in the circumstances, the Secretary of State seeks to substitute his judgment for the judgment of a local authority. That kind of action erodes local accountability and brings local authorities into disrepute.

If the Secretary of State is genuinely concerned to bring about a responsible attitude to spending and to curb extremism, he would long ago have thrown his full weight behind the growing movement towards electoral reform. That would, at a stroke, end extremism. That is beyond the scope of the amendment. All I can do is to commend the purpose of the amendment moved by the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) and express the hope that he does not push too hard the idea that such interventions as were encompassed in the 1966 Act are acceptable. There is a balancing power to enable central Government to intervene to require local authorities to do certain things. It should be a matter for their discretion, under the arrangements that Parliament has set down. It is an important amendment that merits careful scrutiny and should be accepted by the Government.

Mr. Allan Stewart (Eastwood): The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) started his speech by referring to issues to which the Labour party and the Government are committed. It became clear that all that he is committed to is the continuing production of hot air. When asked a simple question by my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, West (Mr. McLoughlin) — [AN HON. MEMBER: "Where is he?"] My hon. Friend has been called out to see a constituent.

When asked by my hon. Friend what the SDP's position was on whether central Government should have a reserve power in relation to local authority expenditure, the hon. Gentleman ducked. He referred to the fact that the alliance is sometimes in favour of local income tax and that there would have to be a central Government grant.

Mr. Maclennan: I answered the hon. Member for Derbyshire, West (Mr. McLoughlin) at some length. Perhaps I did not go to the point as quickly or as clearly as I should have done. If that is the case, let me now make it clear that my hon. Friends and I do not believe that such a power is necessary.

Mr. Stewart: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. He has made the matter absolutely clear. Let people, not only in Scotland but south of the border, be absolutely clear that the Social Democrats do not believe that central Government should have any reserve powers in relation to local authority expenditure, no matter how unreasonable, excessive or irresponsible. That is a principle, but it is not one with which most people would agree.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I should like to know whether my hon. Friend is as puzzled as I am. We are not hearing about the position that was taken by Liberal councillors in Liverpool who were rescued from the antics of the Labour party.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) should not be tempted to stray away from the amendment.

Mr. Stewart: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth) for his intervention. Liverpool, of course, is south of the border, and we are talking about Scotland. It is not unusual for the Social Democratic and Liberal parties to have different views.

The hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) became almost hysterical at times in what has been generally a well considered and moderate debate. However, he advanced the only good argument that I have heard in favour of a Scottish Assembly—his personal commitment to attend such an Assembly instead of this place.

The hon. Member for Lothian missed one of the essential features of schedule 3. It is not proposed that under the community charge central Government would have the same powers as now exist over local authority expenditure. The major power over local authority expenditure in Scotland is the system of guidelines and penalties, but that system will not be necessary after 1 April 1989. I think that the hon. Gentleman accepted the need for some reserve powers in respect of local authority expenditure. At least, that is what I understood him to say. In Committee, he said:

"There may be circumstances in which there is a need for the Government to take steps to restrict local Government expenditure." — [*Official Report, First Scottish Standing Committee;* 17 February 1987, c. 1198.]

It is surprising, therefore, that the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) should have made several broadcasts in Scotland clearly stating that the next Labour Government will sweep away all controls on local government expenditure. I am only sorry that the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) is not in his place. I hope that he will be able to act as mediator to establish precisely what Labour party policy in Scotland is. Either it is in favour of a reserve power or it is not. The Opposition's two leading spokesmen during the passage of the Bill through the House are taking entirely different positions on a central issue.

Mr. Henderson: My hon. Friend may have explained why the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) is out of the Chamber at the same time as the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar).

Mr. Stewart: Indeed. They may be meeting to try to establish the Opposition's policy.

Under any system—a community charge, the present rating system or a rating system as amended—central Government must have ultimate responsibility for the control of public expenditure. That will be so under any system, but I do not believe that the intention behind schedule 3 is to use the powers within it to the same extent as the present powers. It is clear that the accountability argument would come into force. The policy of succesive Governments has been to maintain a reserve power to take action in exceptional circumstances, and it is sensible that that position should be maintained.

6.45 pm

Mr. Dick Douglas: This has been an interesting debate, and I wish to put only a few questions to the Minister about schedule 3. I accept that in terms of fiscal management there is an argument for some form of Government control over the expenditure of subordinate authorities within a unitary state.

I should tell the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) that I was somewhat intrigued by a remark made by the right hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Jenkins) during a debate in the Scottish Grand Committee. We were discussing the government of Scotland. The right hon. Gentleman suggested—I thought he did so with some merit—that one of the ways of reassuring the public that a Scottish Assembly with tax-raising powers, which is what we desire, would not "abuse" those powers, would be to make it clear to the Assembly that there could be no public sector borrowing requirement. I am not sure whether the right hon. Gentleman wanted that provision to be placed in legislation or to introduce it by other means. I accept that that would be a means of introducing a form of fiscal discipline.

Nations have a fiscal discipline imposed upon them in the international arena——

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Douglas: Before the hon. Gentleman intervenes to talk about the International Monetary Fund, I wish only to say that that reflects the fear of pain and the hope of gain that is to be found in the international arena. The Labour Government of 1966 introduced reserve powers, and my recollection is that they were never used.

The first concept that we are considering is the production of a report. It seems that the Secretary of State will receive a report

"proposing a reduction in the amount of personal community charge determined by the authority".

We are told now that there will be criteria for the report, and these will be extremely interesting. Who within the Secretary of State's office will prepare the report? Which civil servants will undertake this task? I suggest that it will be an onerous job. We are told in paragraph 1(3)*(a)* that "the Secretary of State . . . shall have regard to the financial and other relevant circumstances of the area of the authority".

Mr. Ancram: The provisions in schedule 3, subject to one or two minor variations, are identical to those which now exist for selective action to be taken in respect of rates. That procedure has been examined on a number of occasions in the House. The problems that the hon. Gentleman seems to be envisaging have not emerged.

Mr. Douglas: In this instance it is proposed that a report will be produced. We are being asked to have regard to general economic conditions. Paragraph 1(3)*(c)* (iii) refers

"to such other financial, economic, demographic, geographical and like criteria as he"—

[Mr. Douglas]

the Secretary of State—

"considers appropriate; and *(d)* may leave out of account such categories of estimates expenses as he thinks fit."

If anywhere in Scotland any body of reasonably objective opinion started to produce a report on any local authority in Scotland, it would provide that, on the basis of any revenue that was to be raised, it could not be expected to be constrained by considerations relating to "general economic conditions". I shall refer to my constituency as an example. I became the Member for Dunfermline, West in 1979, when the Tories came into power. I can tell the House that there are 18-year-olds who were unemployed, and still are, because of the "general economic conditions". We have seen the decimation of the mining industry, which was the result of "general economic conditions". My hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) and I saw the Prime Minister, the Head of the House. It was pleasant meeting her and we had a nice wee cup of tea. What did we get out of our meeting with the the right hon. Lady? We were told that the Scottish Development Association has to have regard to "general economic conditions". I am still waiting for the report that I asked for in November 1986.

If the Minister were objectively to draw up a report and were to consult any body of opinion within the Scottish Office or anywhere else, I submit that, even to Members such as the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth), having regard to "general economic conditions" in Scotland, he could not say that local authorities were spending too little.

The thrust of the argument is that the Secretary of State will ignore economic conditions and the strains on local authorities. Effectively, he is saying that if a local authority exceeds its estimates and revenue-raising powers, the Government will intervene. That undermines all the arguments about accountability, and that is the thrust of the Bill. The lie is in the Government's mouth. Do they believe that this is a measure of accountability?

I accept that there must be certain forms of constraint if overall fiscal management is to be achieved—I am an unreformed Keynesian — but the Government do not accept that. The Government argue that the market will know best and they follow monetary policies. If we judge the Government's argument at face value, they do not require this provision. There may be some room for constraint, but it is not embodied in the schedule that we are being asked to support.

Mr. Ancram: It may help the House if I briefly cover the Government amendments. I do not believe that we need to linger over them. The only two amendments of significance are amendments Nos. 139 and 140. They are exactly the same as amendments tabled by Labour Members in Committee. They remove four sub-paragraphs which simply translate into community charge terms present legislation concerning rate reductions. The sub-paragraphs were intended to enable the necessary changes to be made to the various procedures in the Bill concerning the community charge so as to implement community charge reductions. At the time, concern was expressed at the constitutional principles involved and I undertook to reconsider whether the amendments were absolutely necessary. I am now satisfied that the Bill as it stands can accommodate community charge redeterminations without further amendment. Therefore, the four sub-paragraphs are no longer needed.

Amendment No. 141 corrects an error in the wording of the Bill. Amendments Nos. 142 and 143 are intended to require authorities with a redetermined community charge to repay any sum paid to them in response to a liability to pay the original charge. The repayment is subject to procedures that may be prescribed by the Secretary of State. I hope that the amendments will find favour with the House, especially as the main amendments reflect the line taken by the Opposition in Committee.

I believe that we have had an interesting debate. From the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) we have learnt that a future alliance Government would exert no form of control whatever on local authority expenditure. Whatever the level of expenditure undertaken by a local authority, there would be no form of control. It is also significant that, during the course of the Bill, the hon. Gentleman has made it clear that the proportion of rate support grant, the central taxpayers' contribution, should be maintained against expenditure. Therefore, the hon. Gentleman has given us a picture not only of expenditure going sky high if so desired by authorities, but also — similar to a blank cheque—the central taxpayer will automatically have to put more money into the central grant pot to keep the proportion of grant against expenditure the same.

Mr. Maclennan: I am perfectly happy to stand by what I have said, but the Minister has misrepresented what I said about grant. I made it clear that grants should not remain constant as a proportion of expenditure, but should be related to resources. If we move to a system of local income tax, that will reduce the amount of grant. Instead of money being paid as income tax to the Exchequer and then back to local authorities, it will go straight to the local authorities.

Mr. Ancram: We still have to hear from the hon. Gentleman the details of such a local income tax scheme.

I understood that the hon. Gentleman's remarks about controls did not merely apply to local income tax, but represented a general alliance principle. The hon. Gentleman also raised a previous argument when he referred to the 13 per cent. of expenditure from domestic tax. He asked how there could be accountability when we propose to destroy present accountability. Before the hon. Gentleman makes such statements, he should wait and see precisely what will be destroyed in terms of present local accountability.

Eventually, we shall remove local businesses from the local government tax-raising system. What accountability do such businesses possess? Local businesses have no vote and cannot influence the spending decisions of local authorities. However, the hon. Gentleman has argued that by removing them from this Bill accountability has somehow been lessened. If the hon. Gentleman examined the situation more carefully he would discover that the present lack of accountability lies with those who pay domestic local taxes. Of the total electorate in Scotland, only 39 per cent. pay rates. This Bill will mean that the vast bulk of those who vote in Scotland will pay some contribution towards the spending decisions of their councils. The scheme that we are proposing is far more democratic than any system proposed by the hon. Gentleman.

The new arrangements proposed in the Bill, as discussed in Committee, will improve the accountability of local authorities by widening the net of local taxpayers and hence the degree of oversight exercised by the electorate. The increased pressure for sensible budgeting allows us to abandon the system of grant penalties and tighter guidelines that presently exist. I hope that all hon. Members welcome that, because, although such controls were necessary, they were not something that any of us wished to see operating in an ideal world. We need to be sure that there is adequate pressure to keep local authority spending within reasonable bounds, but we must also ensure that local taxpayers are protected against the risk of unreasonable behaviour by individual authorities.

We have felt able to get rid of the general rate-capping measures that were adopted in legislation two years ago because we believe that they will not be necessary under the new system. At the same time, we believe that there must be some last resort power to enable the Secretary of State to propose a reduction of community charges in cases where an irresponsible authority decides to undertake expenditure in any particular financial year that is "excessive and unreasonable". Effectively, the clauses under discussion will achieve that. We are translating into community charge terms the present powers to effect a reduction in an authority's rate contained in section 5 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1966.

Opposition Members have made it clear that they oppose the provisions, but I do not believe that individual local taxpayers will agree, especially those who have been subjected in the past to the consequences of excessive and unreasonable expenditure in various areas of Scotland. It will interest hon. Members to know that one of the points made to me in recent questions about the community charge is that there is a general fear that, because there will be no controls, local taxpayers will be left at the mercy of irresponsible councils especially in the first year of a four-year term. I have been able to say that the Government have recognised that possibility, however remote, and as a responsible Government we believe that a last resort power should be returned.

The provisions in schedule 3 largely mirror the existing provisions for proposing a reduction in rates. First, the test that has to be applied is whether the authority's total estimated expenses are "excessive and unreasonable". That is a strict test and precisely mirrors the provisions in the present legislation. Of course, were the Secretary of State to exceed those criteria he would be subject to a judicial challenge. Secondly, the considerations that the Secretary of State either has to or may have regard to, as set out in paragraph 1, sub-paragraph *(3)*, are again the same as apply at the moment to proposed rate reductions. Thirdly, the procedures are virtually the same as at present. The hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) raised a number of points that were altered in Committee and I repeat that they are only cosmetic changes of detail. They do not alter the way in which the provisions will operate. We went into the full details of the provision in Committee. There will always be a need for a full report to Parliament, and in due course, the need for parliamentary approval.

The basis for this schedule is that any Government must make sure that they provide against circumstances, however unlikely those circumstances may be. We believe that a reserve power is required. One of the most interesting things to come out of the debate was the remark of the hon. Member for East Lothian, speaking for the official Opposition, when challenged as to why the 1966 Act had contained these powers. He has said that he believes that there is a "need" for such residual powers. That was the position that he took today and it is the position that we take in the Bill. On that endorsement from him, I am confident that my hon. Friends will reject the amendments.

7 pm

Mr. Home Robertson: With the leave of the House, I shall reply to the debate. The trouble with the so-called residual powers that the Minister keeps talking about is that the Government have used them not as residual powers but far more liberally. I am fed up with hearing the Minister going on about irresponsible local government, when we all know that it is irresponsible and unrepresentative central Government who have been forcing up rates and cutting local authority services in Scotland. The Minister says that this new tax is all about accountability, but he cannot have much confidence in it or he would not leave schedule 3 in the Bill.

The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) was getting himself into a bit of a lather when I was explaining the background to the powers in the 1966 Act, for which he voted. It was introduced under a Labour Government and it re-enacted powers that had been built into local authority legislation for a long time before. The residual powers were intended to be used only in the most exceptional circumstances, but the Government have been deploying them with monotonous regularity year after year when they are not justified. The Minister knows that he has no mandate to exercise such powers in Scotland.

There was no case for this central interference under the old system, and we know from bitter experience that these powers have been abused. There is even less justification for such powers with a poll tax, so I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to support amendment No. 170.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 149, Noes 205.

Division No. 110] **[7.00 pm**

AYES

Abse, Leo	Conlan, Bernard
Alton, David	Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Anderson, Donald	Corbett, Robin
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack	Corbyn, Jeremy
Ashton, Joe	Craigen, J. M.
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*	Cunliffe, Lawrence
Bagier, Gordon A. T.	Dalyell, Tam
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*	Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(L'lli)*
Beckett, Mrs Margaret	Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Bell, Stuart	Deakins, Eric
Bermingham, Gerald	Dewar, Donald
Bidwell, Sydney	Dixon, Donald
Boothroyd, Miss Betty	Dobson, Frank
Boyes, Roland	Dormand, Jack
Bray, Dr Jeremy	Douglas, Dick
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*	Dubs, Alfred
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*	Duffy, A. E. P.
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*	Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*	Eadie, Alex
Buchan, Norman	Eastham, Ken
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*	Faulds, Andrew
Campbell-Savours, Dale	Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Canavan, Dennis	Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Carter-Jones, Lewis	Fisher, Mark
Clay, Robert	Flannery, Martin
Clelland, David Gordon	Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S)*	Forrester, John
Coleman, Donald	Foster, Derek

Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Golding, Mrs Llin
Hamilton, W. W. *(Fife Central)*
Hardy, Peter
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Janner, Hon Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Martin, Michael
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C.*(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stewart, Rt Hon D. *(W Isles)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. James Hamilton and
Mr. John McWilliam.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Best, Keith
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Buck, Sir Antony
Bulmer, Esmond
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Rt Hon Sir Adam
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Hon A. *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Cranborne, Viscount
Crouch, David
Dickens, Geoffrey
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
du Cann, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Eggar, Tim
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Sir Alexander
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Alan
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Grylls, Michael
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(N'folk SW)*
Hayward, Robert
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jackson, Robert
Jessel, Toby
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
McCurley, Mrs Anna
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, M. *(N'bury)*
Madel, David
Major, John
Malone, Gerald
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mather, Sir Carol
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M. *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Murphy, Christopher
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Osborn, Sir John
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stokes, John
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich'N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Wiggin, Jerry
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Francis Maude and
Mr. David Lightbown.

Question accordingly negatived.

Schedule 3

REDUCTION OF COMMUNITY CHARGES

Amendments made; No. 139, in page 38, line 8, leave out sub-paragraphs (3) and (4).

No. 140, in page 38, line 43, leave out sub-paragraphs (3) and (4).

No. 141, in page 39, line 10, leave out 'provision' and insert 'procedure'.

No. 142, in page 39, line 12, leave out from 'was' to 'their' and insert 'liable while'.

No. 143, in page 39, line 13, after 'At' insert 'or for which he would have been liable had it so remained'. —[*Mr. Ancram.*]

Clause 25

REPLACEMENT OF RATE SUPPORT GRANTS BY REVENUE SUPPORT GRANTS

7.15 pm

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): I beg to move amendment No. 175, in page 20, line 11, at end insert—

'(3) The level of any rate support grant or revenue support grant payable to any local authority for any financial year shall be not less than 70 per cent. of the authority's eligible expenditure for that financial year.'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this is will be convenient to consider amendment No. 181, in schedule 4, page 40, line 45, at end insert—

'(5) Notwithstanding sub-paragraph (4) above, the Secretary of State shall not reduce any amount produced under sub-paragraph (2) or (3) above on account of revenue received by a local authority from the non-domestic rate levied on oil or petro-chemical installations'.

Mr. Canavan: The Government are always complaining about rates increases, and no doubt many people in some areas in Scotland have suffered big rates increases in recent years. However, the Government have tried to play political games by pinning the blame entirely on local authorities in the hope of discrediting those local authorities, especially Labour-controlled authorities, which are fighting desperately to maintain and improve services that they were elected to provide.

The truth of the matter is that the real blame for big rates increases in recent years lies fairly and squarely at the Government's door. The Government have cut their share of support by way of rate support grant. I fear that under this Bill, once the rate support grant system is changed to revenue support grant, that trend will continue. My amendment is intended to stop that trend and to restore a realistic level of minimum rate support grant or revenue support grant, as the case may be, if and when this terrible Bill is implemented.

It is interesting to consider the trend in recent years of the Government's percentage of rate support grant in terms of a percentage of reckonable expenditure. There was a time when the rate support grant in Scotland was as high as 75 per cent. That was way back in 1975-76—the golden days of a Labour Government, some people might say. However, there were special circumstances then because of local government reorganisation. It is still interesting that, when the previous Labour Government left office, rate support grant was still 68·5 per cent. of reckonable expenditure. Since this Government came to power, they have cut the percentage of rate support grant almost every year. It is now down to 55·5 per cent. In other words, from meeting two thirds of local authority expenditure, the Government are now meeting just over a half. That is a drop of 13 percentage points since the Government took office. For the coming financial year alone I calculate that there will be a loss to local authorities of about £250 million. Over the years, literally billions of pounds have been taken away from local authorities by the Government. No wonder local councillors are faced with difficult financial decisions.

There must be many councillors, and the people they represent, asking, "Where is this trend going to end? What is the Government's target?" Perhaps the Minister can answer that when he replies. Does he really want to get the ratio down to 50:50, 40:60 or 30:70, or does he foresee a day when local government will have to raise all of its money for expenditure purposes? He should come clean in that respect. It would certainly help people in local government if they knew where they stood.

These statistics speak for themselves. The result of the massive cut in rate support grant over the years, particularly since this Tory Government came to power, means that many councils have no option but to levy significant rates increases or to reduce drastically the important services that they were elected to provide for the people they represent.

My amendment would at least ensure a minimum rate support grant of 70 per cent. of eligible expenditure. Once we move to the new system of revenue support grant, that basic minimum will continue. The Government may not accept my figure of 70 per cent., and I accept that the figure that they inherited from the previous Labour Government was a little smaller than that, at 68·5 per cent. But it would be of tremendous help to councillors and officials in local government—and those whom they serve—if the Government accepted the principle of a minimum. How on earth can a councillor or council official do any forward planning if he does not know what the minimum percentage of rate support grant will be? My amendment would help forward financial planning. I therefore ask the House to accept it.

Mr. Wallace: I shall speak to amendment No. 181. I want to draw attention to two problems—one which could be transferred to the new system from the present one, and another which could arise if the Government develop their proposals for non-domestic rates.

Amendment No. 181 would fetter the almost unlimited discretion that the Secretary of State would have in fixing the amount of revenue support grant payable to each local authority. Paragraph 2(4) of schedule 2 says:

"The Secretary of State may, by reference to such factors as he determines, alter any amount produced"

under the formula above. Amendment No. 181 would not allow him to reduce the amount of revenue support grant by reference to the amount of revenue that a local authority receives from the non-domestic rate levied on oil and petrochemical installations.

I fully admit that the amendment is based on a constituency interest. There is considerable dissatisfaction now because the client group approach which the Government have adopted, and which helps to fix the needs element of rate support grant, has not been applied fully in respect of Shetland Islands council or Orkney Islands council. The same also applies to other local councils, but I shall restrict myself to those of which I have first-hand experience.

[Mr. Wallace]

This year, instead of receiving grant of £20·3 million, Shetland has had it restricted to £10·7 million. Orkney has received £8 million instead of £10·3 million. The shortfall in Shetland is equivalent to a 20p rate on all ratepayers, including commercial ratepayers, who were badly hit by the revaluation, and Shetland's main ratepayer, the Sullom Voe terminal. They would save a great deal if the Government paid the full amount.

The criticism goes even further. It was accepted when the client group approach was first adopted that it would be impossible to apply it fully at the outset. There was an understanding that every effort would be made to bring authorities into line and that authorities which would gain would increasingly receive the full assessed amount. That has not happened this year. The gap has not been narrowed, and if the limit on gains had been applied to Shetland it would have had a further £600,000, which would have been a further saving for ratepayers.

When we debated the Rate Support Grant (Scotland) Order two weeks ago, the Minister said that one of the reasons for the lack of narrowing was the high rate revenue base of the islands, principally because of the oil terminals. I do not deny that there is a high revenue base which reduces domestic and commercial rates, but the burdens imposed by the oil terminals must be borne in mind. Substantial capital expenditure has been incurred for new housing, new schools, improved roads and harbour facilities.

Moreover, the oil installations have produced higher rateable values on domestic and commercial property. The benefits of the terminals should not restrict payment of the full amount of rate support grant. The gap must be narrowed. I do not want the present considerable shortfall to continue when rate support grant is replaced by revenue support grant.

I want also to flag up the problem which would arise if the Government introduced their national pooling of the non-domestic rate. That aim was set out in the Green Paper, but it is not included in the Bill. The Minister might say that, by leaving it out here, he is to some extent acknowledging the difficulties that pooling would pose for islands councils. He is, however, postponing the day when the special considerations mentioned in the Green Paper have to be implemented.

Some 80 per cent. of the rating revenue for Shetland comes fom the Sullom Voe terminal and 60 per cent. of the rating revenue in Orkney comes form the Flotta terminal. If they were lost to a national pool, that would have a devastating effect on the level of community charge in Orkney and Shetland. That is one reason why we have asked for special consideration.

The amendment gives the Minister an opportunity to say what special considerations he has in mind. I know that he intends to meet representatives of the islands councils next week to discuss such issues and I am grateful for that, but it is a little late in the day as the Bill will have left the House by then.

What I have described could be a serious problem for the islands' finances, not least because they have to plan ahead and it is uncertain what arrangements will be in place after 1992 or when the Government, if they are still in office — God forbid — go ahead with a pooling arrangement.

Mr. Hugh Brown: I do not apologise for taking up a couple of minutes on this important amendment. It gives us an opportunity to discuss clause 25, albeit far too briefly.

This is the second time that the financial basis of support from the Government to local authorities has been caught by a guillotine. I believe that we spent about 15 minutes on it in Committee. I am sure that the Minister is desperate to put on the record a lot more about how it will work.

I should like to ask a couple of questions regarding additional commitments that the Government have taken on since we discussed this matter in Committee. I refer to the formula for giving relief to sports clubs. If the Minister does not think that 70 per cent. is a reasonable figure, will he say what level of support the Government are contemplating? Will it be more or less than it is now? He must hazard a guess, if not in actual amounts or in real terms, in percentage terms. Is it a long-term aim of the Government to have no central Government contribution to local authorities? I must point out to the Minister that, although a minor amount, this is an additional item of expenditure of which the Government have taken commitment.

7.30 pm

I am suspicious about what was said last night as to how the system will operate. Strathclyde regional council prepared a formula which, I hope, has been sent to the Scottish Office in which it identified a rates liability of £2·6 million for the 434 clubs in the region. Therefore, 50 per cent. relief would cost £1·3 million. However, under the formula that Strathclyde produced—I must say that it is a workable formula — if all clubs applied and the formula was applied, the formula means that there is a variation depending on the income and turnover of the club to try to take account of the problem of sports clubs that are licensed. The total relief could be £0·9 million, of which Strathclyde regional council would be liable for £0·6 million. The rest would be a district liability.

The Government suggested that that was a considerable concession. I am sorry that not one Conservative Member was interested enough to seek clarification of it. This is the most important clause in the Bill so far as central Government support is concerned. My hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) has rightly drawn attention to the level of support that would be desirable. That is not a commitment by the Opposition, but it gives us the opportunity to consider clause 25.

I should like to direct the Minister's attention to what was said last night. I shall not quote extensively because of the time constraint, but the Secretary of State said:

"if a local authority uses its discretion it will not lose a penny of its income."

We are talking about what will happen after 1989, about the new proposal, not the interim period. The Secretary of State continued:

"I can confirm that the effect of these proposals will be that any individual local authority which may lose revenue which it would otherwise have received from a sports club, but for the relief that it will provide, will receive additional rate support grant commensurate with the revenue forgone."

I presume that he means the revenue support grant, because we are still discussing 1989. Therefore, he is saying that there will be no loss. However, replying to the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), the Secretary of State said:

"The only change will be that if a good proportion of authorities were to exercise that relief, they would lose revenue from clubs, which would not result in any improvement in their grant from central Government."—[*Official Report*, 4 March 1987; Vol. 111, c. 963-4.]

I do not know whether that is a misprint. That is the only situation that would change. Would the Minister care to clarify that? I ask him briefly and concisely to explain how the mechanism will operate. What is the amendment that will be used in the other place to enable local authorities to know precisely that, within future calculations, if they give rate relief, they will receive full compensation? I do not doubt the word of the Secretary of State or the Minister. However, I am suspicious about the whole arrangement because the Secretary of State knows—and we all know—that the Government decide how much support they will give to local authorities. They then say, "Fit that into the formula, whatever it is." If one authority gives more relief, it will either come out of the other part of the grant from that authority or it will come from some other authority.

Mr. Ancram *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Brown: The Minister shakes his head. However, he does not have the confidence of the local authorities. That is like saying, "Yes, we are giving a special allocation to Glasgow"—or somewhere else—"for dampness." That does not mean a thing. It means only that the Minister hopes that Glasgow will spend or borrow that additional amount and that it will be used to tackle dampness. However, it still comes out of the same housing budget, and the same restrictions on expenditure that apply in housing will apply to local authorities, given the powers that he has.

I know that it is a little unfair to raise that point now, but I hope that the Minister will respond because, unless there is an amendment—no doubt the Government will table an amendment in the other place—in which case we may be able to debate it when the Bill comes back, there is a need to clear up exactly how the relief will be given to local authorities, and whether it will affect the level of general support that central Government will give to local authorities.

Mr. Ancram: I should like to deal first with the point raised by the right hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Millan), to the extent that I can do so in general terms, not having received notice that he wished to raise it now. First, as a matter of fact, I should like to see say that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State made it clear last night that he wished to compensate local authorities who take decisions to relieve sports clubs for the loss of revenue that they incur in so doing. In relation to the amendments considered by the House last night, it is worth reminding the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) that where mandatory relief was required I understood that there was no provision that any compensation should be made to the local authorities for that. It would have fallen instead upon their ratepayers, so there is a major distinction between the two sets of proposals that were before the House last night.

In overall terms, the Secretary of State said in an answer to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar):

"When each year Government decide on the aggregate of rate support grant, they will take into account all the circumstances and they will have to include—"

Unfortunately, the record reports an *[Interruption.]* at that point. From his later comments, it is clear that the hon. Gentleman was saying that that would have to include the consequences of the mechanism that he had enunciated. He continued:

"This is not some new principle. It is exactly the way in which rate support grant is determined by every Government, and that is the proper way to do it. I have told the House that no authority will lose a single penny by a decision to grant relief of the kind that we have outlined."—[*Official Report*, 4 March 1987; Vol. 111, c. 965.]

So far as the mechanism is concerned—I do not wish to discuss it in detail—once the Bill is in operation, in 1989, there will only be the needs element through which it can be operated effectively. The non-domestic revenue will be considered and its loss in each authority, based on the authority's certification in the autumn of the number of reliefs that will be given, will be deducted from the domestic rates and compensated in terms of the needs element, so that each authority does not lose as a result of having taken those decisions and does not have to increase its community charge to meet them. That is quite simple after 1989, because then there will only be the needs element.

At present there is already an element of compensation built into the system, through the resources element, but not all authorities are in resources elements, so whether an authority has some comeback through the grants system for taking a decision to relieve sports clubs at present depends whether it is in a resource element. My right hon. and learned Friend said last night that he wanted to ensure that for 1988-89, which is the year before the provisions in the Bill come into operation, there would be as fair a system as would exist after the Bill came into operation. That requires a minor legislative change, which we intend to move in another place, to allow a similar mechanism, through the needs element, to operate before the Bill becomes operative in terms of the new revenue support grant.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that as a general explanation. I know that he has a suspicious mind—he is continually reminding me of that fact—but I hope that on this occasion he will see that not only have the sports clubs welcomed what was said this morning but that once the local authorities have studied it they will see that we have provided a mechanism that is fair to them as well.

I am aware of time constraints, but I should like to say a word about the proposals because in Committee I could not do so at the end of our debates. The amendment in the name of the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) is wholly unacceptable. First, given the present grant rate of 55·6 per cent., the amendment would imply a substantial immediate increase in the taxpayers' contribution to local services. It would be instructive to know the hon. Gentleman's views on where that money was to come from. What other services or expenditure programmes would he like to see reduced?

Mr. Canavan *rose*——

Mr. Ancram: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will allow me to develop my argument. I did not interrupt him, although on some occasions I was sorely tempted to do so. Would the money come from increases in taxation? We already know that Labour's programme would involve

[Mr. Ancram]

either 43 per cent. VAT or a local income tax of more than 50p in the pound. Is he suggesting that those figures are not enough and that he wishes to see taxation increased?

The hon. Gentleman went on to make the point, as he has done before, that reductions in rate support grant had somehow increased rates. Presumably the corollary is that if one holds the proportion of rate support grant steady, rates will hold steady, and if one increases the proportion of rate support grant, rates will decrease. In the four years when grant was held steady at 68·5 per cent., expenditure rose by £260 million in real terms and rates rose by 79 per cent. in cash terms or 17 per cent. in real terms. The grant proportion was being held steady, but it did not help ratepayers because the rates increased in real terms. In July 1986, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State, announced an aggregate Exchequer grant for 1987-88 which maintained the percentage of grant in 1986-87. We can look at Scotland now to see whether the hon. Gentleman's argument is working and whether rates are holding steady, but if he considers the proposed rate increases, I doubt whether he can sustain that argument.

The hon. Gentleman asked me what the Government's position was on rate support grant, and the same question was asked by the hon. Member for Provan. I must tell both hon. Gentlemen that they cannot expect me at this stage to predict what is essentially a decision taken each year in the light of the needs and circumstances of the time. However, I can make this comment about this year. When we maintained the grant proportion, we made it clear that it was in recognition of the fact that at long last expenditure in 1986-87 was marginally below that in 1978-79 in volume terms and that this was the first time that that had happened since 1979. That was the reasoning behind the aggregate which we announced.

Finally, the amendment is wholly unacceptable because it would compel the Government to provide grant at a rate of 70 per cent. or, as the hon. Gentleman fairly said, possibly less of an authority's actual expenditure even if that expenditure was grossly extravagant. The hon. Gentleman is effectively asking the Government to give a blank cheque to the local authority saying, "Spend what you like." The hon. Gentleman knows that he has removed the controls that we were discussing in the last set of amendments. He is saying to local authorities, "Fill in 70 per cent. of whatever you want to spend."

Mr. Canavan: The amendment refers to "eligible" expenditure.

Mr. Ancram: The hon. Gentleman might like to describe what he believes to be eligible expenditure. Obviously, it is not relevant expenditure because we have been setting out guidelines for relevant expenditure and the hon. Gentleman has said that we have been holding local authorities back. His suggestions are unworkable and, once again, show the sort of view of local authority spending that many Opposition Members have.

Amendment No. 181, proposed by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace), deals with oil and petrochemical installations. The hon. Gentleman will not be surprised to learn that I cannot accept his amendment, but I can offer some reassurance on the points that I believe concern him. I shall deal only with those affected by the Bill. For constituency reasons, he may have wanted to make other points in the debate, but in fairness I should stick to the effects of the Bill.

In the period before the establishment of a national non-domestic rate, with pooling of non-domestic rate income, we intend that for the purposes of apportioning revenue support grant on the basis of the respective needs of authorities, those needs will be assessed in the normal way, as they are at present, and non-domestic rate income will then be netted off. For an authority like Shetland or Orkney, the netting off will include the rate income from Sullom Voe or Flotta, which I think are the hon. Gentleman's main concern. The purpose of this procedure is to equalise among authorities, so that after grant all authorities will have to impose the same level of community charge for the same standard of service. That is an important principle.

However, schedule 4, paragraph 2(4) allows us to make special arrangements which we have described as safety netting—that is, the Secretary of State will be able to adjust the amount of grant arrived at under the earlier procedures, so as to avoid or to moderate any change in grant entitlement, from one year to the next. Paragraph 2(4) provides us with an adequate vehicle to avoid any odd or quirky results which otherwise might be expected to arise, particularly for the Islands councils. On present estimates we would expect all the Islands councils to benefit substantially from the safety netting carried out using paragraph 2(4). Indeed, Shetland Islands council has made submissions setting out the importance to it of safety netting.

7.45 pm

I am aware of Shetland's concern in particular about the decline of business for Sullom Voe in the 1990s and the need for a non-domestic rate at that time pitched at a level which will not discourage the oil companies from continuing Sullom Voe's operation. To that kind, I am aware that the council is aiming to pay off its oil-related debts by 1992-93 and I am aware of its concern about the possible effect of a national non-domestic rate thereafter on the oil companies' decisions for the future of Sullom Voe. Indeed, those points were raised with me when I visited the islands in the summer. There are two points to make in response to that. First, the immediate issue as perceived by Shetland Islands council is that it should be able to continue to pursue its debt-free policy between now and 1992-93. There is nothing in our proposal to prevent or inhibit that.

Secondly, our interim proposals to determine maximum annual increases in non-domestic rates are intended simply to do that. It will be open to individual authorities to charge less than the maximum, as I understand that Shetland would like to be in a position to do. I will be meeting representatives of Shetland Islands council next week, and I hope then to discuss the matter further with them. These discussions will cover not only the position in the next few years under the system of grants and non-domestic rates established by this Bill, but the long term under the national non-domestic rate. On that basis I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not press his amendment.

I shall briefly outline how the revenue grant proposals are intended to work, because it is important. Paragraph 1(4) of schedule 4 effectively repeats the existing provisions but in a simplified form. The Secretary of State first

determines aggregate Exchequer grant—that is, the total grant to be paid to local authorities in support of their relevant expenditure, which is, broadly, all their expenditure except housing and water. The first call on this is for entirely specific grants. These are the grants which are paid for particular services. The biggest specific grants are for the police, housing improvement and urban aid. The rest of the AEG is then to be paid as revenue support grant. Having established the total of revenue support grant, paragraph 2 sets out how the grant to each authority is to be established.

The first step in distributing grant will be to look at the expenditure need of each authority. At present we use client group assessments of expenditure need to do this in needs element calculations. In the new system we shall take these assessments but deduct from them non-domestic rate income. The grant required to compensate for differences in expenditure need will then be calculated. For example, if Central region has an expenditure need of £445 per adult and Fife £420. Central needs £25 per adult in grant to compensate for that difference. Once differences in need have been calculated, the rest of the grant will be distributed proportionately to the adult population. To use 1986-87 figures, for example, regions might get £316 per adult; districts, which have traditionally received a lower share of rate support grant, £1 per adult; and the Islands authorities £317 per adult.

The new grant system is being introduced for two reasons. First, the rate support grant system has become too complicated and few people understand it. Having considered rate support grant orders in the House, most hon. Members will agree with that. The needs element is complicated enough, but there are also the resources and domestic elements. The subject has even developed a language of its own with such entities as actual penny rate products, standard penny rate products, and the national standard amounts. Secondly, the grants system must match the system of taxation, since one of its aims is a fair distribution of the tax burden between residents in different authorities.

The new grant system will cause fairly small changes in grant entitlement at regional level but rather larger shifts for some small districts. To ease the transition to the new system, there will be a safety net. In future, revenue support grant orders will be straightforward documents listing for each authority how much grant it will receive. The report on an order will set out how the grant figures were arrived at and local authority associations, which at present mean COSLA, will be consulted before an order is laid. Section 2.6 allows variation orders to be made changing grant distribution and, if necessary, the aggregate. In the present grant system it is necessary to make several variation orders for grant each year. I hope that such changes will be kept to a minimum in the new system and that in many years it may be possible to dispense with variation orders altogether. Certainly, the new system will give local authorities much greater certainty to their grant entitlement. I believe that that will be a major improvement on the present situation.

That is the background to the amendments that we have been discussing. I hope and trust that the hon. Members for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) and for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) will not press their amendments. If they do, I must ask my hon. Friends to resist them.

Amendment negatived.

Amendment made: No. 88, in page 20, line 16, leave out from '26' to end of line 20.—*[Mr. Ancram.]*

Mr. Ancram: I beg to move amendment No. 160, in page 20, line 24, after 'charges', insert

'(including payments of standard community charge contributions under section 12 and collective community charge contributions under section 13 of this Act).'.

The purpose of this amendment is to clarify and place beyond doubt the coverage of the proposed community rebate scheme. It has always been the Government's intention that collected community charge contribution provided for in clause 13 should be able to be included within the provisions of the community charge rebate scheme. Our advice when the Bill was being drafted was that reference to rebates being in respect of payments made by way of community charges was sufficient to secure this. Doubt has now been cast, however, on whether the words "by way of" are sufficiently clear. The purpose of this amendment is to remove that doubt. I trust that the House will approve the amendment.

Amendment agreed to.

Mr. Maxton: I beg to move amendment No. 174, in page 20, line 25, at end insert

'such regulations shall ensure that 100 per cent. rebates may be granted where the level of income of a person warrants it.'.

The whole rebate scheme in this Bill has aroused concern ever since the publication of the Green Paper and then of the Bill, with no White Paper in between, which would have been normal in these circumstances. Concern has been expressed about the lack of detail in the Bill on the rebate scheme. If what the Minister has said so far in Committee and elsewhere is right, we are certain that he intends to operate the Social Security Act that will be coming into force in April 1988. In other words, every person who is entitled to pay the community charge will pay 20 per cent. of it. Whatever their income or means, however poor they are, if they are over the age of 18 they will have to pay 20 per cent. of the community charge.

The Minister's initial reaction to objections to that tended to be, "It is in the Social Security Act and there is not much I can do about it." It was pointed out to him that constitutionally in this Parliament, as in any previous piece of legislation, we are entitled to put in this Bill a 100 per cent. rebate scheme. Is he prepared to say that every single person should pay 20 per cent. of the charge? The Minister and the Government are saying that widows and single parents, about whom the Government have expressed great concern, are going to be better off as a result of having to pay £40 or £50 per year. Every unemployed youth over the age of 18 will have to pay the charge. The poorest in our land will be asked to pay on average £1 a week for their so-called local services. That is what the Government are about. We object to the basic immorality of asking the very poorest in the land to pay.

Of course, £1 a week is not a large sum for any of us in this House. However, there is something immoral in hon. Members, particularly on the Government side, voting to reduce their own tax burden in order to put it on to widows, old-age pensioners and the unemployed. That is what the Government are doing in this Bill.

Mr. Ancram: The hon. Gentleman is sloganising.

Mr. Maxton: The Minister says I am sloganising. I will give him one more slogan. I will tell him what may very well happen under this measure. I have said before, and

[Mr. Maxton]

I say again, that if this Bill ever comes into force, elderly pensioners living alone in council flats will have a difficult choice to make in the middle of a hard winter. Their choice will be between paying their electricity bill to heat their homes and keep themselves alive or paying the community charge. If they make the wrong choice, they die. If they choose not to pay the community charge, the sheriff's officer will go after them and take their television set in payment.

I have heard the descriptions "emotional" and "over the top" from the Minister, but never once has he denied that that may happen as a result of what he is doing. He cannot argue against it, because he knows it could happen. We are talking not only of the immorality but of the practicality of the Bill.

The famous Tory Reform Group document that came out at 1 o'clock in the morning, referring to accountability, makes the point:

"The Government's final fall-back position is that all low-income electors may be"—

or "shall be", which is what it ought to be——

"required to pay 20 per cent. of their local community charge. This idea will not last long in practice. The administrative cost of collecting such sums will often outweigh the income and the social security system (through housing benefit) will be adjusted by a future Government to meet the 20 per cent. charge in full for low-income groups. In these circumstances, the 20 per cent. charge will be effectively redundant."

The Tory Reform Group in England does not believe that the 20 per cent. charge will stick, because it is such a small sum of money. The cost of collecting the charge and chasing people to get it will be such that the Government will appreciate very quickly that it should be scrapped altogether. Once the 20 per cent. charge is abolished and a full 100 per cent. rebate system is instituted, the Government's accountability argument will go out the window. That is why the Government are so miserly and mean in insisting on the very poorest in our society having to pay that sum of money. I ask the Minister to support my amendment and to give the poor of Scotland at least the chance of a 100 per cent. rebate.

Mr. Donald Stewart (Western Isles): This amendment goes to the very crux of the Bill. People of very limited means will be obliged to pay out 20 per cent. of their income. That will not matter very much to most people but, as the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) has just said, to many others it will mean the difference between a reasonable existence and doing without the very essentials of existence. The Government have made great play in the past about the means test. This will not even be subject to a means test. Everybody, however small their income, will be obliged to pay 20 per cent. of their income towards this new poll tax.

8 pm

In 1979, in a document that the Conservatives issued in Scotland, they said:

"In the future programme of priorities we will ease the rates burden, first by transferring to central Government the cost of teachers' salaries"—

no doubt that is due in the next century——

"... by abolishing domestic rates and replacing them by taxes related to people's ability to pay."

This charge goes against that, and most hon. Members would regard that policy statement as fundamental whether or not they agree with this poll tax or community charge.

This charge will fall heavily on Scottish crofters. The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Mackenzie) put down a marker in Committee about that. Since 1956 crofters have enjoyed rate benefits because of their remote location, higher costs of living and lack of amenities. Their circumstances have not changed in any way.

The National Farmers Union of Scotland, which is not often regarded as a friend of the crofters, has come out in their support. It says:

"£1·7 million extra will be taken from Scotland's crofting households."

My constituency has the benefit of the integrated development programme but it will all have gone for nothing because of this swingeing poll tax. All the input from the Common Market will disappear because of this charge. It negates entirely the benefits of the community programme in the Western Isles. Mrs. Betty MacDonald, the convenor of the NFU's Scottish commission, said:

"For a household of two I will pay over three times the amount payable under the existing system."

The Government must face that. Scotland's crofters do not have the resources to pay these charges and the Crofters Holdings Act 1886 will have been passed for nothing. The social effects will be damaging in parts of the islands and on the mainland of Scotland where, because of derating in the past, crofters have a reasonable cost of living. They will come to the towns, and the rural areas will be totally depopulated. For that reason, quite apart from the question of morality and justice, this amendment should be accepted by the Government and backed by the House.

Mr. Hugh Brown: We had a long debate in Committee, so I shall not rehearse all the arguments that I deployed then to draw attention to how this measure will affect a constituency like mine with a high proportion of people receiving social security benefits. I have had two letters containing representations. One is from the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations and the other is from the Scottish Society for the Mentally Handicapped. I assume that the Minister has received similar letters. The Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations is probably one of the most influential and well-respected bodies in Scotland. Speaking on behalf of 11 other voluntary bodies, it says:

"The bill, in its present form, will have serious effects upon the clients and members of voluntary bodies."

The Scottish Society for the Mentally Handicapped says:

"So mentally handicapped people would presumably be liable for about £50, which would have to come out of their Social Security benefits. While there may be some adjustment of benefits nationally, the Community Charge would be fixed locally and the two might well be incompatible. Many families will feel that they are being taxed for having a mentally handicapped dependant."

It is appalling that, under the guise of some kind of accountability, the Government are being miserly and putting the boot into the poorest and most handicapped people in our society by way of a 20 per cent. charge. I have written to both organisations, I hope diplomatically, and told them that in one case Her Majesty the Queen Mother is the patron and the president is Lord Mackay of Clashfern. The patron of the other organisation is Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Kent and the vice-president is the Duchess of Buccleuch and Queensberry. When talking about noble families I am never very sure whether I am talking about the Lothian or the Hamilton family or whether they are just related. I hope that my little

effort in drawing attention to the power that still remains in the House of Lords to do something for the poor will be noted by the Minister. It is ironic that in this society we have to hope that the Lords can do something that the Government have failed to do.

Mr. Maclennan: The right hon. Member for the Western Isles (Mr. Stewart) is right when he says that this matter has been debated at length—and it is right that it should have been. The proposals by the Government to impose 20 per cent. of the community charge on those who are destitute is an abomination and ought never to have been the subject of legislation. It is an appalling commentary upon the attitude of the Government to the poor, who grow in number the longer this Government remain in office, that there is no provision in the Bill to help these people avoid an appalling impasse.

The Government have sought to justify the poll tax by saying that it is a charge for services, but it will not fall upon people according to the extent to which they use services. The Government know that local government services are most used by the elderly and by young people with families. For the most part it is the single unemployed who will have to bear this appalling burden. They are the very people in Scotland who receive least assistance from local authorities. The alliance parties were firm and clear from the beginning that local taxation ought to be based upon ability to pay. The Government have rejected that principle and we regard their attitude to the poll tax as retrograde, medieval and wholly inappropriate in a civilised society. I support the amendment.

Mr. Ancram: In Committee questions were asked about whether there would be a rebate scheme and a number of hon. Members did not think that there would be. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) tabled an amendment but did not move it so we had better leave that matter aside.

I should like to quote from a letter written by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 2 March to Councillor Layden, the chairman of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities. I hope that the letter will put this matter beyond doubt. It says:

"The Government's intention is that there should be community charge rebates throughout Great Britain, though each person liable would be required to make some community charge payment; the Social Security White Paper suggested that each household make at least a 20 per cent. contribution towards domestic rates. You will have seen that Clause 26 of the Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc. (Scotland) Bill provides the power to pay such rebates in Scotland. We envisage a similar power when the legislation to introduce the community charge in England and Wales is put before Parliament."

If the hon. Member for Cathcart does not wish to rely on my statements, perhaps he will rely on that one.

The right hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Stewart) spoke about the amendment put forward in Committee by the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan). Those who know the area that the right hon. Member for Western Isles represents are not unanimous in thinking that the amendment put forward by the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland was correct. A certain Mr. Brian Wilson, who I believe is still a member of the Labour party and a candidate, on 27 February, wrote in the *West Highland Free Press*, a journal which I suspect the right hon. Gentleman sometimes reads:

"The arguments raised against the solution, . . ."—

that is, the solution proposed by the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland—

". . . notably by Mr. Hugh Brown, are formidable. It simply is not on to introduce in 1987 a new scheme which gives the well-paid schoolteacher with crofting status a 25 per cent. tax rebate while the pensioner next door in a non-croft house is hit for the full whack."

If the right hon. Member for Western Isles is not prepared to listen to the arguments that I put forward in Committee, he might at least listen to the arguments of Mr. Brian Wilson.

Mr. Donald Stewart: I agree that probably only 1 per cent. of crofters are schoolmasters who have inherited their croft or bought one. But that does not apply to 99 per cent. of the crofted area, either in the islands or on the mainland.

Mr. Ancram: If the right hon. Gentleman looks at the number of owner-occupier crofters, he will find that the percentage of them who have other jobs or professions is rather larger than that.

The point that is being made brings us directly to the question of rebates. The moment that we make exemptions for certain categories, we give to those who do not need help as well as to those who do. The purpose of the rebate scheme is to target help to those who need it.

Mr. Wallace: The Minister has almost made out the case for a local income tax. He says that, by trying to introduce exemptions, one cannot necessarily target those who are in need as opposed to those who are not. The reason for these exemptions is that his Bill does not allow for the fundamental principle of fairness, which any tax system must have. He almost accepted that and put forward a good case for a local income tax.

Mr. Ancram: I wish that we had time to go into the question of a local income tax. I have been longing to go into the details of a local income tax. The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) told me that I should not expect him to produce any details of his scheme, and I can only suspect that that is because he realises that were he to go into the details of it he would see that it hits at those whose support he is trying to gather.

This amendment would require the rebate scheme to provide for rebates of up to 100 per cent. of the community charge levels. Here again we are dealing with an issue which has been debated at length not only in the course of the Bill but, more appropriately, by both Houses during the passage of the Bill which became the Social Security Act 1986. The proposition that all those liable for the personal community charge should be required to make some contribution towards it is already embodied in the housing benefit scheme for rates which will be introduced from 1 April 1988 under the provisions of the 1986 Act.

In view of the amount of discussion that we have already had on this point, I shall limit myself to a brief summary of the justification for our policy. There are two reasons for the proposal. The first is that the primary purpose of rates, and in due course the community charge system, is to finance the provision of local authority services. Since all ratepayers, and subsequently all community charge payers, have access to local authority services, it seems right that all should make at least some contribution to the costs. The second justification is to increase the accountability of local authorities to their ratepayers, or community charge payers, for the costs of the services that they provide.

[Mr. Ancram]

As was clearly established during the passage of the Social Security Act 1986, there needs to be a relationship between the services that local authorities provide and the willingness of their local taxpayers to meet the cost of these services. If a significant proportion of local taxpayers bear none of the burden of meeting the costs of local services, that relationship is broken.

The provision for a minimum contribution is therefore an essential part of the improvements in accountability which the new system will bring. It will, indeed, already have been included, in principle, in the rating system before the community charge is introduced. The carry-over of the principle into the community charge arrangements will reinforce the improvements in accountability that the broadening of the tax base will bring. The amendment therefore strikes at one of the main principles of our policy, and I cannot accept it.

The rebate scheme which we offer is a generous one. It takes account of high levels of gross income at the top end of the taper and it depends on income support levels at the bottom. It will give protection where it is required, while maintaining the principle of accountability.

On that basis, I ask my hon. Friends to reject the amendment.

Mr. Maxton: In the last 30 seconds before the guillotine comes down on the debate, I should like to say that the 80 per cent. rebate and the paying of 20 per cent. by every person—the mentally and physically handicapped, the elderly and the young unemployed — is the most immoral part of what is a very immoral Bill. I ask my hon. Friends to join me in the Lobby in voting for a 100 per cent. rebate.

Question put, that the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 143, Noes 196.

Division No. 111] **[8.15 pm**

AYES

Abse, Leo
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'fmline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Buchan, Norman
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Clay, Robert
Clelland, David Gordon
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S)*
Coleman, Donald
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Craigen, J. M.
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(L'lli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Golding, Mrs Llin
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Fife Central)*
Hancock, Michael
Hardy, Peter
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley, N)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Janner, Hon Greville
Jenkins, Rt Hon Roy *(Hillh'd)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Martin, Michael
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stewart, Rt Hon D. *(W Isles)*
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Tinn, James
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Tony Lloyd and
Mr. John McWilliam.

NOES

Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Best, Keith
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Bruinvels, Peter
Buck, Sir Antony
Bulmer, Esmond
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Rt Hon Sir Adam
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Cranborne, Viscount
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dickens, Geoffrey
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
du Cann, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Sir Alexander
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Alan
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Gryffs, Michael
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(N'folk SW)*
Hayward, Robert
Heddle, John

Henderson, Barry
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jackson, Robert
Jessel, Toby
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
McCurley, Mrs Anna
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, M. *(N'bury)*
Major, John
Malone, Gerald
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mather, Sir Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Morris, M. *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Murphy, Christopher
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Osborn, Sir John
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Patten, J. *(Oxf W & Abgdn)*
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stokes, John
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Whitfield, John
Wiggin, Jerry
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Michael Portillo and
Mr. Richard Ryder.

Question accordingly negatived.

It being after fifteen minutes past Eight o'clock MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *proceeded, pursuant to the Order [11 February] and the Resolution [4 March], to put forthwith the Questions on the remaining amendments moved by a member of the Government.*

Schedule 5

WATER AND SEWERAGE CHARGES

Amendments made: No. 144, in page 42, line 1, after '(a);' insert 'subject to paragraph 2A below,'.

No. 145, in page 42, line 5, at end insert—

'2A. In estimating the expenditure mentioned in paragraph 1 above which they will incur in respect of any financial year a local authority shall take into account—

(a) such additional sum as is in their opinion required—

(i) to cover expenses previously incurred,

(ii) to meet contingencies, and

(iii) to meet any expenses which may fall to be met before the moneys to be received from the sources mentioned in paragraph 1 above in respect of the next following financial year will become available; and

(b) any means by which any part of that expenditure may otherwise be met or provided for.'.

No. 146, in page 43, leave out lines 6 to 11.

No. 147, in page 43, line 22, after 'prescribed', insert 'in relation'.

No. 148, in page 43, line 37, after '(a)', insert 'subject to paragraph 15A below,'.

No. 149, in page 43, line 43, at end insert—

'15A. In estimating the expenditure mentioned in paragraph 14 above which they will incur in respect of any financial year, a local authority shall take into account—

(a) such additional sum as is in their opinion required—

(i) to cover expenses previously incurred,

(ii) to meet contingencies, and

(iii) to meet any expenses which may fall to be met before the moneys to be received from the sources mentioned in paragraph 14 above in respect of the next following financial year will become available; and

(b) any means by which any part of that expenditure may otherwise be met or provided for.'.

No. 150, in page 44, line 24, leave out 'in whose entry in the valuation roll there appears no domestic subjects note' and insert 'in respect of which there is an entry in the valuation roll'.

No. 151, in page 44, line 38, leave out from 'rate' to the end of line 44.

No. 152, in page 46, line 6, leave out 'in whose entry in the valuation roll there appears no domestic subjects note' and insert 'in respect of which there is an entry in the valuation roll'.

No. 153, in page 46, line 30, leave out from 'rate' to the end of line 36.—*[Mr. Ancram.]*

Clause 28

INTERPRETATION

Amendments made: No. 89, in page 21, line 10, leave out from '"domestic rates"' to end of line 11 and insert 'means rates which are leviable on lands and heritages which are domestic subjects'.

No. 90, in page 21, leave out lines 14 and 15.—*[Mr. Ancram.]*

Clause 29

APPEALS

Amendments made: No. 91, in page 22, line 10, leave out from 'imposition' to 'appealed' in line 11 and insert 'requirement', designation or, as the case may be, other matter'.

No. 92, in page 22, leave out line 15. — *[Mr. Ancram.]*

Schedule 6

REPEALS

Amendment made: No. 154, in page 50, line 48, leave out 'the words'.—*[Mr. Ancram.]*

Order for Third Reading read.—[Queen's Consent, on behalf of the Crown, signified.]

8.26 pm

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

Clearly, at such a stage in the consideration of a Bill of this complexity and importance, it is difficult to conceive of anything fundamentally new that is likely to be said by Members on either side of the House. Nevertheless, I want to begin by emphasising that there are perhaps four ways in which fundamental defects in the existing system of local government finance have been identified, each of which is covered by the Bill and none of which is accommodated either by the proposals of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) or by the existing domestic rating system.

The first defect is well known, but I make no apology for repeating it. Some 750,000 adults in Scotland—21 per cent. of the total—make under the existing system, or would make under the proposals put forward by the Labour party, no contribution towards the raising of local revenue. For the purpose of this discussion I acknowledge, as I did on Second Reading, that spouses have a financial interest in the rates contributions of their husbands or wives, but even taking that into account we are still left with a substantial minority of the electorate who make no contribution. That is not because of their level of income their status in any general sense or because they are less in receipt of benefits or services from the local authority. Some may be wealthy, some may be of moderate wealth, some may be relatively poor—*[Interruption.]* Some will be very wealthy. Those with a private suite in the Caledonian hotel in Edinburgh will pay no rates at all whereas the impoverished person living round the corner will.

Mr. Maxton: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Rifkind: In a moment. I am just developing my point.

At no stage during the course of our debates have the Opposition either stopped to justify the exclusion of 21 per cent. of the adult electorate from any contribution towards a system of local authority revenue, nor have they put forward proposals which would rectify that.

Secondly, certain groups of the community, those who by any stretch of the imagination are among the lower income groups, will benefit in some cases very significantly from a system of community charge as opposed to a system of domestic rates. We have calculated, and no one has questioned this, that more than 85 per cent. of all single pensioner households will gain under a community charge, and that of these 30 per cent. would gain more than £1 a week.

We have also demonstrated that some 80 per cent. of other single adult households would gain, and that of these more than half would gain more than £1 a week. Within that last group, more than four fifths of all one-parent families would gain, about half of them gaining more than £1 per week. No one has yet suggested, and no one could suggest with any conviction, that those people are not among the poorest members of the community. It has been demonstrated, without any evidence to the contrary, that they will benefit, in some cases significantly, from the community charge as opposed to domestic rates.

The third consideration is the question of accountability, on which there has been much comment and to which the Opposition pay lip service, but which they have not dealt with in any convincing way. Under our existing arrangements it is not just the 21 per cent. who have no possible accountability. It is probably one third of the total electorate when one includes those who receive 100 per cent. rebates under the existing arrangements. Therefore, about one third of the adult electorate can vote for any level of rates increase in the knowledge that they will not have to make one penny contribution towards its cost. That is a substantial proportion of the electorate. The same does not apply in the case of a general election or in respect of central Government because all adults, irrespective of their status and their income, pay tax to central Government.

Mr. Maxton: Value added tax.

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman is correct. A proportion pay income tax, but 100 per cent. pay value added tax. The hon. Gentleman should be first to be aware that as local authorities have only one source of revenue from their local electorate, anyone who does not pay that local tax is totally immune from the consequences of the decision taken by that local authority — unlike the electorate in their relationship with central Government where there is not one elector who does not find himself influenced by decisions on public expenditure by central Government, either through value added tax or through income tax or through both. That is a factor that the Opposition have not begun to answer at any stage in this debate, nor have their proposals for reform of the system in any way dealt with that fundamental point.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadeen (Mr. Dewar) who at least does not interrupt with the same boring regularity as the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) — [HON. MEMBERS: "The Secretary of State is getting bored."] Yes, I am getting more and more bored by the hon. Member for Cacthcart. "Boring for Britain" should be his slogan at the next general election—he might make some impact with that.

At least the hon. Member for Garscadden understands that these are not bogus debating points but legitimate considerations. I acknowledge that, and I must assume that he is also worried about them. He must be as acutely conscious as anyone that the lack of accountability of the present system, the extent to which large minorities of the electorate make no contribution towards local rates and the extent to which pensioners and other single-parent families lose out under the existing arrangements are all defects which his own proposals will in no way bridge. That is a fundamental problem.

The fourth consideration regards the non-domestic ratepayer. Business and commerce are in the extraordinary position that under the existing arrangements they have become the milch cow of local authorities. They are perceived as bodies which can be expected to sustain any

level of rates increase. The average Labour councillor—not all of them—maintains that rates increases do not have the slightest effect on the viability of the industries or businesses concerned or on the employment that they can provide. However, the chambers of commerce and the Scottish CBI have emphasised that the rates increases which are now proposed by certain local authorities will severely damage employment and will lead to significant job losses which will harm the local economy.

There are a number of fundamental considerations. We must ask to what extent the Labour party can respond to those concerns in any way, given its opposition to the Government's proposals.

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that his courage and determination in taking action on rating reform has earned him great admiration in Southend-on-Sea as well as in Scotland, but is he prepared to take action on the grotesque anomaly whereby agricultural buildings are not subject to the payment of rates?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I hope that the Secretary of State will stick to what is in the Bill, which is the appropriate thing to do on Third Reading.

Mr. Rifkind: If I had residual doubts about the merits of the Bill, the approbation of the good people of Southend-on-Sea would have put my mind at rest. My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) will be aware, if he is interested in levying from the farmers of the United Kingdom the responsibility of paying rates for agricultural land and holdings, that the Labour Government would be the only Government liable to impose such a damaging innovation on the farming community at this difficult time for its interests.

In seeking to respond to the basic anomolies and unfairnesses which our Bill will rectify, the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden has not produced any convincing alternatives. Labour Members have laboured mightily and they have produced a mouse. The extraordinary proposal of capital values as the answer to the ratepayers' dream——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Chair often has great difficulty on Third Readings because the pattern that is set by the Secretary of State, or whoever it may be, is inevitably followed by all other speakers. The rule is that on Third Reading of a Bill we confine ourselves to what is in the Bill. I hope that the Secretary of State will do that.

Mr. Rifkind: I am happy to accept your ruling, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I notice the enthusiasm and relief with which the Opposition heard your ruling. They, too, are clearly even more delighted that I shall be unable to comment on their proposals at this stage, and we can all understand why.

I do not wish to speak for too long because I know that many other hon. Members will wish to comment. However, I wish to comment on the other major area, because it is a point which has been central to the——

Mr. Maxton: Is it relevant to the Bill?

Mr. Rifkind: It is indeed relevant to the Bill.

The other major area which is central to the debate is the question of ability to pay. The Opposition have sought to imply on various occasions that somehow the proposals before the House will lead to unacceptable and unreasonable hardship for the average person in Scotland. *[Interruption.]* We are now told that they will not lead to any problems for the average person in Scotland *[Interruption.]* It looks as though we are making progress at this late stage. It seems that the hon. Member for Cathcart does not wish to argue that the average person in Scotland will be worse off as a result of these proposals. I am prepared—*[Interruption.]* As I say, we are making considerable progress. The average income in Scotland is, we heard recently, £201 per week for persons in employment. Therefore, an average community charge payment of between £4 and £5 per week is a relatively small amount that is unlikely to produce hardship. The hon. Gentleman and other Labour Members will say, "Ah, yes, but it is not just the average person that we are talking about. We accept that he may not experience any hardship, but what about those being brought into the net for the first time? What about the young single person who does not pay rates at the moment and will pay rates in the future?" He may pay between £3, £4 or £5 if he is in employment, but if he is unemployed he is unlikely to pay the full amount.

Let us consider the position of the young, single, employed adult. We know what the situation is, because the latest figures illustrate that in 1985, which is already some two years ago, approximately 90 per cent. of youngsters between 18 and 24 who were in full-time employment earned more than £80 a week.

Mr. Maxton: There are not many of them.

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman simply does not know the facts. Almost 90 per cent.—88 per cent., to be exact — of all young adult males between 18 and 24 earned over £80 a week. Many are paying rates; many young adult males are ratepayers. They have to pay. Why should others with the same income make no contribution? The hon. Gentleman is silent all of a sudden. Even if those young people have had the good fortune to have no contribution to make up to now, the suggestion that a maximum payment—it is the maximum that we are talking about—of some £5 a week will be a cause of hardship is ludicrous.

The hon. Gentlman and the House as a whole are aware that, in addition to the fact that the vast majority of those who are in employment will have incomes far in excess of any level that would imply hardship in respect of such payments, there is to be a rebate scheme, which will assist not just young single adults but any whose income is below a level that would imply hardship if the full community charge were levied. That policy applies at present to domestic rates.

I believe that we have been able to demonstrate to any fair-minded person that the proposals will benefit some 80 per cent. to 85 per cent. of single pensioners and single-parent families. Our proposals will remove the anomalies to which we have drawn attention and they will not create hardship either for the average person in Scotland, which has already been conceded by the Opposition or, as I have demonstrated, for those on lower incomes.

Dr. M. S. Miller (East Kilbride): Is the Secretary of State saying that nobody will be worse off? [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] In that case, will he tell us who will be worse off?

Mr. Rifkind: Those who pay nothing at the moment will be worse off. That goes without saying. Whether that

[Mr. Rifkind]

is unfair is a separate issue. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that those who pay nothing at the moment do not necessarily pay nothing because their income is low. It may simply be that they are not the occupier of a rateable property. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be the first to appreciate that point.

I commend the Bill to the House in the very sure knowledge that, despite more than 100 hours in Committee, two days on Report and a public debate that has gone on much longer than that, and quite apart from the outcome of the votes, it is a well-recognised fact throughout Scotland—*[Interruption.]*—that, due to the splendid advocacy of the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Ancram) and his colleague who is responsible for industry, my hon. Friend the Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Lang), the Government's case has been demonstrated to be infinitely superior to that of the Opposition.

Mr. Douglas: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Rifkind: I understand — *[Interruption.]* I understand the sensitivity—

Mr. Douglas *rose*——

Mr. Rifkind: I am not giving way.

I understand the sensitivity of Opposition Members. They have had their opportunity to demonstrate their view as to the defects of the Bill and the advantages of domestic rates. It is a widely held perception in Scotland that they have failed to do so and that the Government's case has been enormously strengthened by the parliamentary consideration of the Bill. On that basis, I commend it to the House.

8.45 pm

Mr. Dewar: There is a slightly frivolous atmosphere, which is not surprising at this point, but I cannot help spending a minute or two welcoming the authentic voice of Southend man back to our Scottish debates. The earthy populism that he brings can be useful. He has given us a useful quotation on agricultural rating, to which I may give a wider airing in Scotland in the months ahead.

When the Secretary of State is reduced to saying, "It is a well-known fact that," we know that he is on weak ground. I do not accept his analysis. I do not accept his philosophical position, although I accept that it can be debated. Almost anything can be. I do not accept that the House should pass the Bill at this stage. It is the end of a rocky road. The Bill came to us as a bad Bill. I fear that it goes to another place still as a very bad Bill.

I should like to thank my hon. Friends who served on the Committee and worked extremely hard, along with representatives of some of the other parties, to try to get our case across. It was at times, I fear, a thankless task, but it was bravely discharged. I do not like the Bill. That is no secret. There are so many objections to it that they are difficult to summarise in what must be a reasonably brief speech. To some extent, we have been sandbagged just by two days of listening to the Minister, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Ancram), during the closing stages.

I do not make any apology for referring to this. Today there has been published a useful summary of the arguments, which came from a Conservative source. That was the Tory Reform Group publication in England and Wales. I am interested in the fact that the defence against quotations from the document is that they are invalidated by their English origin. It is a remarkable Conservative argument. The Secretary of State no doubt will remember that the Green Paper was a common document, which was given currency north and south of the border. The reason was simply that the arguments were the same north and south of the border, and it turned out that the solution was the same north and south of the border. It is remarkable that the Secretary of State should try to make a distinction and say that in some way, merely because an argument comes from an English branch of the Tory party, it is per se invalid. That suggests a certain amount of embarrassment.

I do not put enormous store on the Tory Reform Group and it would be ludicrous if I did, but it is worth saying to the Secretary of State that the group has on its notepaper the names of the deputy Prime Minister, the Home Secretary, the Secretary of State for Education and Science, the Paymaster General, the Secretary of State for Energy and some other very respectable Conservative leadership figures. It is interesting that the group has come up with such sharp and trenchant criticism of the fundamentals of this series of proposals.

Mr. Anderson: The hon. Gentleman may not have seen the whole document, in which there is a specific reference to the fact that the group does not pretend to have consulted, far less received the approval of, those who are its patrons or vice-presidents.

Mr. Dewar: The hon. Gentleman misinterprets my point. I am not suggesting that the views of the Tory Reform Group are the views of the Scottish Office. Perhaps they should be. Clearly, and sadly, they are not. I can do little about that. I am entitled to pray them in aid because they make a useful summary. I should like to draw the attention of the House——

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dewar: I shall not give way.

I shall not spend the whole of my speech on the document, but I should like to draw the attention of the House to one or two points because they are put concisely and effectively. The Tory Reform Group says:

> "The real criticism is that Government was acting"

in the cause of rating reform

> "in a haphazard way, making up these decisions as it went along. It had no clear idea as to why it had to intervene so constantly, what was so fundamentally wrong in local government and how to put it right."

I could not have put it better myself. The group went on to say:

> "The proposed community charge . . . is misconceived and it will undermine local self-government. This is because it will: involve substantial and excessive centralisation of power in Whitehall; isolate businesses from local government; fail to achieve the degree of accountability that is required; be administratively expensive."

That seems to be a very simple and straightforward account of our case and our attack upon the Bill.

On page 16, the group gives a very interesting account of how all this happened, and I think it is worth sharing it with the House. Hon. Members will remember that we have been very puzzled by the fact that the Government,

having gone through very careful preparation and considered investigation of the arguments, came to a measured conclusion in late 1983 that the rating system was fundamentally sound and that no major change was necessary. Then, suddenly, in one jump, we ended up with this extraordinary object, the Abolition of Rating Etc. (Scotland) Bill. We had our suspicions and have suggested what happened.

I will read what the Tory Reform Group thinks about it. It says:

"What happened was that Ministers had to act with excessive haste. Up to the summer of 1984 the firm line being put out by the Department of the Environment was that rates were here to stay. Suddenly, with a difficult Party Conference debate on rates coming up, Ministers went into a 180 degree turn and felt that they had had to find a quick alternative to rates. It was one of the occasions when a Party Conference actually determined Government policy. The speed of change led the Department to bounce the key Cabinet Ministers into a poll tax . . . and to avoid having to put forward more considered alternatives."

That is a remarkably similar account of what happened to the one that we have put forward as the most likely, indeed the only, explanation we can think of. It is the group's submission that the Bill and the proposals that we are now seeing in this Bill in fact add up to

"the centralisation of power and the administrative nightmare which the community tax will entail."

When we use words such as "administrative nightmare", as I freely concede we do, we are normally chided as being irresponsible and as putting forward propositions which no one could sustain.

I think that the Tory Reform Group has a lot going for it in these arguments, and I certainly believe that there may even be some support, although I do not know how widespread it is, for it in the ranks of the Conservative party.

I cannot resist saying that we took the trouble this morning to telephone the Tory Reform Group to ask it who its Scottish supporters were. We were told that its organiser is the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Malone) and that the assistant organiser is the hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mrs. McCurley). We then telephoned the independent headquarters of the Tory Reform Group in Scotland, who turned out to be a gentleman who works in Conservative Central Office in Edinburgh. He had obviously had the message passed to him because he said in the most definitive terms that no Scottish Conservative Member had anything whatsoever to do with the Tory Reform Group.

Mr. Norman Hogg (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): He has been made a peer.

Mr. Dewar: Well, not quite yet; but he has certainly got Brownie points.

I must say to the hon. Lady that I was particularly interested in this because when I looked up her little biography in one of the standard works of reference I found a lot of rather outré judgments about her—that she is outspoken, formidable, vivacious, sexy and cuddly. Let me hasten to reassure the hon. Lady that as far as I know it is not a well-known fact that that is true. But what is also in the biography — and presumably it was supplied by the hon. Lady—is that she is a member of the Scottish executive of the Tory Reform Group. Therefore, I hope that she has some respect for the views that her colleagues in England and Wales have put forward.

I will move on and say a word or two about some other aspects and leave the Tory Reform Group to its troubles and its problems and the wrath of its parliamentary colleagues. One thing it said in passing was that the English Ministers would have been required to see what happened in Scotland, to use Scotland as some sort of dry run, and, on the basis of the nightmare that enveloped us, the Government might be tempted to abandon their plans south of the border.

Mrs. Anna McCurley (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): If the hon. Gentleman considered a different situation, wherein England had gone through the revaluations that we have in Scotland, he might then say that the Tory Reform Group here in England might be thinking along the lines that the Tory Reform Group members in Scotland are at this very moment.

Mr. Dewar: I must say that that is an interesting admission. The hon. Lady is conceding that it was all panic over the revaluation and had nothing to do with the great matters of principle which have been imported into the debate by the Secretary of State. It was all to do with saving the votes of discontented Tories who were panicked by revaluation. That has the ring of truth, and I congratulate the hon. Lady on saying it.

I have never taken the view—here I disagree with the Tory Reform Group—that this was something that was being tried in Scotland at the behest of the English to see what happened. We were not being used as some sort of medical laboratory in which the virus was let loose. I believe that we have got this Bill because the Secretary of State for Scotland and his colleagues want it. That is why I find it particularly alarming that someone who could get things so totally wrong should be in charge of so many other matters of importance. If I thought that the Secretary of State was being dragged reluctantly along, I might draw some consolation, albeit rather doubtful consolation, from that, but I believe that he wants this wrong-headed and misconceived legislation.

I believe that the Bill is misconceived and wrong-headed because, despite the special pleading, it is unrelated to the ability to pay. Self-evidently, at the most basic level, irrespective of one's income — I concede that I am talking about the position above the level of the rebate —the richest man in the land would pay the same as someone of very modest means. It is so much per skull across the board. Many of the statistics which are paraded are valid only because of the introduction of the 20 per cent. rule, which will victimise the lowest paid. We believe that that is absolutely unforgiveable and will bring genuine hardship in some cases. It is in my view only because the Government are doing that that they can give the most vestigial cloak of plausibility to their claim that this is not a seriously regressive tax.

Furthermore, it is based upon a flawed and irrelevant concept of accountability. I do not wish to overstate my case, but, reverting to the point that we have just been on, I genuinely believe that to imply that accountability demands that those who are the most disadvantaged in our society should pay 20 per cent. of their local taxation bill is a perversion of any argument of humanity or equity in British politics. I am very sorry indeed that this form of

[Mr. Dewar]

argument should have been put forward. All that I can say to the Secretary of State is that we shall — *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) must contain himself.

Mr. Dewar: We have tried to advance arguments during the debate about the complications, expense and difficulties of collection and administration. I do not intend to discuss them even in the most brief fashion. We shall regret the Minister's attempts to minimise and sweep aside difficulties if the scheme is introduced.

The truth is that this is openly partisan legislation. It is an attempt by Ministers to help their own. I find it a most unpleasant phenomenon. As has been said, it will not work, because there are flaws in the scheme. Those who are meant to be beneficiaries will end up as victims. If the only way in which to increase income is by increasing the community charge, we shall hammer the burden on to a narrow tax base. One or two somewhat twisted people —twisted politically, and not in any other way—take pleasure from that prospect. But the trouble is that any responsible local authority wage settlement of perhaps 14 or 15 per cent., depending on the RSG percentage, will have to be funded out of locally raised revenue. At the moment, that burden is spread. The Secretary of State represents it as making commerce and industry the milch cow. That is not right. They use many local services, as do individual ratepayers. In any event, they will be largely excluded, as the only increase is subject to the RPI ceiling.

Therefore, if one has the kind of settlement that the teachers got, which is well supported by Members and has been praised as a statesmanlike settlement, it will have to be funded from increased community charges. To use a term that is familiar to people who work in the City, high gearing is involved. If one must increase one's revenue by perhaps 3 per cent., one is likely to find about 9 per cent. going to the community charge.

At the moment there are people who regard the issue from a selfish point of view as the greatest thing since sliced bread, but in perhaps four or five years, when the gearing begins to take effect and the built-in escalator starts to work, the community charge will go up and up, and people will begin to wonder whether they received a favour from their local Conservative Member of Parliament.

There will be winners and losers. In a dismissive way, the Secretary of State seems to suggest that the only losers will be those who will be brought into the system. That is not true. There will be many other losers. The statistic that the Secretary of State forgot is his own basic one in the Green Paper. Fifty two per cent. of Scottish households will be worse off. That may not sound too dramatic until we see where the households are and who lives in them. The truth is that this measure has unashamedly been brought in to produce a shift in the balance of taxation in Scottish communities. Undoubtedly, it will result in a shift in favour of districts which, by any test that may be applied, are more comfortably off. Of course, the Government defend that argument. They say that the rating system is corrupt and helps those who are disadvantaged. That is what the argument is about. There is no point in Conservative Members suggesting that there will not be a shift. The argument is whether the shift can be justified.

We must look at the victims—the people who will lose—who live in areas with poor services where life is difficult. We must compare them with those who live in areas which, by and large, support the Conservative party, and where there is already a high level of personal income. I concede that there will be many individual exceptions. There will be little old ladies, to use the parody of the argument for the sake of convenience, who will benefit.

If we look at the broader scope, which, as Scottish representatives, we are entitled to do, we shall see that there is no doubt that the legislation is selfish and has no basis in social justice or equity. It will undermine local democracy. It will centralise power to a dangerous extent. That is true whether there is a Labour or Conservative Secretary of State. It will bring sadness and sorrow to the people of Scotland if it comes into operation. My hope, and fortunately my expectation, is that it never will.

9.4 pm

Mr. Allan Stewart: The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) made a considerable claim about the Tory Reform Group document. Of course, that document is the sole responsibility of its author. I am amazed at the hon. Gentleman's discomfort in that he must leave the Chamber immediately another hon. Member begins to speak. As my hon. Friend the Minister said in an earlier debate, it is worth reminding Opposition Members that that document states:

"The decay of local government can be traced to the loss of democratic accountability and the disintegration of the traditional Labour party. The combination of the two has been devastating."

I have reiterated that so that Opposition Members have it clearly in mind. The hon. Member for Garscadden was rather ungallant to my hon. Friend the Member for Renfrew and Inverclyde (Mrs. McCurley), but he made a number of complaints about unflattering references to his hon. Friends during the long consideration of the Bill in Committee. I thought that it was a reasonably congenial Committee. The Opposition's problems were not competence, but the absence of a coherent policy behind which they could combine. That is why the Bill had such an easy ride in Committee.

The Bill will be considered in another place, and perhaps my right hon. and hon. Friends will consider introducing amendments for their Lordships to consider. One area of the Bill that is worthy of further thought is the position of the mentally handicapped, an issue that may well be raised in another place.

The principles on which the Bill is based have been set out clearly by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State. He said that about 750,000 people make no contribution to local authority expenditure in Scotland. The status quo is indefensible. The revaluation was important because it highlighted the deficiencies and unacceptability of the present system. That is why I believe the Bill will be welcomed by the people in Scotland. It will be welcomed by the wealth creators, who are currently reeling under the unacceptable rate increases that have been imposed upon them by regional councils, such as Lothian and Strathclyde.

The hon. Member for Garscadden made a considerable point about equity, but my right hon. and learned Friend

the Secretary of State dealt with that in his opening speech. It is worth emphasising that the bulk of local authority expenditure will be covered not by the community charge, but by the non-domestic ratepayer—*[Interruption.]*—or through the national Exchequer. Any Government are therefore able to set out a taxation system —*[Interruption.]*—to meet any social equity considerations. I wish that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Douglas) would stop acting as Dunfermline's answer to Falkirk, West.

Mr. Douglas: The hon. Gentleman is a St. Andrews-trained economist, but I am not going to malign that university. I hope that he had some idea during his student days, if not as a Minister, of equity in taxation. I ask him to tell me of any degree of equity in a tax that everyone has to pay at a basic rate that is unavoidable. Where is the equity in such a tax?

Mr. Stewart: It is interesting that the hon. Gentleman is in favour of the abolition of value added tax, which has precisely the attributes to which the hon. Gentleman has referred. If the hon. Gentleman would listen instead of shouting and muttering all the time, I am saying that national Government can change the national taxation system to meet any social justice or equity criteria that they wish.

My constituency has been referred to throughout our consideration of the Bill. It will be of great benefit to people such as pensioners who wish to retain a reasonable standard of housing and to young couples who wish to extend or improve their homes. It is also of interest to my constituents that, during the course of the Bill, the Labour party has confirmed that it wishes to see the abolition of Eastwood district. The Social Democrats have confirmed that, in practice, their policies would also result in the abolition of Eastwood district. The policies of the Labour party and the Social Democratic party are not dissimilar, because of the long time scale suggested by the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) with regard to the introduction of a local income tax.

It must be emphasised that the Government's proposals will be implemented on 1 April 1989. If by any mischance the proposals were not implemented — for example, because of the results of the general election—the rating system in Scotland would not only continue, but the Scottish people would be faced with another revaluation in 1990.

I congratulate my right hon. and hon. Friends on reaching Third Reading of the Bill. It has emerged unscathed from 125 hours in Committee. The Opposition have opposed the Bill without confidence, competence or clarity. I commend the Third Reading to the House.

9.12 pm

Mr. Maclennan: If the Bill is enacted it will leave a successor Government with the urgent task of reintroducing a system of local government taxation that is fair, accountable and acceptable to the Scottish people.

The Government have rightly diagnosed what is wrong with the present system of rates and how capricious, complex and, in some cases, unjust that system has become. However, they have failed to replace that system with a system of local taxation that will command support and acceptance because of its equity and ease of administration. They have certainly not established a system that will make local government more accountable for its expenditure. As a result of the decision on non-domestic rates — effectively to turn such rates into an assigned revenue, thus removing from local authorities any responsibility for determining the rate level — and the increased reliance upon central Government grant, local authorities will be left with a mere 13 per cent. of expenditure derived from personal taxation. How that system can possibly be dressed up by the Government as representing an increase in local accountability is beyond all sensible people, including the Tory Reform Group. The views of that group were quoted earlier by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar).

The Minister has said that the Bill was not subject to improvement in Committee. However, one major concession was made earlier tonight—the removal of the extraordinarily widely drawn power to amend, by regulation, any piece of legislation, subordinate or primary. The removal of that power was a concession to the powerful debate that took place in Committee. I believe that the Bill has been improved.

What has not been shaken is the Government's determination, made clear from the beginning, not merely to enact the Bill in the precise terms in which it was originally put before the House, but to do so with extraordinary speed. That has been done without the normal deliberations that have accompanied the consideration of past local government finance bills.

The Bill is of major constitutional importance because it is altering the balance of power between central and local government. It is altering that balance to fulfil the dogmatic requirement of the Government that they should have absolute control of public expenditure. They failed to achieve that end earlier by means of rate capping and direction and reduction of the grant element in the amounts available to local authorities. All the means that they have tried since 1979 have failed to satisfy the Government that they have got the reins of local government fairly in their grasp. They want to achieve that through the Bill, and that is why they have been so determined to get it through.

Because the Bill has that major constitutional aspect, I hope that another place will look at it hard and long and that not only Scottish, but English, peers will give it the scrutiny that it deserves—scrutiny that we have not been able to give it because of the manner in which the Government have driven it through. We know that it is a forerunner of what is to be done throughout the United Kingdom.

I notice that a distinguished member of the English so-called Tory Reform Group is Lord Whitelaw, whom I find it strange to be described as English not only because of his ancestry but because of his land owning in Scotland. I hope that these noble Lords will regard it as their constitutional duty to delay the Bill and subject it to rigorous scrutiny. If the Bill is not enacted before the dissolution of Parliament, that will be a service to the people of Scotland.

The Government pretend that they have safeguarded the position of those less well-off members of our community from the burden of universal taxation by a system of rebate. It is quite bizarre that this system is not incorporated in the Bill and that the Government have not explained in any detail how it is to be operated. It is

[Mr. Maclennan]

dependent upon the decisions of Government, which have not been made, but the Government expect the House and the country to believe that this is an equitable method.

There has been some argument about the winners and losers. Nobody is in a position to make an authoritative judgment about this, but it is clear that the balance of the burden will be shifted, and shifted substantially, to the disadvantage of the less well-off members of our community. It is also clear that the Public Finance Foundation was right to say that those households with an income under £200 per week will be much worse off, while households with an income over £200 per week will be much better off. That is the kind of broad conclusion that it is possible to draw, but it is not possible to draw more specific and precise conclusions because the Government have never provided the configuration. The illustrative figures published in the Green Paper have not been adhered to by the Government, and they have been treated merely as illustrative. We do not know how the new charge will operate.

As the Bill has gone through the House, the people of Scotland have not been attracted to what the Government have put forward. The Government have sought to interpret some criticisms made by the Labour party in Committee as being a failure in argument. That is not fair to the Labour party in Committee, nor is it a true interpretation of Scottish opinion.

Every responsible organ of opinion in Scotland—the *Glasgow Herald*, the *Daily Record*, *The Scotsman* and every other newspaper—has condemned this tax, as it properly should be condemned, as a tax appropriate only to uncivilised societies. The Government are not able to pray in aid of their scheme any example of this tax even being tried in another civilised country, for the obvious reason that no civilised country would impose a compulsory tax upon its destitute population.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Come off it.

Mr. Maclennan: If the hon. Gentleman doubts that there are destitute people, he has not been around his constituency in recent weeks.

The Bill fails to remedy a mischief, and it will have to be corrected by a successor Government. It is not possible on Third Reading to describe in detail or at all the nature of the local income tax which is the most fair system to replace the existing creaking rates system.

It is now well understood that local income tax is the preferable system and it has operated successfully in a number of other countries. The people of Scotland have to look forward to the prospect of a more equitable system of local taxation, one which increases local accountability, following the defeat of this Government at the general election. I believe that this Bill will play a significant part in achieving that defeat.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Barry Henderson.

9.21 pm

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have not heard the hon. Gentleman yet.

Mr. Douglas: You are lucky, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Henderson: I am glad that not only you, Mr. Speaker, but Opposition Members are so anxious to hear me. I am delighted at that. It may be helpful if I tell Opposition Members that I want to be as brief as I can — [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] — If Opposition Members continue to interrupt me rudely and make noises, my speech will take longer. The trouble with the Opposition throughout the passage of the Bill, both in Committee and on the Floor of the House, is that they have fundamentally misunderstood the nature of the measure. They believe that levity, length, noise, rudeness or crudeness are a substitute for effective opposition.

Mr. Norman Hogg: What a pompous idiot!

Mr. Henderson: If the hon. Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg) had come to the Committee Room and seen his hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) misbehaving himself and had done something about whipping him out of the place, I might not have received the kind of remarks that I have received now. The hon. Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth heard his hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) remarking about my hon. Friend the Member for Renfew, West and Inverclyde (Mrs. McCurley). If such comments had been made by one of my hon. Friends about one of his hon. Friends, I should have heard some very rude remarks from the Opposition.

The Bill is about justice and responsibility — something about which the Opposition know all too little. That is why they will remain the Opposition for a very long time.

Mr. Norman Hogg: The hon. Gentleman will not know about it because he will be out next time.

Mr. Henderson: If I am out next time, I can confidently say that a Labour person will not put me out — *[Interruption.]* Just as when I defeated the Labour candidate in East Dumbartonshire, it was not a Labour candidate who put me out.

Mr. Norman Hogg: The hon. Gentleman lost East Dumbartonshire.

Mr. Henderson: Of course I did, but the Labour candidate still could not defeat me there. I am sorry that I am taking longer that I intended, Mr. Speaker, but it is entirely because the Opposition keep interrupting me.

Throughout the Committee stage my hon. Friend the Minister has resisted exemptions from the community charge and he was absolutely right to do that. The Bill is now leaving the Commons and the Government have triumphed. They have won the argument and carried the House with conviction. There is, however, one exemption which they should seriously consider further, and I hope that it will be made in another place. I put it to my hon. Friend the Minister that, because the Bill is about justice and responsibility, there is one section of the community to whom we should give more justice because they cannot accept responsibility. I refer to the mentally retarded and mentally handicapped.

Mr. Douglas: Do not be so patronising.

Mr. Henderson: Does the hon. Gentleman wish to intervene?

Mr. Douglas: Yes. I declare an interest because I have a daughter who is spastic.

Mr. Henderon: I know that.

Mr. Douglas: If the hon. Gentleman really feels that there should be such an exemption, he should have tabled an amendment earlier.

Mr. Henderson: I said as a preliminary to my remarks that my hon. Friend the Minister was quite right not to accept exemptions earlier.

Mr. Douglas: But that is what the Committee stage is for.

Mr. Henderson: The Opposition could have made that point and tabled amendments themselves, but they did not.

Mr. Maxton: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Henderson: I have given way a great deal.

Mr. Maxton *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. One at a time.

Mr. Henderson: The Opposition will say that I am detaining the House when there is a guillotine. I am doing my best to make a brief speech which is relevant to the Bill and I am being prevented from doing so by Opposition Members. I shall give way if they want me to, so long as they do not then accuse me of making a long speech.

Mr. Maxton: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Henderson: I think that I shall get on. The hon. Member has had 100 hours to make his arguments, which he did incompetently and inadequately. He will get a chance to make his own speech before the end of the debate.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will consider further representations on this matter and make this one exemption to the community charge in another place. I hope that a satisfactory formula which achieves that objective can be found. I realise that there will be problems doing that, but I hope that such a formula is beginning to form in my hon. Friend's mind.

In view of the barrenness of the Opposition's arguments, it is interesting that the hon. Member for Garscadden prayed in aid the Tory Reform Group. So few are the Labour party's arguments that the most effective argument that it could hope to raise on Third Reading was from a Tory publication.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: A Tory Reform Group publication.

Mr. Henderson: Indeed.

The Bill proves that the Government care about Scotland and that it is the Tories who speak for Scotland and want to correct a system that has been unjust for years. Opposition Members are right to say that the community charge will apply to all adults in Scotland, but they are wrong when they say, as they often do, that all will pay the same. I hope that they will try to remember to differentiate between the two.

It was sad to hear the hon. Member for Garscadden, an honest man, defending a corrupt system. Indeed, it has been sad to hear the Labour party throughout our proceedings on the Bill. It has been sad to hear a party which claims to be radical defending the status quo and forgetting its roots.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister on presenting such a major Bill. The subject has defeated many fine men and women before, but he has found the solution and an alternative to the rating system. This Conservative Scottish ministerial team has shown the way forward for the whole of the United Kingdom.

9.29 pm

Mr. Donald Stewart: The hon. Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Henderson) has just said that the Bill is about justice. Not even his hon. Friends on the Government Front Bench pitched the thing that high. We are all aware that it is a panic measure that was brought in by the reaction against the second revaluation in Scotland. The Government's supporters in Scotland made their opposition known and therefore the Bill was cobbled together.

The hon. Member for Fife, North-East discussed the great advantages that the Bill would bring. It is only three years since his own Front Bench said that they could not think of a better system for raising local authority revenue in Scotland. However, all of a sudden he describes the system as corrupt. We all know of the great inefficiencies and the many anomalies in the rating system. I should not have supported that system. The Labour party agreed that a local income tax would be the answer.

The Bill is a remedy that is worse than the disease. One of its outstanding points is that, regardless of income, people will have to pay at least 20 per cent. of their rates bill. Even a means test has been abandoned. The poorest in the community will be obliged to pay 20 per cent. towards the poll tax, which hits the lowest paid the hardest. The Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations has stated:

> "The new charge will be more regressive than rates. Those on high incomes will be the biggest gainers."

There is no way round that. My hon. Friends have suggested an income tax that would at least take into account the ability to pay. However, the Bill does nothing of the kind. Local authorities in Scotland have been bedevilled by the gradual erosion of the rate support grant. The Government pretend that they have nothing to do with the fact that services are disappearing. However, that is due to the way in which the Government have gradually cut off funds from local authorities.

I am a Highlander and I make no claim to second sight, but I advise the House that the Bill will never be implemented in Scotland.

9.31 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): I support the Bill on its Third Reading. I should especially like to draw attention to one of the amendments that was agreed to yesterday. My hon. Friends on the Front Bench will appreciate the wonderful reception that the amendment affecting sports grounds has received in Scotland. Scottish people are looking forward to the fact that they will begin to see real benefits in such activities because local authorities will have discretion and will know that they will be refunded.

It is interesting to listen to the comments of Opposition Member about the Bill. If one listened to them carefully —I listened to them carefully yesterday as well as today —one got the impression that we would have to be made to introduce such a Bill at this time if we wanted to be re-elected. According to them, it has no friends and will be rejected by the Scottish electorate.

I have news for the Opposition. I am delighted to go back to Tayside, North and to fight the next election on

[Mr. Bill Walker]

the basis of this Bill and my party's record in government. I am happy to face any of the Opposition parties. Quite frankly, it is nonsense for them to say that, because we all know how popular the Bill will be among the people who care about what happens in local authorities. It will certainly be popular in Tayside, North. I have no doubt whatsoever about that.

I also know that the Scottish people will see the fairness of the system, in which differences in incomes will be taken into account. The impression has been given that there will be no rebates. Of course there will be rebates—that is provided for in the Bill—and of course account has been taken of the fact that individuals have different circumstances. I am prepared to stand on any public platform and defend the reason why 20 per cent. should be paid by all those who are adults and making use of —*[Interruption.]* I am happy to defend that position. I am not ducking that issue any more than I duck issues on nuclear disarmament or anything else. It is my experience that if one gives the true reason for doing something, one need not fear the reaction from one's supporters. I am not ashamed that I speak for those whom I expect to support me. It is right that a caring Government should make decisons centrally in order to care for those who need to be cared for. That is why we have social security benefits, housing benefits, and so on.

It is also true that there has been a ghastly failure in getting people to take an interest in and to participate in local government. There has been a decline in the numbers who vote.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): That is not true.

Mr. Walker: I can remember when greater numbers turned out to vote in Dundee than do today, so do not tell me that there has not been a loss of interest. *[Interruption.]* There has been. *[Interruption.]* There have been reductions in the numbers of voters and the reason is that people cannot relate what goes on at local level to what they want done—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask the House to give the hon. Member a fair hearing.

Mr. Walker: The Bill will have the additional effect of making people want to vote because they will know that that they are contributing to the cost of services, even if it is only 20 per cent. Twenty per cent. of an increasing figure, when local authorities wish to spend more money, will give voters an interest. That is why I am happy to defend the Bill and to welcome it.

9.36 pm

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): I am grateful for the opportunity to say a few words about the Bill. I have not had an opportunity during previous stages for one reason or another, such as——

Mr. Wilson: Laziness.

Mr. Foulkes: No. No one can accuse me of not wishing to participate in matters of all kinds—*[Interruption.]*—whether I have responsibility for them or not. I have not had the opportunity because I have been preoccupied with matters——

Mr. Martin J. O'Neill (Clackmannan): Worldwide.

Mr. Foulkes: —beyond this country, as the Secretary of State, were he here, would recall that he used to be before he was promoted.

I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) as he is the only Conservative Member who was supported by more than 50 per cent. of the electorate at the general election. Given the relative wealth of his constituents, I can understand why he is so enthusiastic about these proposals. Moreover, if the poll tax were introduced there is a grave danger of his being the only Scottish Conservative Member after the general election.

I am also glad that I was present for the unique opportunity of hearing the hon. Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Henderson) speak.

Mr. Henderson: I spoke about the Bill.

Mr. Foulkes: It was the first time that I have heard someone concede defeat not merely before the election takes place but before it is even announced.

Mr. Henderson: I am well aware that I shall continue to be the Member of Parliament for Fife, North-East. I said that in no way was I going to be beaten by a Labour candidate. I could have gone on and said that I would not be beaten by an SNP candidate, a Liberal candidate, an SDP candidate, an Ecology candidate or any other.

Mr. Foulkes: It has taken a long time for the hon. Gentleman to remember to add those and all hon. Members present understood that in a state of panic the hon. Gentleman spoke the truth.

I am grateful for the opportunity of saying a few words because this is a very important matter. For nine years before I came to this House I had the opportunity of being in local government as a member of the Edinburgh corporation—where I served not alongside but opposite the Secretary of State for Scotland—and subsequently on the Lothian regional council. Unlike some Conservative Members, particularly the hon. Member for Tayside, North, I have some experience of local government and its pressures. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Two more hon. Members wish to take part in the debate.

Mr. Foulkes: The Bill is of somewhat doubtful parentage, born of two trends or pressures. The first was the revolt of the ratepayers, particularly in Troon. I remember the right hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger), when he was Secretary of State for Scotland, panicking at the pressure put on him from the ratepayers of Troon, and his fear of losing his seat. He still faces that danger, and I do not expect him to be the Member for Ayr after the election.

The second pressure, the second parent of the Bill, was the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth), who was considered by most of his hon. Friends as somewhat eccentric in putting forward the idea of a poll tax. *[Interruption.]* He was regarded as extreme as well as eccentric. I well recall how he was put down time and again by the hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro), the present Secretary of State and both Under-Secretaries of State, the hon. Members for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Lang) and for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Ancram). All the people now espousing the cause of community charges were putting down the hon. Member for Stirling and saying what a silly little upstart he was to

come up with such an idea. The truth is that he is the other parent of this bastard child, the community charge—or poll tax, as I and others in the House prefer to call it.

The poll tax must be opposed for six reasons. First, it is unfair. Secondly, it is costly to administer and a waste of resources. Thirdly, it will disrupt the family. The party which claims to be the party of the family is disrupting the family through the tensions that will be created between sons and daughters and the householder who is responsible to pay. Fourthly, it is against Scottish opinion. No serious opinion in Scotland is in favour of it. The recent poll in the *Glasgow Herald* gave the Conservative party only 19 per cent. support in Scotland. Fifthly, this tax is the easiest to evade. The one good thing about rates is that they are difficult to avoid. It is difficult to hide property because a house cannot be tucked away somewhere.

I think my next point is number six. I was always good at arithmetic. From what we have heard from the Tory Reform Group in England—I shall not mention names—we will get a strange and eccentric system. The hon. Member for Stirling described it as an extreme tax and it is clear that the example will not be followed in England. We will be out on an unfair, unfortunate, eccentric and extreme limb. The people of Scotland do not want this tax and I am certain that they will reject it at the next election.

9.46 pm

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I do not feel able in the time allowed to me to respond to some of the points about doubtful parentage.

There are six good reasons for supporting the Bill. The first is because, apparently, the Tory Reform Group is opposed to it. The second is that throughout the passage of the Bill the Labour party has singularly failed to make any case against it.—[Hon. Members: "Not at all."] Opposition Members say, "Not at all." However, they insist on calling it a poll tax rather than a community charge because they sought to identify in the minds of the electors that their ability to vote was somehow linked to whether or not they paid a tax. They knew that they could not defeat the community charge on the basis of argument, so they had to spread fear and alarm.

The third reason for supporting the Bill is that it will help the elderly, pensioners and single-parent families. The Opposition have sought to dismiss them as they have sought to dismiss every other group which will benefit, on the ground that there are not many of them.

The fourth reason for giving the Bill a Third Reading is that it will deal with the problem that the Tory Reform Group identified in its report as being central to local government difficulties—the problem of the loony Left and the extremists in the Labour party who have their hands on the levers of power in local government. Because the system of local government funding does not have built-in accountability, they are able to carry out their policies, secure in the knowledge that they will be voted in again and again by people who do not have to pay for their decisions. Their extremism has been encouraged, but it has failed.

The fifth reason for supporting the Bill is that, by its reaction in Scotland to the measure, the Labour party has shown that it believes it is a fairer system. Opposition Members may scoff, but only last night they suggested a pilot scheme to see how it would work and in Committee they argued that the rating system is unfair. The Opposition parties have singularly failed to come up with an alternative to the rating system, yet they all admit that the rating system is failing in Scotland and is bad for local Government.

The sixth reason for supporting the Bill is that it is good for local government. It will restore spending decisions and accountability to local level. The whole machinery of central control over expenditure will disappear and councillors, Labour and Conservative, will be able to stand for election and give their expenditure plans, knowing that everyone will have to make a contribution to implementing those plans and that there will be true local, democratic accountability, which the Labour party has always said it favours.

One other reason why the Bill is good news for Scotland is that we have finally dealt with a problem that Labour councils have allowed to grow in Scotland — sports clubs. Labour councils have had an opportunity to help sports clubs and, with one or two notable exceptions, they have refused to do so.

Mr. Douglas: What about Fife?

Mr. Forsyth: I said "with one or two notable exceptions", of which Fife is one. Strathclyde, Central and all the other Labour councils in Scotland have failed to follow that lead. The Bill provides an opportunity for them to help sports clubs in Scotland, without any financial penalties for them to hide behind.

The Bill should be given a Third Reading because it is good for the people of Scotland and local government and bad for the Labour party.

9.52 pm

Mr. Douglas: We have heard advocates of Tory reform support a radical reforming measure. The Secretary of State is a man who, one might say not disparagingly, is looking at any time for a backbone to crawl up. On other occasions, he is a man of principle, but when he grasps a principle it crumbles and is destroyed in his own hands.

Conservative Members assert that this poll tax will make local government more responsible. Every penny that we get in this House comes from the transfer of taxes. The burden of tax is not on us, but does that make us irresponsible? Does it make us irresponsible because the burden of taxation is, in practice, not on us — *[Interruption.]* Other people pay taxes to pay us. The Secretary of State does not understand that. It is a little beyond him at this time of night. We get paid because other people pay taxes. We are extremely responsible in terms of the political process.

Teachers are paid out of the transfer of taxation. What we are trying to obtain here, in the overall balance of taxation, is an equitable and fair system. Other people pay taxes — *[Interruption.]* I do not want to lecture the Secretary of State on economics. It is difficult, because he is a lawyer and he does not understand economic matters. Taxes are levied on us, but we pass them on, because we do not pay them. This is part of the problem in local government. What is happening with this tax — *[Interruption.]* The Secretary of State has been absent for most of this Third Reading debate, and he has exposed the House to extreme discourtesy. This tax, which the Secretary of State asserts will make people more responsible, is inequitable. It is an unavoidable tax.

We have heard some hypocritical statements from the Johnny-come-latelies, who have suddenly discovered that

[Mr. Douglas]

a group of people who would have not normally paid tax to local authorities — the mentally handicapped — will have to do so. We had two Conservative Members, not one, pleading with the Secretary of State, "Why cannot something be done for this group?" That was minutes after they had voted against our amendment which tried to get remission of the poll tax for certain classes of people. It does not come prudently from the mouths of right hon. and hon. Gentlemen to support this tax and then to say, "But there are certain groups who ought not to pay it." I ask the hon. Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Henderson), who has Auchtermuchty in his constituency, to go to Auchtermuchty town hall and find people queueing up who want this tax. There has not been one meeting in his constituency.

Mr. Henderson: The hon. Gentleman must have seen advertised in the *Fife Herald* the open public meeting which was addressed in the corn exchange.

Mr. Douglas: How many came? It was the talk of the women's rural institute and others in Auchtermuchty. They are all queueing up to support this tax.

As I said about another noxious Bill that went through the House — the Dockyard Services Bill — the Government should ensure that the media and the people whom a Bill affects are persuaded that it is a good thing.

I have challenged the Secretary of State to come to Dunfermline and debate not just this measure but the whole orbit of Government policy as it affects Fife. I have asked him to see whether he can persuade people there to support the measure. There is no bedrock of public opinion that desires this iniquitous and inequitable measure.

The Secretary of State has proposed the measure— *[Interruption.]* The Secretary of State should not tempt me from a sedentary position on what to say about the Bill. He knows full well that this is a panic measure which is being dressed up by the slick process that he has adopted in Scotland to try to persuade the Scottish people that the Bill will remove the burden not just from those who have difficulty in paying but from all areas of the population who desire to see some reform of local government taxation.

If the Secretary of State wants the Bill pushed forward not just by Scottish Members but by Tory Members, and if it goes through another place and eventually becomes law, we shall rue the day when we adopted this Bill which turns the clock back.

Dr. M. S. Miller: Why, if the Bill is so wonderful, does it apply only to Scotland? Why was it not introduced for the whole of Britain?

Mr. Douglas: The answer is reasonably simple. Because of revaluation in Scotland, the panic is more evident there than in the rest of the United Kingdom. If it is such a boon——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will bear in mind that the Front Bench spokesmen have had no time to respond to the debate.

Mr. Douglas: As you know, Mr. Speaker, I usually obey your strictures and rulings, but the Bill has been dragooned through because the Government have an overwhelming majority. If the Bill is such a boon and a blessing to men, why is it being introduced initially only in Scotland and not in the rest of the United Kingdom?

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): My hon. Friend will know that the Caterpillar workers and the old-age pensioners were lobbying Parliament. Will he tell the House whether any of those influential bodies wanted this poll tax?

Mr. Douglas: There is no evidence of any support whatsoever, except for a very small number of people in Scotland, especially the small businesses which, I would argue, do not really understand the implications of this Bill and the damage it will cause there.

One of the points that the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth) made — he raised it as usual in an extremely eclectic manner — was that local authorities did not pay attention to sports clubs. One of the provisions in the previous——

It being Ten o'clock, MR. SPEAKER *proceeded, pursuant to the Order [11 February] and the Resolution [4 March], to put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair.*

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 204, Noes 150.

Division No. 112] **[10 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Best, Keith
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brooke, Hon Peter
Bruinvels, Peter
Buck, Sir Antony
Bulmer, Esmond
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Rt Hon Sir Adam
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Hon A. *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dickens, Geoffrey
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
du Cann, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Sir Alexander
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Alan
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Grylls, Michael
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(N'folk SW)*
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jackson, Robert
Jessel, Toby
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David

Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
McCurley, Mrs Anna
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, M. *(N'bury)*
Major, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Mather, Sir Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M. *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Murphy, Christopher
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Osborn, Sir John
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stokes, John
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Wiggin, Jerry
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Gerald Malone and
Mr. Michael Portillo.

NOES

Abse, Leo
Anderson, Donald
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'rmline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Buchan, Norman
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Clay, Robert
Clelland, David Gordon
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S)*
Coleman, Donald
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Craigen, J. M.
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(L'lli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Golding, Mrs Llin
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Fife Central)*
Hancock, Michael
Hardy, Peter
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley, N)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Janner, Hon Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Martin, Michael
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Neillist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Mrs R. *(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stewart, Rt Hon D. *(W Isles)*
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Tinn, James
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Allen McKay.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

RECOGNITION OF TRUSTS BILL *[LORDS]*

Order for Second Reading read.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 90 (Second Reading Committees), That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Question agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

CRIMINAL JUSTICE (SCOTLAND) BILL
[LORDS]

Ordered,

That the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill *[Lords]* may be proceeded with as if it had been certified by Mr. Speaker as relating exclusively to Scotland.—*[Mr. Durant.]*

CRIMINAL JUSTICE (SCOTLAND) BILL
[LORDS]

Order for Second Reading read.

Ordered,

That the Bill be referred to the Scottish Grand Committee.—*[Mr. Durant.]*

SCOTTISH GRAND COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That in the course of its consideration of the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill *[Lords]* the Scottish Grand Committee may meet in Edinburgh on Monday 23rd March at half-past Ten o'clock.—*[Mr. Cope.]*

Afghanistan

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Durant.]*

10.13 pm

Mr. David Atkinson (Bournemouth, East): I am grateful to you, Mr. Speaker, for selecting my debate on Her Majesty's Government's policy towards Afghanistan. The subject is a timely one in view of the reopening at Geneva last week of the United Nations proximity talks to discuss the withdrawal of Soviet troops and the visit of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary to Moscow later this month.

The last occasion on which I raised the subject of Afghanistan in an Adjournment debate was on 20 December 1985, one week before the sixth anniversary of the Soviet invasion and subsequent occupation, an occupation by invitation, it was said, to counter foreign interference, just like the invitation from Czechoslovakia in 1968 and Hungary in 1956. I did so then because I felt that there existed a distinct danger that in the euphoria that was following the first summit meeting between President Reagan and Mr. Gorbachev there might be a temptation to some in the West to compromise their original position over Afghanistan in a desire to pursue détente and achieve success in arms control.

I raise the subject again tonight because of what has happened since and what is happening now, which may also tempt some to compromise to match Mr. Gorbachev's recent quite remarkable and, on the face of it, encouraging rhetoric on internal reforms in the Soviet Union and accommodation on arms control. It is especially important that, at this time, we continue to give the fullest possible support to Pakistan as it continues to negotiate on behalf of free Afghanistan, bearing as it does the considerable strain imposed on it with the presence of more than 3 million Afghan refugees and, in recent days, the totally unacceptable air raids on its border villages by the Afghan air force which have killed 66 people and injured many more. I hope that appropriate protests to the Afghan authorities have been made.

In many ways, the seventh year of Soviet occupation has seen an intensification of the conflict on both sides. Mr. Gorbachev has been making new political attempts to impose a Communist-dominated solution on Afghanistan, while demanding a more effective military response against the Mujahideen, who have responded in kind. In May last year, the Kremlin replaced one puppet leader, Babrak Karmel, as general secretary of the so-called Ruling Peoples Democratic party — the Communist party — with another, Dr. Najib, who had impeccable Marxist credentials and a reputation for ruthless brutality as head of the KGB-trained Afghan secret police, the Khad.

As a member of the largest tribal group, the Pashtuns, Dr. Najib has been trying to widen the basis of support for his regime through a policy of national reconciliation. His measures have included an attempt to strengthen his depleted and demoralised armed forces through new conscription, the staging of local elections and the convening of jirgas—traditional councils—the inclusion of non-party figures in his administration, and protestations of his regime's respect for Afghan traditions and the Islamic religion. Emulating Mr. Gorbachev, Dr. Najib has

campaigned against inertia and corruption in the party, for which he blames the regime's lack of success in mobilising popular support.

Parallel to that has been a new drive on the part of the Kremlin to convince the world of its desire to withdraw from Afghanistan as soon as possible. In July, Mr. Gorbachev announced in Vladivostock that six Soviet regiments — about 5 per cent. of the total of about 115,000 troops in Afghanistan — would be withdrawn. He repeated that announcement during his following visit to India. It was clearly intended to impress the forthcoming new round of United Nations-sponsored talks. In October great publicity was made, with the actual withdrawal timed to precede the annual debate on Afghanistan at the United Nations General Assembly.

That had little effect—quite the reverse, in fact. The plenary session, which my hon. Friend the Minister addressed on behalf of the 12 member states of the European Community, on which I heartily congratulate him, passed by 122 votes to 21, with 11 abstentions, a resolution calling for immediate withdrawal of foreign troops. Meanwhile, the Mujahideen maintains its brave resistance throughout most of the country, inflicting heavy losses on Soviet and Afghan forces, particularly convoys travelling to and from the Soviet Union, and attempting to reinforce garrisons within the country. They continue to control large parts of towns and whole areas of countryside. They remain active in and around the capital, Kabul, in which areas exist where no Russian dares to go. They are showing greater ability to co-ordinate their activities and to speak with one voice.

That is despite the increasingly sophisticated approach to strategy and tactics by Soviet forces, using smaller units and mobile helicopter-borne troops, and especially their specialised commandos, the Spetnaz, together with ruthless Soviet and Afghan retaliation against the civilian population and the continued abuse of human rights that has so rightly been condemned by the United Nations in response to the reports of its special rapporteur.

Only recently have we learnt of the new Soviet AK74 rifle being used against the Mujahideen with dum-dum bullets which wreak devastating damage to the human body in total violation of the Geneva convention. In his reply to the debate which I initiated in December 1985, my hon. Friend the Minister referred in some detail to the rapporteur's previous findings: the conscription of children aged 15 years, the displacement of people from their homes, acts of brutality by the armed forces, the bombardment and massacre of villages, and the use of anti-personnel mines and of booby-trapped toys, all of which have been responsible for the deaths of more than 500,000 Afghans since 1979, most of them innocent civilians.

Similar abuse of human rights has been noted by Amnesty International, whose report last November referred to widespread and systematic torture of political prisoners by the KHAD with the participation of Soviet personnel, and the prevention of the international committee of the Red Cross from visiting Afghan prisons since 1982. Unlike its protestations against prisons in Turkey, we hear nothing from the Left about conditions in Afghanistan. Throughout last year the refugee problem has remained largely ignored by public opinion throughout the world. According to UNICEF last June, the population of Afghanistan is now 7 million compared with 15 million in the 1977 census. Over 3 million refugees in Pakistan constitute the largest concentration of refugees in the world. A further 2 million are in Iran. We should all be grateful for the widespread international aid and voluntary help given to Pakistan to service the 350 camps and to provide food to the families. This includes £40 million worth of aid from Britain since 1980. The European Community, too, has provided substantial help. The American Congress is to consider $4 billions worth of further aid to Pakistan later this month.

It is no doubt because of the consistent attitude of the United Nations, of the Islamic conference and of the Non-Aligned Movement that Mr. Gorbachev, through Dr. Najib, announced a qualified six-month ceasefire with the Afghan resistance starting on 15 January, an amnesty for rebel prisoners, the formation of Government of national unity to include resistance leaders and a guaranteed safe passage for them to take part in peace talks. As the House knows, such an offer has been rejected out of hand by the Mujahideen. To it, the acceptance of a ceasefire without a total, immediate and unconditional end to Soviet occupation after so much sacrifice and suffering would be tantamount to a shameful surrender to the enemy. No doubt Stalin took the same view against Hitler in the 1940s.

To the Mujahideen, complete peace and security will return only upon the unconditional withdrawal of Soviet forces and the overthrow of the atheist puppet Government and the establishment of an Islamic state. A coalition Government with the present regime would serve only to maintain Soviet influence, and would be a certain recipe for continued civil was as well as to contradict succesive resolutions of the United Nations. To the Mujahideen, any invitation to refugees to return is interpreted as a new source of enforced conscripts to bolster the Afghan army.

At the mass rally of the Islamic alliance of the Afghan Mujahideen in Peshawar on 17 January, it confirmed its commitment to a ceasefire following the withdrawal of Soviet troops, to the establishment of an interim Government to supervise elections to a representative Islamic Government who would be empowered to draft a constitution, the immediate establishment of a commission to draft guidelines for that Government, and the formation of a means of arbitration to resolve differences between the individual groups. It fears, however, that its resolve will not be matched by those who have supported it in the past or who are now negotiating on its behalf. It fears that we in the West will be charmed by Mr. Gorbachev, in the interest of "real politik", into accepting an Afghanistan within the Soviet sphere of influence. It fears that ex-King Zahir Shah, who has already been approached by the Najib regime, will be an acceptable head of state for a client Government.

The Mujahideen fears that the Islamic conference is wavering in its previous insistence on an immediate withdrawal of Soviet troops. It fears that China and Iran might compromise their previous support as a trade-off for better relations with Moscow. It fears that Pakistan, which has been under so much economic strain as a result of the presence of the refugees who are blamed for unrest and riots among its population, will finally climb down from its previous insistence on a withdrawal of Soviet troops within four months instead of two years. It fears an end to western aid as part of the compromise, thus leaving the

[Mr. David Atkinson]

Mujahideen isolated and increasingly defenceless against the Soviet forces intent on eliminating all those who refuse to join the coalition Government.

I look forward to my hon. Friend the Minister's reply tonight. I look forward to hearing from him that Her Majesty's Government continue to support fully the sovereignty of the Afghan people, their right to determine their country's future, be it neutral or non-aligned as suggested by Lord Carrington in 1980, or in alignment with others, Islamic or otherwise, if that is their wish.

I look forward to the Government's insistence that a timetable of Soviet withdrawal must not be linked with negotiations between the Afghans themselves, and that it must take place as soon as possible to allow those negotiations to commence. I look forward to the Government's insistence that any plan suggesting the supremacy of the Communist People's Democratic party, which would have to be enforced with terror and the denial of human rights, as in all other Communist countries, is totally unacceptable.

I look forward to the confirmation of continued aid and support to the Mujahideen until the Soviet forces have withdrawn from Afghanistan lock, stock and barrel. Finally, I look forward to learning that they are the messages that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will be taking to Moscow with her later this month.

10.26 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Tim Eggar): I am grateful to you, Mr. Speaker, for selecting this important topic for debate, and to my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) for moving the motion this evening.

This debate is extremely timely. The personal representative of the United Nations Secretary-General is conducting renewed proximity talks in Geneva between Pakistan and the Kabul regime. We wish Mr. Cordovez's efforts well. There can be no military solution to the dreadful war of occupation in Afghanistan. There can only be a political settlement, and it must be genuine. The Afghan people deserve no less after the horrors of the past seven years.

Afghanistan's fate offers a clear warning to independent and sovereign nations within reach of the Soviet Union's military might. They know that, seven years ago, 85,000 Soviet troops invaded Afghanistan. The number has now risen to more than 110,000. At the last United Nations general assembly, 122 countries again endorsed the principles that could—if the Russians wish—be the basis of real and lasting peace. Those principles are the complete and immediate withdrawal of the Soviet forces, the right to self-determination of the Afghan people, the safe and honourable return of the refugees, and the restoration of Afghanistan's independence and non-alignment. Only 20 countries joined the Soviet Union in voting against such a sensible recipe for a peaceful solution to the agonies of Afghanistan.

We have noted with interest the many Soviet statements of intent to withdraw from Afghanistan. Do they want a genuine political settlement? Or are they merely trying to achieve, by cosmetic political gestures, what they failed to achieve militarily? Only they can answer. That answer is needed now. Stage-managed "withdrawals" like that of last October are irrelevant. Each month's delay, each year's delay, in withdrawing Soviet troops is another month or year of brutal pressure on the people of Afghanistan, to ensure that they acquiesce in the loss of their freedom.

We must not forget what is really going on. My hon. Friend painted a grim picture. Just over a year ago Mr. Gorbachev called Afghanistan a "bleeding wound". The blood has not been staunched. Things have only got worse. A few days ago in Geneva the United Nations special rapporteur on human rights, Dr. Ermacora, reported on the situation. His analysis shows clearly that the human tragedy continues to unfold. He estimates that between 10,000 and 12,000 civilians died last year in the period up to September alone.

He reports:

"Official government statements that refugees are returning in great number are not confirmed by officials in Pakistan and Iran who are directly responsible for the refugee problem. Such returns, if any, have been sporadic and negligible in relation to the total refugee population . . . The total of Afghan refugees might now be estimated to be in excess of 5 million".

The special rapporteur quotes recent examples of oppression in Afghanistan. They are, for instance the execution of four inmates of the Pol i Charki prison in January, the death of 500 civilians in early September 1986, following a bombardment in Kunduz, the destruction of a clinic at Shinwar in Nangahar province in November and, at the same time, three bombardments of a basic health unit in Tani in Paktia province, the very critical food situation resulting from the armed conflict in some areas, and the widespread measures adopted to impose alien cultural values — especially through the system of education.

Dr. Ermacora's conclusions took careful note of the Kabul regime's recent initiatives of what it chose to call a "ceasefire", a "national reconciliation" and an "amnesty". He noted that the amnesty was not unconditional, that certain types of political crimes were excluded and that its implementation depended on the screening of the cases by a commission, the composition of which corresponded to the political structure of the regime.

Dr. Ermacora adds:

"In spite of the political declarations concerning peaceful reconciliation, there has so far been *no* marked change in the human rights situation in the country: fighting is continuing, particularly in the border areas; many wounded persons are crossing the border and the number of refugees is increasing steadily".

Therefore, says the UN special rapporteur

"the unchanged human rights situation continues to be the source of deepest concern because of the sufferings of the civilian population and the magnitude of the economic, social and cultural problems confronting millions of refugees."

That, then, is the reality, described not by a partial observer but by the representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations. In addition, as my hon. Friend pointed out, Amnesty International has painted a grim picture of torture of political prisoners. Its reports said:

"Torture is widespread and systematic. It is most commonly inflicted on men and women prisoners held in the custody of Khad (the secret police)".

Soviet personnel were allegedly present during many of the torture sessions. Hon. Members will know that Khad, this instrument of torture, now grandly renamed the Ministry of State Security, is the power base of Najib, who ran it until the Russians moved him to replace Karmal, no doubt hoping he could win Afghan hearts and minds where Karmal had failed.

Can such a man inspire Afghan confidence? On 12 January, less than two weeks after asking the Mujahideen to lay down their arms, he told the Ministry of State Security that during this so-called process of

"national reconciliation . . . the role and importance of the organ of the Ministry of State Security, its political bodies and its party organisations will be further enhanced."

In other words, at a time of national reconciliation, as he calls it, he was calling for a strengthening of the role and power of the secret police.

As we speak, major military operations continue along the border with Pakistan, and Pakistan's international border continues to be repeatedly violated. There have been nearly 300 bombing raids and other incidents this year alone. We all greatly admire the forbearance of the Pakistan Government in the face of this threat to their security. A week ago, shortly after the Geneva talks resumed, at least 110 people died and 200 were injured in Afghan regime air raids on Pakistani border towns — the worst such incidents since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The Government wholeheartedly condemn such atrocious and provocative attacks which come at a time when the Soviet Union and Kabul regime claim to be engaged in serious negotiations for a peaceful, political settlement. Moreover, Kabul regime inspired terrorist bombing incidents inside Pakistan territory were reported almost daily last month. There were over 500 such incidents last year.

It is astonishing that some hon. Members — not previously noted for their humanitarian concerns in Afghanistan and noticeably absent tonight — put their names to early-day motions 587, 588 and 593 concerning alleged breaches of the ceasefire offer and the shooting down of an Antonov 26 aircraft near Khost. Khost was precisely the area in Paktia province where the Kabul regime and the Russians were concentrating major military operations. Not only is it unusual that civilian aircraft are allowed anywhere near military operations, but the AN26 is an aircraft used for ferrying military personnel. Nor can a "ceasefire" be "breached" when it is unilateral, when it requires the other side effectively to surrender and when it is not applied in the first place to the border areas where most regime attacks have concentrated. Such early-day motions bring the House into disrepute. Certain honourable Members find it convenient to overlook the thousands of civilians killed through the bombardment of their villages, the women, children and old men lying dreadfully wounded in International Committee of the Red Cross hospitals in Peshawar and Quetta, and the fact that one third of the Afghan people have been forced to flee abroad. At least 85,000 refugees have crossed into Pakistan in the last year.

Mr. Speaker, the Government will continue to provide substantial aid to Afghan refugees and victims of the war. The Russians and the regime use a deliberate policy of depopulation and crop destruction in certain strategic areas. Instead of villages full of life, there remain just empty shells. Drought and famine will play an increasing role in coming months. Those who do not become refugees have two choices — to go to Kabul, where the population has swollen over seven years from 700,000 to 2·5 million, or to go to the hills. In Kabul, the Soviet-style education system spreads communist propaganda. The rural areas are abandoned to the brave European and humanitarian organisations which provide the only health, education and other services. The Russians are trying to remove the sea so that the fish cannot swim, but they reckoned without the morale and bravery of the Afghan resistance, which remain as high as ever. The Russians should learn from Afghanistan's history that they cannot break the spirit of the Afghan people.

Why do we know so little about the real war? While Western journalists are invited to Kabul, which is surrounded by 20,000 Soviet troops, a condition of the so-called ceasefire offered by Kabul in January was an end to the illegal entry of foreign journalists into the area beyond Kabul's control. Journalists take their lives in their hands when they try to tell the tale of the true horror of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.

The Afghan resistance has grown in political co-ordination. We admire its continuing courage against great odds in resisting foreign domination, and we welcome the increasing co-ordination under certain commanders inside Afghanistan. We will continue to keep in touch with them. The resistance leaders must be involved in a settlement.

I have already spoken of the current pressures being exerted on the Pakistan Government. It is much to their credit that they have maintained a principled position, while doing their utmost to contribute to the search for a real solution.

Peace is urgently needed. The key lies in Moscow. We welcome any reduction in the fighting but for peace, to last it must address the root problems and solutions. We assure the Soviet Union that neither we, the rest of Europe nor the West have any interest in prolonging the war. We recognise that an independent Afghanistan should have friendly relations with all its neighbours — including, of course, the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union is in a quandary. If it is still its objective to preserve at all costs an Afghan regime dominated by a client Communist party, it will still be propping it up and fighting an unwinnable war years from now. If it wants to move towards a genuine settlement, it can be assured that we will be constructive. The UN package contains guarantees of non-interference and non-intervention designed to meet Soviet concerns. A neutral Afghanistan has also been referred to by Soviet leaders.

The first step needed is for the Russians to make an irrevocable commitment to a short timetable for the departure of their troops. This would build confidence so that the Afghans would be encouraged to work towards a genuinely representative Government in order that a genuinely representative Government can evolve.

Trying to predetermine a Government based on Najib or the Communist party simply will not work. That is not self-determination. Najib's references to

"consolidating the gains of the revolution"

and its "irreversibility" are illustrative. So is the attitude of Mr. Shevardnadze who went to Kabul in January and reassured Najib that the Soviet Union saw the Communist party as the "back bone" of the so-called policy of nationwide reconciliation.

The only route to stability is by the removal of foreign occupation and the emergence of a Government truly representative of the refugees and the Mujahideen. We hope that the Soviet Union's statements of intent mean that it is moving towards this realisation. That is in its control. It is up to the Soviet Union to withdraw its troops. There is no time to lose for the sake of the people of Afghanistan. It is their interests that count. We must not forget them.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eighteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 6 March 1987

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Inner City Areas

9.35 am

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): I beg to move,

That this House condemns the economic and social policies of Her Majesty's Government which have led to the continued decay and dereliction of the inner city areas; draws attention to the high levels of unemployment, homelessness and family poverty, to the neglect of the environment, and the loss of local industry and public services; and calls for policies of investment which will revive the economic life and the provision of essential services in these areas.

This debate takes place against the background of next Tuesday week's Budget and the billions of pounds that will be available to the Chancellor of the Exchequer for his pre-election tax give-away. Those potential tax give-aways are enormous. Whatever may be the ifs or buts in the Chancellor's speech about what he thinks he will be able to do, we know that vast sums of money will be given away. Report after report has clearly shown that money will be given away to the better-off people. They will do far better than many other people who urgently need money to be spent on their needs.

Against that enormous give-away, the problems that are to be found in our inner cities will grow worse and will increase. We hear in this House of the north-south divide. I suggest that it could be narrowed down to a particular area in a borough or city where there are the "haves" and "have-nots". None suffers more from this have/have-not syndrome than the great cities. The terms of the motion are so drawn that hon. Members with inner city constituencies will be taking part in it. I am a Member of Parliament for a London constituency, but I know that it is not only in London that there are crucial, pressing problems about which urgent action needs to be taken.

These issues are not new, but, in view of the forthcoming Budget, it is essential that they should be discussed yet again in the House. My view is that if one represents an inner city constituency, it does not matter whether one sits on the Opposition Benches or on the Government Benches, one knows of the problems that, sadly, exist in many of our cities.

The words "urban deprivation" are often heard. They cover a variety of issues: unemployment, housing, hospitals, education, the local environment in which people live and the problems that they have to face, whatever their age. We are told that these problems require careful consideration. I fully accept that. But urgent action also needs to be taken by the Government. They should give the lead to local authorities and commercial businesses so that hope for the future is given to the many people who live in our inner cities. However, that, sadly, is not taking place with the urgency that the problem deserves. I am sure that many hon. Members who will seek to take part in this debate will outline the problems that exist in the areas that they represent. We are in a vicious circle. The problems exist, the need for improvement is clear, but there are not the right means and will to bring hope.

Over the past two or three years there have been many debates on local government and rate support issues. Often the areas in greatest need have suffered because of the Government's policies, especially on rate support grant. Funding in those areas has been severely restricted and, in many cases, drastically reduced. Funding is the key to the success of rebuilding our major cities. It appears to many hon. Members that the Government either do not understand or do not want to understand that fact.

The editorial in *Today* of Thursday 19 February stated:

"Chance to help the have nots".

It continued:

"Voters may be tempted by lower taxes. But there is plenty of evidence to show that that is not what they care about most. What they really want is more jobs, better schools and hospitals, and social benefits that would lift the poor out of their poverty."

The editorial continued:

"The test of his judgment"——

the Chancellor's—

"will be what he does for the disadvantaged. And most of all what he does for the unemployed."

That is a fair, realistic comment on the type of issues which I hope will be discussed today.

We read in the newspapers comments by people who make flying visits to the inner cities and often do not live in them but who tell us what is wrong with them. Those of use who live in or represent inner city areas know that the overwhelming tragedy is the despair of so many of the people who live in them. People wonder whether anything well ever change in the day-to-day life that they as inner city residents have to experience, whether it is unemployment, housing or hospital services. We all know of communities that campaign to keep their areas alive, yet they find that neither national Government nor often local government wants to listen or to help them.

I represent part of the London borough of Wandsworth. Wandsworth is a classic example of an area of haves and have-nots. Property prices are becoming unbelievable and, for many people in need, properties are unobtainable because of their price. The other side of the "up-marketness" of Wandsworth is unemployment. There are 16,000 people in Wandsworth who are out of work. The number who have been out of work for between nine months and three years is 7,623. In Tooting, one of the parliamentary constituencies in that borough, 13·6 per cent. of the eligible work force are unemployed.

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): The hon. Gentleman has emphasised that he is a Member of Parliament who represents part of Wandsworth, which is an outstandingly well-run local authority area which has a good level of investment and treats its ratepayers with great respect. Will the hon. Gentleman answer a question about the unemployment problem? Why is British Rail short of 7,000 guards and hundreds of drivers—90 alone in Croydon—when it is offering pay approaching £260 a week? People are just not willing to take on those jobs. How can people remain unemployed for so long when such jobs are going begging?

Mr. Cox: That is an interesting point. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman's comments will be noted with great

[Mr. Cox]

interest by the unemployed not only in my constituency but in other parts of the borough. It may well be, as the hon. Gentleman said, that job opportunities exist in other areas of London, but the official fact is that well over 7,500 people have been out of work for long periods in Wandsworth. Whatever policies the Government say that they are using to help unemployed people, there is evidence that, because of their actions in combing out the long-term unemployed, as they describe it, there is substantial unemployment in my part of London. I am sure that hon Members who represent other parts of London will relate experiences similar to that of many people in my constituency and in Wandsworth generally. Figures and articles are often quoted in the House, but the tragic fact is that thousands of people in London want employment but, for whatever reason, are not able to get it.

Mr. Roger King: They are not willing to work.

Mr. Cox: To say that they are not willing to work is an insult. It is a disgrace to millions of people. Those of us who see people who are unemployed are left in no doubt that they want employment and that their family and the environment in which they live suffer because of their inability to get a job. It is an utter disgrace to say that they are not willing to take up employment.

We hear much about the great housing policies of the London borough of Wandsworth, but there is another side to that supposed glittering achievement. No local authority houses have been built for several years. Thousands of people are on the waiting lists. I have a letter sent to me by a constituent on 28 February in which he outlined the problems that he and his family face. His children are sleeping on mattresses in the family bedroon because they cannot get the type of accommodation which they would like in Wandsworth where they have lived for many years. My constituent says that, despite his efforts to get suitable accommodation from Wandsworth council for himself and his family, he sees countless houses boarded up and left empty as he walks around the borough trying to find somewhere to live. Hundreds of houses in Wandsworth are boarded up. There is one specific reason for that: the local authority wants to sell them. It is not concerned about housing needs. Thousands of people on the housing lists in the borough have virtually no hope of getting accommodation. Countless families are in bed-and-breakfast accommodation at enormous expense to local ratepayers, yet hundreds of houses are deliberately kept empty and boarded up so that they can be sold.

That is a deplorable indictment of the local authority when within its own community there are thousands of people wanting somewhere decent to live in which to bring up their families.

Mr. John Powley (Norwich, South): The hon. Gentleman will be aware that, according to figures from the Department of the Environment, there are 1,397 empty properties in the borough of Wandsworth. Is the hon. Gentleman also aware that there are 3,200 empty properties in Tower Hamlets and 3,100 in Hackney? If the number of empty properties in Wandsworth is a disgrace, surely it is doubly a disgrace in Hackney and Tower Hamlets. Surely they are equally guilty, if anybody is, of deliberately keeping properties empty and allowing the area to deteriorate.

Mr. Cox: The hon. Gentleman has made an important intervention. I agree that it is disgraceful. However, I wish that he would consider why in the boroughs he mentioned — Tower Hamlets and Hackney — there are so many empty properties. Many of them are empty — as I hope hon. Members from those areas will say if, as I hope, they participate in the debate — as a result of Government financial policy in the boroughs. That is the tragedy of Government legislation such as rate capping. When local authorities want to get their properties back into a decent state of repair so that they can be let, they do not have the money to do it. Report after report is available for any hon. Member to see the facts. Therefore, I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it is disgraceful that Government policies have caused those properties to remain empty for so long.

I want to return to the problems in the London borough of Wandsworth, especially with regard to hospitals. We often discuss in the House the problems of hospital closures and hospital services generally throughout the country. In Wandsworth, after several hospital closures, we have yet another battle to fight — the threatened closure of St. James' hospital in Balham. I give the Tory-controlled local authority credit because it is bitterly opposed to the closure of St. James' hospital. People throughout the borough are opposed to its closure, but we understand, that it is still the intention of the local health authority, because of Government cuts in Health Service expenditure, to approve the closure of the hospital. It is an utter disgrace, in view of the needs not only of the people in that area but of others, because people go for hospital treatment not only in the area in which they live but in adjoining areas. We are in no doubt that we shall see, as we have seen over several years, the run-down of the essential health services of a community such as Wandsworth.

Mr. William Shelton (Streatham): I have some sympathy with the hon. Gentleman and I do not wish to see that hospital closed. However, will he accept that there are two reasons for the proposed closure which have nothing to do with the diminution of Health Service funds? One is the dreaded resource allocation working party whereby funds have been moved from the south to the midlands and the north to provide better treatment in those areas. Secondly, there is the vast expenditure on the magnificent new hospital, St. George's, in Tooting. That is rightly or wrongly drawing off funds from the other hospitals. I think that those are the reasons, rather than any cuts in Health Service funding.

Mr. Cox: I accept the hon. Gentleman's point about RAWP. We can all learn our lessons. Whereas initially RAWP may have been a good thing, I believe that it is now time that the Government looked again at the financial allocations for hospital expenditure. I have much sympathy with hon. Members, on whatever Benches they sit, who come from areas where there is an urgent need for hospital improvements. However, it is our duty as Members of Parliament to try to safeguard the services in the areas we represent. The sad fact is that within the London borough of Wandsworth we have seen the closure of hospital services, which has happened throughout London. Since 1979, 32 hospitals have closed in London. Hon. Members representing London constituencies not only on Opposition Benches but on Conservative Benches,

repeatedly say that far too many hospital closures have taken place and that they must now stop. They are right to say that—this is not a political point because they realise the enormous problems that exist as a result of a lack of proper hospital services in their areas.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the money being put into the big new St. George's teaching hospital in Tooting. I agree with what he said. However, I visit that hospital from time to time and what I and a great many other people say is that it may be a superb hospital one day but there are three stages of development. There is a struggle to finish stage two, and we are repeatedly told that other hospitals have to be closed in our area in order to find the money to complete stage two. Where the money will ever be found to complete stage three, heaven only knows.

Many people see St. George's as an impersonal hospital. It is so enormous. It may have superb facilities —I do not dispute that—but all of us and our families would expect to go into a hospital where one felt that there was some concern being shown because of the problems one faced. The sad fact about hospitals such as St. George's, Tooting, is that one is nothing more than a name on a computer. One goes in one day, one is looked at and then a couple of days later one comes out again. There is no feeling that St. George's is a hospital we can relate to.

I compare the feeling about St. George's with the large tower blocks that we now all condemn. They are highly impersonal, and, unfortunately, many of our large hospitals are now becoming as isolated and impersonal as many tower blocks and large housing estates. That is something that we should consider.

Mr. Nicholas Baker (Dorset, North): The hon. Gentleman made an interesting point about RAWP. Does he accept, that as the population has left London, the people moving to the new areas must have hospital services? Therefore, to encourage some of the curious campaigns to maintain elderly and decrepit hospital buildings in London when the population has left is selfish at one level and nonsensical at another. What he and other London hon. Members should support, and I believe generally do, although not in every case, is campaigns to maintain hospital services and the standard of those services in London rather than bricks and mortar. The money must necessarily be spread properly to the regions where people have moved from London and other urban areas.

Mr. Cox: There is a lot in what the hon. Gentleman says. However, he omits to say that, although people are moving out of London, those who remain are invariably the elderly and the poor who, as report after report shows, are the people who need hospital services, be it within a hospital or the back-up services that relate to a hospital, far more, in many cases than those who are moving away. That is a fact not only in my area but in many areas. That is why we are concerned to stop the hospital closure programme and to maintain the hospital back-up services. We know from experience that it is not solely a question of a hospital being closed because, as the hospital is closed, many of the related services also disappear.

I accept what the hon. Gentleman says. No doubt areas such as his have a pressing problem, but his pressing problem in no way diminishes the problems which, sadly, remain in the large cities, whatever movement of population there may be.

Whereas I accept that we have problems, I try to be realistic in this type of debate and say that I do not believe that they have just started; they have been with us for a long time. But there is ample evidence that, unfortunately, over the past seven years, those problems have worsened as a direct result of the Government's policies and the actions that they have taken. For example, there is the cut in rate support grant, the cut in housing investment, the cut in job retraining schemes, the closure of hospitals that we have been discussing, the cuts in local health services——

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): Rubbish.

Mr. Cox: It is not rubbish. I suggest to anyone who says "Rubbish" that he looks at the recently published comments of the Audit Commission, which are available for all hon. Members to read. They refer to London but can be related to many other large cities. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will listen to the comments that I shall quote, and, when he has heard them, I shall be interested to know whether he still thinks that what I said is rubbish. The Audit Commission said:

"Although London is the richest city in the United Kingdom, large parts of it face desperate social and economic problems. In some boroughs, unemployment among young men exceeds 45 per cent.; in some places, among young blacks, it exceeds 60 per cent. . . . Homelessness, housing conditions, crime, are worsening year by year, as the cycle of urban deprivation becomes more established.

Once the cycle of decay becomes established it will be immensely difficult to reverse. Prevention is the only viable strategy; and this will undoubtedly cost money. There is therefore no time to lose if effective action is to be taken to prevent the emergence in London of the urban dereliction that now affects some large North American cities."

That is what the Audit Commission says about London. Some hon. Members may not like to hear it, but it is also a sad fact in many other parts of the country.

Mr. Powley: Would the hon. Gentleman quote further from the Audit Commission report, which draws particular attention to the disgracefully inefficient way in which many of the inner London boroughs are administered? The report states that

"spending per resident in the most deprived metropolitan districts"——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): Order. The hon. Gentleman is hoping to catch my eye. He should not quote in an intervention. He should be as brief as possible.

Mr. Powley: I beg your pardon, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Let me précis what the Audit Commission says. May I ask the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) why the most deprived inner London boroughs are the most inefficiently run boroughs in the country? What measures are they taking to improve their efficiency and to spend more of their resources on the measures that he advocates rather than on waste and inefficiency?

Mr. Cox: Of course, we would all welcome greater efficiency in any local authority. I am the first to say that if a local authority is criticised because a body such as the Audit Commission says that improvements can be made, I hope that the authority will take note of what is said about it. There are no ifs or buts about that. The Audit Commission said clearly what the problems are. I take the hon. Gentleman's point. If local authorities manage the areas of their responsibility in a way that is not conducive to tackling such problems, they should improve matters.

[Mr. Cox]

Those of us who come from the large cities hear Ministers, particularly the Prime Minister, talking about their commitment to the family. That is laudable because we all belong to families; we know the benefit of the family. But on any night of any week an estimated 5,000 people are in bed-and-breakfast accommodation in London. Heaven knows what the figure is throughout the United Kingdom. I do not know how the Prime Minister or any other of her Ministers thinks that that helps to rebuild or unite a family. Many of the Government's policies in recent years have, in fact, eroded the unity of the family. The Government have taken action that breaks up families. Many thousands of families in the country have no wish to be separated or to live in poverty, but as a result of the policies followed by the Government in recent years the problem of families being broken up and living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation has been growing.

It would be better for Ministers, including the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, to visit our cities. I do not dispute that they do, but they should do so without the public press fanfare of, "The Minister's here today," or the syndrome of, "The Minister will see the good things that are being done." I suggest to any Minister who is involved with the inner cities that it would be far better to make visits in a small group of two or three people. Ministers are intelligent people——

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): Not all of them.

Mr. Cox: I am prepared to be generous, even if my hon. Friend is not.

Ministers can see what is happening. They can knock on a few doors and ask people what they feel about their families' future. Ministers would learn far more by doing that than by spending hours reading reports. I accept that some reports are valuable, but far more could be learnt by meeting people who are experiencing the problems that I have outlined.

Whatever party we belong to, what do we expect to see in our cities in the year 2000? In 13 years' time, will we say, "We went through a rough patch in some of our cities, but thankfully, as a result of the combined efforts and willingness to act by organisations that have a role to play in the cities, things have now improved greatly"? All of us who are involved in politics must ask ourselves that question.

I commented briefly on the Audit Commission report. Report after report—some political, others not political in any way—says that action is needed now. None of us can dispute that.

I was asked about properties that remain empty. Several reports say that many properties in our large cities are standing empty which need money to be spent on them. No doubt during the debate comments will be made about rate increase. I am a ratepayer. None of us is happy when we read about substantial rate increase in the areas where we live. All of us, whether or not we have been in local government, know the services in the areas where we live or that we represent depend on the amount of money that is spent on developing and providing them.

Many local authorities are now faced with an enormous dilemma. If they want to make improvements in the areas, as a result of rate capping legislation the only way in which they can get the money to tackle some of the problems is by increasing the rates. Some hon. Members and, I am sure, some local residents do not like that. However, the reasons for that cannot be hidden by hon. Members saying, as we heard twice this week during Prime Minister's Question Time, "What does my right hon. Friend think about the rate increases in such and such an area?" Rates are being increased in many cases because of Government policies which have caused a reduction in national funding to those areas.

Mr. Steen: No: that is rubbish.

Mr. Cox: It is not good the hon. Gentleman saying no. The facts prove otherwise. For example, my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) sought to introduce a Bill on 13 February about housing in multiple occupation. Government records show that 81 per cent. of houses in multiple occupation lack proper means of escape from a fire; 66 per cent. have inadequate essential amenities such as baths, showers, toilets, washing and cooking facilities; 48 per cent. are overcrowded. Those are Government figures showing the problems that exist in properties in which several families or people live.

To the credit of hon. Members, that Bill was supported by Conservative, Labour and Alliance Members. They said that there was an urgent need for such legislation to be introduced. The tragedy was that, because of the tactics employed on 13 February, the Bill did not have a fair hearing; it received a little over one hour's debate. The problems outlined by the Government about housing in multiple occupation still exist. They will not go away. If local authorities want to tackle such problems, from where will they get the finance to do so?

Many hon. Members want to take part in this debate and it is only fair that I should cut out some of the comments that I intended to make and to give other hon. Members a chance to speak. I believe that hon. Members who take part in debates in this House should give way to interventions, but that obviously takes up time in a speech. In drawing my remarks to a close, I have wanted to outline the despair and hopelessness in London and many other areas. I want to outline the lessons that I hope will be learnt.

We all know the nature of the problem. However, as I have already said, what position do we hope that our cities will be in at the turn of the century? We must begin to give urgent attention to that question. National Government must be in the forefront of policies that will regenerate life and hope in our cities. Local authorities must also be involved. However, I believe that other organisations must be involved. We can no longer leave it to local authorities and Government alone to tackle the problems.

I would welcome initiatives from other organisations with the finance that is so urgently needed. I should like to see building societies, banks and pension funds beginning to invest in our inner cities. I should like them to start working alongside local authorities. Indeed, to their credit, many organisations are working alongside local authorities. We hear much criticism about Liverpool. However, I heard a report recently—and possibly the Minister will be more aware of this than I am—to the effect that Liverpool, to its credit, had sought to work with private organisations which wanted to come into the borough and develop. Those organisations had the money to do so and, to its credit, Liverpool is doing everything

that it can to speed up development and planning permission so that new industries can enter the area. That lead should be followed in other places.

Organisations with the money can bring technical and managerial experience into our inner cities. That is very welcome. We want a long-term partnership in which regeneration will be the key for all those people who seek to be involved in development. However, what we do not want is the kind of press and media coverage that appeared last weekend about the future of Fulham football club and its ground. That was a clear example of an organisation backed up by people with money whose sole consideration was profit, not Fulham football club. Let us be honest; Fulham football club is not the most prominent football club in the country, but it is a football club to which many people relate and it has a long history. People involved with the club are entitled to ask, "Are the people who now control this ground interested only in selling it?" People were incensed when they read that the ground was to be sold to make a profit of £20 million. That is not what we want to see taking place in our cities.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) was hoping to take part in the debate. He told me earlier in the week that many aspects of the Docklands development are welcome. However, there are many other aspects that are bitterly opposed by the local residents. The criteria among developers in that area seems to be, "How much money can we make out of the Docklands development?" In that part of London, better housing, better job opportunities and a better local environment for residents should be at the forefront of development. Unfortunately, all the indications are that the Docklands are being developed not for the community which has lived there for years, but for people who come in, develop, and make enormous profits without any commitment to the area. We do not need that in our inner cities.

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that for about four decades plan after plan was discussed but no action was taken to clean up and improve an area which was getting into an appalling state of dereliction? Does he further agree that the development does not simply involve modern industries, but contains much new housing for sale and rent for local people?

Mr. Cox: I accept that for a long time there was not the commitment or the kind of development that we wanted to see in that area. I can criticise that, but I can equally criticise what is happening now. With respect to the hon. Gentleman, who I know is not a London Member, if he doubts me, he should go to the Docklands and listen to the people living in the area.

Dr. Hampson: I was there three weeks ago.

Mr. Cox: If the hon. Gentleman was there three weeks ago, he must know the deep fears felt by many people in the area about the developments taking place in what they regard as their home. They have as much right to regard that area as their home as we have to consider our areas as our homes. The Docklands development is not the kind of development that we should encourage in many of our large cities, because it does not meet the needs of local people who have a right to be heard as to how they would like to see their areas develop.

We should work together to develop the identity of the inner cities. We must get away from the divide which obviously exists in many areas and which—I make no bones about it — has been increased as a result of Government action in recent years. If we had a political understanding and a willingness by the Government to say, "We have a responsibility to lead the revitalisation of our great cities", we could start to make meaningful progress. Sadly, I and many hon. Members who represent our great cities do not see that willingness in Ministers when they make their pronouncements in the House and around the country.

Britain is still a great country. Our workers have great skills and talents, and the country is still enormously wealthy. If we began to marry all our abilities, there would be hope not only for those who live in the inner cities now but for those who will have to live in them in the future. I hope that the debate will focus attention on that point.

No one can dispute that problems exist. They will not go away. No hon. Member would wish the problems to worsen, so now is the time to work together to get hope back into our cities, which all of us are proud to represent.

10.21 am

Sir Reginald Eyre (Birmingham, Hall Green): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) for drafting his motion so as to allow hon. Members who represent constituencies in provincial cities to take part in the debate. Some of the points that I shall make are relevant to the matters that he raised.

From my experience in Birmingham, I would put the beginning of the deterioration in our inner cities at an earlier date than do most analyses. Before the war, in Birmingham and in other big cities in the provinces, large slum areas in the centres were cleared and families were accommodated in new traditional housing estates in the outer areas, such as Kingstanding, Glebe Farm and Stechford in Birmingham. But the heavy deterioration in formerly good and well-maintained roads of houses in areas such as Sparkbrook and Handsworth began with the bombing in 1940 and 1941. That deterioration continued during the war and in the immediate post-war years. It was significant that the exodus of people from those areas, many of whom had contributed much to the success of the communities, who could manage to move to the more pleasant suburbs, began to accelerate in those immediate post-war years.

As the post-war clearance of inner areas in the big cities got under way, many small businesses were wiped out and inadequate thought was given to resiting, so a loss of jobs followed, again accelerating the impoverishment of those areas. The planning system was insensitive and aided job destruction, and planning blight widened the areas of decay.

Although in the 1950s and 1960s enormous sums of public money were devoted to new housing developments, our town planning dreams during and just after the war all too often turned into nightmares. In what now appears to have been a period of municipal madness, we created tower blocks, appalling walk-up blocks of flats, large areas of faulty system-built houses and great estates of ill-designed housing. Many of those estates have been unpopular with and unacceptable to their occupants and enormously expensive to maintain and repair. Also, several of those nightmare estates were built in the outer parts of the big cities so that the people transferred to them have had to endure inner city conditions in the outer wards.

[Sir Reginald Eyre]

Surprisingly, the problems of the inner areas were not generally recognised until 1969 when, through the agency of local authorities, attempts were made to ease the problems. In 1973, the Department of the Environment conducted studies in carefully chosen problem towns, and detailed reports were prepared. I was privileged to take part in the study of Oldham, and I well remember the friendliness of the people there.

Thus, more urban policies were formulated. The White Paper of 1977 was produced, and successive Governments added to urban policies and allocated increasing sums of money to support them. Improvements have taken place as a result, and they can be seen on the ground. But one has honest doubts about whether improvement for the people who live in those areas has been commensurate with the costs involved. Despite efforts with land registers and similar processes, vast areas of derelict land continue to exist in the inner cities. Much of that land is in public ownership.

Since 1979, the Government have brought to bear a new and important initiative—and the hon. Member for Tooting recognised it. Their purpose is to use public resources on a pump-priming basis to attract a private enterprise contribution to the regeneration of our inner areas. The leverage that can be achieved — with two, three or four times the amount of private sector money following the public investment — is vital to the economic and social regeneration of rundown areas.

The London Docklands Development Corporation has been massively successful. It started with 8·5 square miles of dereliction, and it has transformed great areas into residential and commercial property. The Mersey Urban Development Corporation has made considerable progress, too, following that principle. But in the actual operation of the UDC we should heed the advice of Lord Mellish of Bermondsey. In another place, he, in effect, said that if a concerned local authority played its part with the development corporation, it would be welcomed; but if a political change caused that local authority to withdraw its representation, its absence must be borne philosophically. Indeed, Lord Mellish expressed himself more vigorously than that.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I accept entirely the leverage point. In the LDDC area, the ratio between private and public investment is as much as 6:1. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one flaw, partly because of the stay-away attitude of local authorities—mine is the most guilty in this respect — is that the LDDC drafted its policy and set out on its work without seeking to respond to community need? It was often bought by market demand, and that, unmitigated, does not always act in the interests of the resident community. That is the flaw in what, in many respects, is a necessary development.

Sir Reginald Eyre: I have sympathy with some of what the hon. Gentleman has said. He will appreciate the need for political stability in areas of development, otherwise private funds will not be forthcoming. That is the crux of the problem.

Mr. John Fraser: Will the hon. Gentleman explain something which mystifies me? Despite the fact that well over £150 million has been spent in Docklands during the past three years, unemployment there has still gone up. Why?

Sir Reginald Eyre: That is a London issue. I am not sure of the accuracy of the hon. Gentleman's assertion. I hope that he will forgive me, but I am sure that a great many of my right hon. and hon. Friends who represent London constituencies will be glad to take up that point with him.

Because of the success of development schemes, the Government's decision to announce four more urban development corporations — three in the north at Trafford park, Teesside and Tyneside and one in the industrial west midlands—is to be warmly welcomed. It is profoundly encouraging that banks, major industrial and large building companies are so willing to participate in these schemes. It is this comparatively recent advance in funding and policy which gives me hope that we are at last finding a solution to what appeared to be intractable problems.

Mr. Reg Freeson (Brent, East): Will the hon. Gentleman welcome Birmingham city council's proposed joint enterprise, which involves the private sector and many institutions, to establish an urban renewal company to act as an urban renewal agency? Will he urge the Government to endorse such a joint co-operative approach?

Sir Reginald Eyre: I am interested in that matter and, if the right hon. Gentleman will permit me, I shall deal with it as soon as possible.

People's involvement in the development schemes that I have described is assisted by the spread of home ownership and of small business ownership which can be promoted in the development. Moreover, as land in inner areas is made available, I am confident, on account of reports that I, like the hon. Member for Tooting, have read, that building societies, operating under their newly liberalised regime — which the Government provided — will work with housing associations and other agencies to provide attractive housing schemes for sale and to let, including accommodation for retired people.

I agree with the hon. Member for Tooting that it is possible that pension funds will recognise the prospect of providing housing facilities for their retired members and their families as schemes progress. By creating mixed housing developments in an attractive form, people will be brought back into inner areas, thus providing a wider range of occupation and helping to stimulate the local economy. The work and jobs thus generated in discouraged areas will be a great boon.

I should like now to consider the point raised by the right hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Freeson) about Birmingham. The city council, with the support of the two main parties, is trying to set up its own inner city regeneration scheme through an urban development agency as distinct from a corporation. The proposals are for a two-tier company structure, so there is considerable complexity in that respect.

The prospectus says that the agency will be

"a market led, profit seeking creative development business. It will be private sector led and will operate with the active participation of the local authority who will also facilitate the redevelopment."

That is a sign of Birmingham's realism and of the fact that lessons to be learnt from the LDDC and its success have

been widely recognised. Undoubtedly, this is a means of making a substantial contribution to the solution of terrible inner area problems.

In its proposals, the city has the important support of the Birmingham Chamber of Industry and Commerce, which has an excellent record, through Birmingham Venture and other initiatives, of contributing to inner area efforts. Substantial private operators also support the proposals. They include Douglas and Gallifords, the civil engineering contractors, George Wimpey, Bryants Holdings, the builders, Lloyds bank, Citibank and Touche Ross.

The area of Aston and Nechells has been put forward as the first part of Birmingham's inner city for regeneration. The city is bringing its derelict, empty, non-operational land into the project. That shows how we are all learning from the success of development corporations fostered by the Government.

I understand that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has had meetings and correspondence with the city on this matter, and that he has quite properly required clarification about several matters, including planning considerations. As I have already said, some of the arrangements are complex, but it is the planning arrangements for development corporations which have helped to achieve success in such a short time. I believe that the city intends to conduct a feasibility study and that a high development value is estimated for the area. As a result, the requested urban regeneration grant would achieve valuable leverage.

My right hon. Friend knows that Birmingham, with the support of the main parties, is making considerable efforts to diversify the local economy. In addition to the contemplated extension of the national exhibition centre, which has been a great success, the Birmingham convention centre is well under way. My right hon. Friend's recent approval of urban aid to facilitate the provision of a new hotel at the convention centre is greatly appreciated. We are most grateful to him.

I know that my hon. Friend the Minister will personally draw the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to what I am saying. Visible progress with regeneration at Aston would be a further signal to the whole country that solutions to these persistent problems can be found. As my right hon. Friend will appreciate, the benefit to the people of Birmingham will be immense, as a new area of live economic activity will be created under Government policies.

Mr. Freeson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way again. It is because this initiative is so important, not only for Birmingham but elsewhere, that I intervene again. What neither he nor the Government have done so far is to give a general welcome to the initiative. Notwithstanding the fact that many detailed matters have to be investigated, checked and studied, there has not yet been a positive endorsement of what Birmingham, with its partners, wishes to introduce in its area. Should not the Government be urged to give that support?

Sir Reginald Eyre: I made it clear that the Birmingham proposal has the support of the two main parties. I ask the right hon. Gentleman not to be political and over simple about this matter. If he studied all the papers on this matter, he would realise that in order to establish a proper framework in which private enterprise can be involved successfully and with confidence over a period of years, it is necessary to deal with certain planning aspects and with the longer-term requirement of political stability. These are essential to the success of the proposals.

Naturally, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State must devote considerable time to the detail. This is well accepted by the corporation in Birmingham. It has made it clear that it is prepared to develop the details of the scheme and to seek consultations with officials as it begins to build the proposals to bring them within my right hon. Friend's the Secretary of State's perfectly proper and reasonable requirements. I am merely saying that at this stage I would like my right hon. Friend to continue his sympathetic and understanding consideration of these matters, because I would be pleased if we could make progress.

It would be a great signal throughout the country if we could develop a system whereby we get the benefit of private funding and can be seen to be tackling these problems, in an area that for years has been neglected and which has a terrible effect on the people living there. It would be of great help to the people of Birmingham if some way could be found of advancing in accord with Government policies. In Birmingham, peace and stability in the outer areas depend on a solution of these problems in the inner areas, and that same consideration applies in all the big cities.

Other factors that contribute to improvement result from concentrating on the people who live in the discouraged areas and involving them in a number of different ways. First, following our policy lines of the 1970s, I would like to see local authorities agreeing to more involvement of tenants in running their own estates, through Estate Action. The great inefficiencies in repairs and maintenance continue in the big city housing estates to the distress and misery of the tenants.

Mr. Steen: My hon. Friend is familiar with the Government's commitment to improving the quality of life on these estates by the introduction last year of Estates Action. Last year the Government gave £50 million and this year £75 million to involve communities in the solving of their problems. Is that not the kind of approach that he would welcome?

Sir Reginald Eyre: Yes, that scheme is already of immense value and is playing a part in improving conditions in many big city areas.

Secondly, I should like to see greater involvement of parents in the education of their children, and increased representation on governing bodies is one way of doing this.

Thirdly, I am encouraged by the development of neighbourhood watch schemes in big cities. I understand that there are now 17,500 such schemes. The fact that people come together in small neighbourhood areas to counter unacceptable behaviour helps all those people involved in the scheme to get to know each other. It is my experience that community instincts are strengthened by this association. People can begin a renewal of feelings of neighbourliness that will be helpful in big city circumstances.

Fourthly, I hope that the initiatives of my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General with task forces in eight main areas will continue, because they are providing

[Sir Reginald Eyre]

lessons in the involvement of local people in voluntary organisations, and community participation in projects, all of which can be of great help.

Finally, I shall briefly refer to aspects that create optimism and hope in big cities. One is the super prix motor racing event in Birmingham, again this year on 31 August. The city will be pleased to see any hon. Members who wish to attend. It is extraordinary that that event attracts people into the inner area and creates a holiday or carnival atmosphere. It is helpful to cities such as ours, with the production of motors being an important part of our economy. Social events, such as marching bands and so on provide good family entertainment.

I want to counter the constant denigration of big cities, which does not do any good, nor does it help solve the problems. It is unjustified in many respects, because big cities have large and attractive areas that are popular and pleasing to live in. The national problem is that there are comparatively small pockets of decay in the big cities, where we have not produced a solution to the problems that have festered in such areas. However, we can now produce proposals that will help to solve them.

I shall refer to an interesting matter. With the encouragement of the English Tourist Board, National Holidays has put out a brochure about "Great English Breaks" which refer particularly to "Hotel Breaks in Great English Cities". It includes in its splendid list Birmingham, of course, Bradford, Manchester, Leeds, Portsmouth, Newcastle upon Tyne, Southampton, Stoke-on-Trent and Leicester. If one looks at the brochure, one realises that there are a number of extremely attractive features in all these cities.

Dr. Hampson: Having looked through the brochure, does my hon. Friend agree that "Leeds Leads" and is the centre of the Yorkshire dales tourist industry?

Sir Reginald Eyre: I am impressed that my hon. Friend has seen the booklet. He is right to say that there is a claim, which I shall have to examine, that "Leeds Leads." I am told by the English Tourist Board that this form of advertisement has already generated over £1 million of business by way of visits to big cities.

We now have the possibility of developing policies that can deal with the worst of the problems. Many attractive and pleasant features exist in our big cities, and anybody who looks at these brochures will begin to understand that that is so. They represent more fairly the state of life in these big cities than some of the miserable and denigratory statements that are all too often made about them.

10.49 am

Mrs. Rosie Barnes (Greenwich): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to make my maiden speech on a matter that is very dear to my heart.

First, I should like to pay sincere tribute to the former hon. Member for Greenwich, the late Guy Barnett. He was known and respected in Greenwich as a sincere, hard-working and caring Member of Parliament. I am sure that all hon. Members would like to join me in extending deepest sympathy to his wife and family. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]

Just over a week ago the people of Greenwich put their trust in me by electing me to represent them in this House. I have promised to fight to improve the quality of their lives, which is clearly deteriorating rapidly. To most people Greenwich means a day out, perhaps a trip down the river, a visit to our beautiful historic buildings and, weather permitting, a picnic in our royal park. Tourists go home with their photographs showing them with one foot in the northern hemisphere and one in the southern, and people alert enough at noon to keep their eyes on the observatory see our famous ball rise and fall to signal Greenwich mean time.

Although the people of Greenwich are proud of their heritage, their preoccupations are of a different nature. Greenwich is part of inner London and suffers from many inner city problems: high levels of unemployment, especially among the young, a chronic shortage of housing, council housing that is often in an appalling state of disrepair, and schools and education standards that often leave a great deal to be desired. From the poorest council estates to the affluent Blackheath, there is great anxiety about the declining state of the National Health Service in our area, and law and order is a major concern — whether in the tower blocks or in the comfortable middle-class houses. I shall speak about each of these in turn—first of all, jobs.

There are about 5,000 unemployed men and women in Greenwich. That is approximately 15 per cent., or one in six, of the population. They are mostly young, unskilled and poorly educated, and often YTS failures. Although there has been a big drop in industrial and manufacturing jobs in our area, there is still a shortage of skilled labour. Even basic skills are at a premium. The Woolwich jobcentre, which covers Greenwich and Eltham as well as Woolwich, last year managed to fill only 38 per cent. of its secretarial vacancies, and the building trade and light engineering works also have vacancies. This clearly brings me on to education and training.

Despite all the money spent on them, Inner London education authority children are clearly getting a poor deal. Parents of children at the secondary stage feel particularly bitter in the third year of industrial dispute. Teacher-parent liaison is still very poor. The marking of work is patchy and we still have over 1,000 teachers surplus to requirements in some schools while thousands of children are untaught in others.

At a time when the number of pupils has dropped by one sixth and the number of teachers has dropped by one tenth, administration costs have virtually doubled from £44 million in 1981 to £87 million in 1986. To enable our children to get even those jobs requiring only basic skills, never mind the high-skill, high-tech jobs in the City that are currently filled by young people who commute from the home counties, the education of our children in London must be improved and basic standards must be restored. This is clearly important in the case of Docklands, where jobs of all kinds, including catering, banking and secretarial jobs as well as highly specialised ones, are there for the taking. It is an indictment of our education system that the youngsters of Docklands do not have the qualifications for the range of jobs available. Education and training must be given priority if the economy is to revive, and those things are certainly vital if the youngsters of London are to get the jobs that are there for the taking.

Housing in Greenwich is perhaps the major single source of despair among its people. There has been a fourfold increase in homeless families, from 323 in 1982-83 to 1,307 in 1985-86. Over the same period house starts

have fallen by more than half. House prices in Greenwich have increased even faster than the London average, making it impossible for most local people, and particularly young couples, even to consider buying a home. Approximately 3,000 families are desperate for a transfer from council housing that is unsatisfactory for a number of reasons: chronic disrepair—and some of the disrepair that I have seen would not look amiss in a Dickensian film — overcrowding, children in tower blocks, or a combination of all three.

More than 16,000 people are on the council's waiting list, and that number does not include many people who feel that there is so little hope that they do not even bother to put their names forward. This disguises the fact that many young couples with families are living with in-laws in far from ideal conditions. Many young people who are ready to leave home to make an independent start in life but for whom no accommodation is available have to stay with their parents.

It is estimated that there is a backlog of £60 million worth of repair work on the Ferrier estate alone, and Greenwich council has only £15·7 million to spend next year on housing investment in the whole borough. How can we give hope to those people who are currently trapped either in a state of homelessness or in council housing that is totally unsatisfactory and who feel helpless and desperate? We urgently need a partnership of national and local action, and a partnership of public and private investment. The people trapped in those estates do not have any strong ideological view about where the money should come from. They need decent homes in which to live.

I turn now to the Health Service. In our area we have lost three hospitals in as many years — St. Nicholas's hospital, the British Home for Mothers and Babies, and the Dreadnought hospital. Now the Brook hospital is fighting for its existence. Hospital beds in Greenwich are becoming like conveyor belts because many patients are discharged far too early as doctors and nurses struggle to keep pace with the ever lengthening waiting lists. We have the worst mortality rate in the region, and infant mortality is a serious problem.

The future does not look promising. The regional health authority had to agree to cut the number of acute beds on the understanding that demand would fall. There has been no such reduction in demand, and, although the bulk of the reduction in acute beds has already been made, it has not resulted in anything like the cost saving that was anticipated, largely because the dedication of doctors and nurses has resulted in the remaining beds being more intensively used. We look with fear to the future because we do not know how we will make the necessary cuts without destroying a service that is already perilously close to collapse.

Law and order in Greenwich, as in so many other inner city areas, speaks for itself. Housebreaking, car thefts, violence on our streets, vandalism and criminal damage have risen dramatically in Greenwich as they have risen elsewhere and are now almost commonplace. People do not feel safe on the streets at night and our old people feel increasingly vulnerable, even in their homes. Jobs, education, housing and the Health Service must be given the priority that they deserve. Until the fabric of our society is restored Greenwich will follow the pattern of other inner city areas—a pattern of decline, decay and despair.

11 am

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams (Kensington): The House has just heard an alarmingly competent maiden speech from a new hon. Member whom we all want to welcome today. We were already impressed by the charming manner and elegance of the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mrs. Barnes), but now that we have heard her speak we recognise her as a formidable debater and someone with a very good mastery of her subject.

I had the pleasure as a Member of the European Parliament to represent the adjoining constituencies for five years, though I did not represent Greenwich itself, but I got something of the flavour of the constituency during my time as a Member of the European Parliament and I recognised the independence of the voters there, which made them decide on their landslide and somewhat surprising choice. Now that we have seen the hon. Lady, we are not surprised any longer that they have chosen somebody of such obvious competence.

Lady Members in this House are relatively few in number—what one might call a select band—but they are not a limited company. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has shown what opportunities lie ahead for lady Members.

I was reminded yesterday of an occasion when I was invited as a Member of Parliament to go to a hundredth birthday party for an old lady living in Kensington. Her friends had got together a number of local notables. She spoke to each of us in turn and had a little conversation with all the visitors at this party. To me she said, "It is very nice indeed to be remembered in your old age." I said, "I don't suppose that anyone is likely to remember me, because I am just a politician." She looked quite reproving and said, "Let me say this to you, young man"—she was able to draw on long experience, and what she said to me that she wanted me to remember was, "You never know your luck." I think that perhaps that is an apt remark today, for the hon. Member for Greenwich must have wondered — when she started her campagn — whether she was going to win. I do not suppose that she ever expected that she would win such a substantial popular vote. We welcome her to the House most warmly and look forward to her next contribution.

I am particularly glad to have the opportunity of joining this debate this morning because I want to be the first Member in the House to give a very warm welcome indeed to the Landlord and Tenant (No. 2) Bill, which was introduced by the Department of the Environment yesterday. It is likely to affect some half a million households in England and Wales. It has a number of objects for which, together with a number of other hon. Members on both sides of the House, I have fought for a number of years. In the first place, it will give a greater measure of protection to tenants in blocks of flats and substantial conversions in private ownership. This is something which, as the Member for Kensington, I can say is urgently needed.

I trust that this Bill will go through all its stages before the House breaks up for the general election, because we do not want this measure to be postponed, even for a matter of months. All too many people living in the borough that I represent are suffering from the mismanagement of the blocks of flats in which they live. This does not only apply to the low-grade or unhappy properties on low rents; in some cases it applies to the

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grandest properties on very substantial annual rents, which are just as unhappy and badly managed. I regret to say that I can assert that through my own observation.

I should also like to say that the handout published by the Department when it introduced the Bill yesterday gives us promises of more to come. In case this may not have been picked up, I should just like to read one paragraph from it. The passage reads:

> "The Government intends that the Bill should give tenants tighter control over the handling of service charge funds and insurance as the Nugee Committee recommended. These provisions will be introduced into the Bill by amendment during its passage in the Commons."

Normally, I am extremely critical of Departments that add to Bills after Second Reading, but if the Department has new provisions to add to the Bill in Committee, then I think that I am likely to be one of the Members who will welcome them very gladly.

The other aspect of the Bill that is most important is that it gives the right to buy to recognised tenants' associations in two ways—either by pre-emption when the owner of the property decides to put it on the market or by decision of the courts. This is something that I think the House will welcome particularly warmly.

The difficulty that we have all over London, and I am sure in many other inner cities as well, is that there are large numbers of mansion blocks and substantial conversions which have been in existence for many years which need a great deal of money spent on them in order to maintain their quality. It is difficult to see where the money is going to come from if it does not come from the tenants themselves. When the blocks are in the ownership of people who sometimes cannot even be identified—or overseas consortia, bodies of people in the middle east or with companies which one cannot fully trace in the Cayman Islands, and so on — the tenants are very resentful when they are called upon to pay very large service charges or contribute to huge sinking funds in order to enrich people who really have no particular interest in their welfare. If the tenants are willing to put up the large sums of money that will be needed in order to maintain these properties, then it has to be on the basis of co-ownership. They will only put up the money if they know that it is going into their own property, just as private householders will improve their property and maintain it because it is in their interest to do so.

The principle of co-ownership has to become established, in my opinion, if we are going to maintain the properties that we have in the inner cities, which used to be the glory of London. I am talking about the substantial blocks of flats which people were happy to live in in the old days. Mr. Edward Nugee, QC and his committee are to be extremely warmly commended for the excellent report that they brought out on this subject, and I would like to congratulate the Department on reacting so quickly and producing such a businesslike and competent measure. Having tried my own hand at drafting a Bill on these lines on a number of occasions in recent years, I can say that I appreciate how difficult it is to master some of the technicalities and to produce workable solutions. I think that the Department has made an excellent beginning and I am sure that as we go through the various stages in the House we may be able to make improvements to it as well.

I would like to say that it seems to me that in the not too distant future we are going to establish co-ownership in blocks of flats as the normal formula for the relationship between the tenant of a single flat and the owners of the block or the substantial converted premises wholly let as self-contained flats in which the tenant lives. If we are going to think in terms of co-ownership, then we shall have to think in terms of new forms of finance. This is where, as has been mentioned already, we have to look to the building societies.

The whole problem of urban renewal is really one of finding very large sums of money. There is no escape from the fact that very large sums of money are required to maintain our inner cities in the condition that we should like. I do not think that local authorities or the Government should be expected to find the whole of that money. I must say this on behalf of the borough that I represent. Twenty years ago, under the leadership of Sir Malby Crofton—not nearly enough credit for the work that he did has been given to him, in my opinion—a very ambitious programme was begun in the north of the borough to get rid of the terrible slums and to build new and desirable properties instead. Sir Malby Crofton had the insight to realise that the right way to approach this was to work with housing associations which were more or less independent of direct local government control.

From somewhere — I do not know where — he managed to find a very large amount of money indeed and we can be proud of much of the new housing in north Kensington. People are happy to live in the new accommodation that has been provided there. In one or two cases mistakes may have been made that we can learn from in terms of design and so on; but in Kensington, in general, we have shown the way. We have shown that a local authority, in conjuction with other interests, is able to make a major impact in terms of urban renewal. Other local authorities which have not made the same effort do seem to me to bear something of the blame for the decayed condition and the sadly rundown circumstances which the hon. Member for Greenwich mentioned in her speech.

As I have said, it is not really only local authorities or the Government who should provide the money for urban renewal. It must come from the people who are living in our inner cities themselves.

In Kensington we have a rather special problem which I have to mention because it matters so much to many of my voters. I refer to the very high cost of private accommodation, which is artifically pushed up in our case by the amount of foreign money that is coming in to purchase houses and flats on behalf of people whom we welcome in London but who seem to have almost unlimited amounts of cash behind them to purchase desirable properties. I am speaking of the people in the embassies, and consulates, and the banks that are coming into London and want to be represented in the City—American busnesses, and business undertakings from other parts of the world. It seems that they have more money to spend on accommodation than honest British taxpayers could possibly put into the purchase of their houses or flats. So we see sensational prices being paid for properties which are sometimes not very grand properties at all, but which now are fetching almost unbelievably high figures.

I have thought of the possibility that in parts of inner London we might adopt what I might call the Swiss solution — that foreign residents are given restricted

access to the purchase of freeholds. However, I do not know whether that would commend itself to the House; and I do not want to do anything at all that would discourage people from regarding London as a world capital to which they can come and go, freely to do their business or to represent their countries diplomatically, and so on. However, it would be welcome if we could have a wider dispersal of the foreign ownership of property in London, and if it were not all concentrated in Kensington and in one or two other inner-London constituencies, as it seems to be at the moment.

I think too that we must look at the purchase of property for use by executives of companies as a perk for their directors and other senior company officers, or simply for the purposes of business entertaining. There are all too many properties in Kensington now which look like private houses but which are, in fact, extensions of the office for entertainment purposes. Possibly the renting of such properties by business should not be admissible as a business expense for tax purposes. These, of course, are Kensington issues, which I realise do not apply in many other constituencies in London.

The cost of inner London accommodation in general is a matter for hon. Members in all parts of the House. If we are to bring it down or to stabilise it, the cost of new building must be attended to and we must find a way of increasing the supply of new properties which people can afford to purchase, especially if they are first-time buyers. I should like to see new small flats for first-time home buyers being built all over inner London, and in places with easy access to inner London. The pressure of demand is certainly there and I believe that there are suitable sites for the building of new and agreeable blocks of small flats. The building societies have a big opportunity here, and local authorities and planning authorities should also be as helpful as they possibly can.

I should like recognised tenants' associations to be encouraged to buy out and manage successfully existing properties and to modernise and improve them as far as possible. We must also make more use of unused accommodation. We still have too much accommodation in inner London which is in need of conversion, redecoration or modernisation, and which is standing empty. Unfortunately, the shorthold conception has not made as much progress in inner London as I would have wished. However, if there is less restriction on the initial rent that can be charged I believe we shall see shorthold bringing properties on to the market more and more. I certainly hope so.

I should also like building societies to promote the new building of flats with new systems of joint finance and participation. It may be necessary for there to be certain changes in the tax provisions to facilitate that movement, particularly in regard to the tax treatment of sinking funds. My hon. Friend the Minister for Housing, Urban Affairs and Construction has emphasised what he calls the "right to rent", and that is recognised as being important in inner London. Not everybody wishes to purchase even a small flat in inner London. We have a large population of people who came to London to study or for short tours of business duty, for whom it would not be sensible to purchase a property. However, they find it very hard to find suitable premises to rent, possibly for periods of two or three years or shorter periods when they have business or family reasons for being in London for a while.

I do not think that we have got the tax provision in the private sector quite right. I would not wish to abolish the relief of mortgage interest for people who are purchasing their houses: that is a satisfactory stimulus for private home ownership. For many years local authority support has also been given to the provision of rented accommodation in the public sector. However, we have not had any favourable tax treatment or allowances for renting in the private sector. That is one of the reasons, no doubt, that has contributed to the steady decline of the private rented sector; if has not enjoyed the tax advantages or the outright subsidies that have been offered to other forms of accommodation. As one would expect, market forces have tended to diminish the number of people who are looking for rented accommodation in the private sector.

It would be worth considering the possibility of a housing cost tax credit as an optional alternative for mortgage interest relief of an equivalent value, so that people who rent property would not find themselves left out in the cold as far as tax provisions for housing are concerned. At present we have means-tested housing benefits for people in the private sector, but they are extremely difficult to administer. I do not believe that the uneven application of those benefits is a satisfactory long-term solution.

That leads me to another aspect of a long-running campaign that I have fought in the House—for a basic income guarantee, or some totally new method of handling the redistribution of income. It might be a tax credit scheme—call it what one likes. The hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox)—I am sorry that he is not present—mentioned the problem of employment. Of course, that is something that one observes in Kensington, too, because we have a number of people who are unemployed; but we also have a very large number of job vacancies. If one speaks to the people who run employment agencies in Kensington they are desperate for people who will take jobs, even unskilled jobs, and jobs that are not especially insultingly low-paid. So we have the difficulty that people are looking for work, or believe themselves to be wanting work, yet, when it comes to the opportunity to take a job, do not rise to it.

In this country we now have 14 million people who are directly or indirectly dependent on means-tested benefits. That is a large number of people to whom the Prime Minister's injunctions to work hard and to save do not seem to apply. If they work hard, they may find that they are no better off than if they had remained in idleness. If they save money, they may then find that they are obliged to run their savings down before they are eligible for supplementary benefit. That means that we have a large number of people in an emerging subculture—14 million people, in fact — for whom the attractions of employment are not so very great. That is the underlying difficulty that we have in the inner cities because we have plenty of talent and people who are capable of work; but the incentive to take part-time work especially, or to work for short periods on relatively low wages, simply is not there. Thus, the generation of wealth in the inner cities by the people themselves is hampered by the systems that we operate for paying supplementary benefit and for other means-tested benefits of all kinds.

I should like to suggest—I hope that the Treasury as well as the Department of the Environment, the

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Department of Employment and the other Government Departments that are concerned about opportunities to work in the inner cities will consider the possibility—that we could move towards a tax credit system on the basis that one would be able to draw, as a right, a tax credit of a value equivalent to about half the present rate of supplementary benefit. That would not be a matter for means-testing, but would be a basic citizen's guaranteed income and it would, of course, replace the tax allowances which people enjoy if they go into full-time work. It would also be an option which those who are not in full-time work could rely on instead of claiming means-tested benefits. It would liberate a large number of people who at present are restricted from taking work because of the provisions of the supplementary benefit rules. It would give them the opportunity to take their chances of employment when they arise without the loss of their basic, underlying benefit. Something along these lines must come, because we need to get all our people back to work to create wealth as far as they can.

Reviving the inner cities is not just a matter for the Government, nor for local authorities; it is for the people who live in our inner cities themselves. Individual initiative and effort are the only way to create the necessary wealth to make London and our other great cities as prosperous and happy places to live in as they used to be.

11.20 am

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mrs. Barnes) on her competent and confident maiden speech. She showed a grasp of the problems of her constituents, and as only 15 months ago I, too, came to this place following the harrowing experience of a by-election, I understand her feelings today. She made kind reference to her predecessor which we in the Labour party particularly appreciate, as will his family. Certainly if she shows the same dedication, loyalty and hard work as was shown by Guy Barnett, she will represent her constituents extremely well.

Talking of dedication and hard work, I notice that the few hon. Members in the Chamber today for the debate who are from non-London constituencies all come from the north of England—*[Interruption.]* I apologise to the hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Powley), but I was referring to Labour Members. Besides these days anything north of the Watford gap is considered to be the north of England, so the hon. Gentleman is one of our number.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) for tabling the motion. It refers to the economic and social policies of the Government which have led to the continued decay and dereliction of inner city areas. It goes on to outline the particular features of Britain under the Tory Government which form the basis of the decline, decay, neglect and dereliction. Unemployment, low pay, poor housing and a drab environment are all part of the scene and lead directly to the centre of the problem.

Back in 1979, just before entering Downing Street and following her election victory, the Prime Minister quoted St. Francis of Assisi: "Where there is discord, may we bring harmony. Where there is despair, may we bring hope." But, as with her other promises, such as not to increase prescription charges, not to double VAT, to tackle unemployment and to protect the Health Service, the words of the saint which were designed to win her support were empty words and empty promises.

The Prime Minister offered to bring harmony, but what have we had? Conflict. This has been a Government of conflict—conflict with the trade unions, leading to the longest, bitterest industrial dispute in our history; and conflict with local authorities, leading to a deterioration in services and a decline in standards and the environment, particularly in inner city areas. We have even been at war with a foreign country and supported aggression against other countries.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clelland: I will give the hon. Gentleman something else to think about. We have seen rising crime and street riots in our inner cities. That is what the Prime Minister calls "harmony". If that is harmony, God help us all if ever she gets nasty.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that industrial disputes and strikes were at a record low last year? Surely that is not a sign of disharmony.

Mr. Clelland: It is a sign of the effects of rising unemployment and the fear of people for their jobs. If the hon. Gentleman had listened to what I said, instead of concentrating on his intervention, he would know I said that we had the longest, bitterest industrial dispute in our history. That goes without challenge.

The Prime Minister's other promise was, "Where there is despair, may we bring hope". Yet unemployment has trebled and millions of people have been thrown out of work with little or no prospect of becoming re-employed. As a direct result of the Government's policy—their utilisation of unemployment as an economic weapon—four generations have been cast into a pit of hopelessness with no clear future and no security.

As if that were not enough, the Government's attacks on local authorities in the most needy areas have hit the services and support that were designed to help cushion the blow and make life easier for people when depression and recession occurs. The doubling of homelessness, rising levels of stress-related illness, suicides and attempted suicides, apathy and cynicism, and drug and alcohol abuse are evidence not of a hopeful, confident society, but that the Prime Minister has increased despair and hopelessness—the reverse of what she promised in 1979.

That is the Britain of 1987. It is a Britain in which inner city problems, which were recognised in 1976 by the Labour Government who introduced special financial assistance and inner area partnerships, have worsened and in which resources have been withdrawn from hard-hit inner city areas.

One of the so-called assisted areas is the Newcastle-Gateshead inner area partnership, within which sits the constituency of Tyne Bridge. Obviously the two councils welcome any additional resources that they can get, but the amount lost by both councils in rate support grant since the Government came to power far exceeds the amount given in inner area partnership grant. The councils know, and even the Government have recognised, that their area has special problems which must be tackled if the terrible deprivation that we have seen in some cities is to be avoided or at least minimised on Tyneside. To make

up for the loss of grant, the councils have had to increase the rates. Despite the best efforts of the Conservative propaganda machine, people understand what has happened and why. Recognition of their efforts has come from sources that even Conservative Members may find hard to discredit.

Newcastle council is often criticised by Conservatives for being a high spender, which, in their way of looking at things, means that the council is inefficient. I have a document with me which states that Newcastle council

"spends the money it take wisely and effectively—which privately, many Government ministers admit."

That comes, not from *Labour Weekly* or some Left-wing publication, but from the *Daily Mail* of 9 December 1985—not a newspaper which is credited with supporting the Labour party.

"There is no anti-business element in the local authority, and that can be refreshing."

That was said by Gordon Allanson, the manager of Eldon square, which is the biggest, most successful shopping centre in the country.

"Of course, I am grim about the rates . . . But there's more than one side to it. They inherited huge problems which have got worse"—

I may well ask, inherited from whom? The previous administration was a Conservative one.

"Closed factories and shut shipyards don't chip in a penny to the kitty. But spendthrift? No, they are not."

That was said by the industrialist, Dr. Ralph Iley, ex-chairman of the regional Confederation of British Industry.

"What we have done here I wouldn't have attempted anywhere else in Britain. Nowhere, and I have worked all over, would I have got this sort of gritty pride from the men. The sensible, pragmatic co-operation of other businesses, the services, and especially the local council."

That was said by the chairman of Vickers Defence Systems. Therefore, local business people and the community, which consistently supports the Labour council, appreciate what the city council is doing and that it is tackling real problems and needs. It is not being profligate or overspending as the Government would have it.

Because the Government believe their own propaganda and Ministers show a worrying ignorance of how local government in general and local government finance in particular work both the city council and Gateshead metropolitan borough council have been rate-capped and will be forced to reduce their rates, therefore their spending, in the coming year. Some of us will watch carefully to see how many jobs are created by the businesses that will save money by the rate reduction, taking into account, of course, the jobs in local government that will be lost as a result.

Mr. John McWilliam (Blaydon): Does my hon. Friend recall that, shortly before he took over as leader of Gateshead council, it was one of the four local authorities named in the inspectorate report as liable not to provide an acceptable level of education? One of my hon. Friend's first tasks was to do something about that problem when, at the same time, the Department of Employment said that it was overspending by £1 million.

Mr. Clelland: I take my hon. Friend's point. Indeed, Gateshead council is attempting to resolve its great problems in education. Unfortunately, it is being held up by the parochial views of one or two parents, which we hope will shortly be sorted out. *[Interruption.]* With the help of the Government. We must get the authority of the Secretary of State for Education and Science before we can go ahead with our programme. If the Minister states that that authority is not likely to be forthcoming, I shall be interested to hear it, but I am sure that that will not be the case.

Unemployment, the scourge of the northern region in particular and of the country in general, is highest in the inner city areas and is running at 26 per cent., even on the Government's figures, which few people believe to be credible. The actual figure in my constituency is more like 30 per cent. Nothing that the Government are doing in the area is having a major impact on unemployment. Indeed, the closure of training centres, jobcentres and Government offices aggravates the situation, as does the relocation of Government offices outside the region. The Government have failed to take positive action to promote the shipbuilding and engineering industries, which, far from being outdated, as we often hear from those who live in the south and are ignorant of the north, are at the forefront of technological advance. The electrical engineering industry in particular is being run down, not because of lack of demand but because of Government prevarication. The minor grants to small business, as welcome as they may be, cannot begin to approach the impact that Government policy has had on major industries in the northern region.

The other major problem in the inner city area is housing. On the one hand, there is a shortage of housing and, on the other, for various reasons, inadequate housing. Housing—the inadequacy and lack of it—has reached crisis proportions, particularly in inner city areas. It is no good Conservative Members trying to score political points, as they have done today, by drawing attention to the number of empty council houses. That not only does nothing to resolve the problem but shows contempt for the intelligence of the general public and complete indifference to the real suffering that is being perpetuated while they enjoy their political knock-about.

It is quite obvious to any casual observer that, at any one time, there will be empty properties. But to suggest, as the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon) did a few days ago—it has been repeated by other hon. Members today—that local authorities are deliberately keeping homes empty when they desperately need not only the rent income but to meet demand and house people, is beyond comprehension. Of course, houses are empty. In Newcastle, for instance, 1,336 houses, from a stock of over 46,000, are empty. Of them, more than 400 are being modernised. Thirty five are awaiting demolition—still awaiting an answer from the Department of the Environment since as long ago as 22 July 1985. Sixty four houses are awaiting disposal or sale, and the remainder are either undergoing repair or are on offer to prospective tenants.

For those hon. Members who like to play around with statistics, that represents 2·9 per cent. of housing stock, compared with a rate of 4·1 per cent. of empty properties belonging to the housing associations in the area and 4·6 per cent. in the private sector. Of course, the Government are responsible for 6·9 per cent. of empty properties in the control of Government Departments. There are in no position to criticise.

Incidentally, the rate in Wandsworth is 3·7 per cent. Wandsworth has something to do to match the housing efficiency of Newcastle city council. I do not criticise

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Wandsworth for that. I understand the reason for empty properties and do not intend to use it, as some hon. Members do, in some sort of political point-scoring game. The continual harping on by Conservative Members about housing provision, particularly as it obtains in the public sector, which they despise, amounts to a cruel deception perpetrated on homeless families and others seeking decent accommodation. Even if Newcastle council were able to let every empty house tomorrow, there would still be 10,000 or more people on the waiting list. That applies in other boroughs, particularly in Wandsworth.

The answers to the housing crisis are to build and modernise more houses at rents and prices that people can afford, but the Government have done the opposite. They have severely cut the amounts that local councils are allowed to spend on housing, and now, in their 43rd local government Bill, they propose to attempt to channel public money into providing private rented properties. Ministers refer to the right to rent. That does not mean the right of tenants to rent property, but the right of landlords to rent property to tenants at massive profits.

The Government completely ignore the fact that the private rented sector — the absentee landlords, the Rachmans of this world — created the terrible slum conditions that Labour councils such as Newcastle and Gateshead cleared away to provide decent homes with modern facilities. That is, of course, with the exception of system-built communal properties forced on local authorities by central Government in the 1950s and 1960s, many of which are now completely discredited for the damp, dreary places that they turned out to be. That is another problem that plagues inner cities which councils wish to tackle but cannot tackle at anything like the necessary rate. Despite the difficulties, some local authorities such as Newcastle and Gateshead are tackling the problems of such developments, and in some case are removing them altogether, which is often the only suitable treatment for them.

If local authorities were free to get on with the job that they were elected to do, even with all the difficulties, they would have a much greater impact on the problem than they do at present because of the straitjacket into which the Government have placed them. The City of Newcastle has demonstrated that it can do that. It has been acknowledged, even by Ministers, as having the right approach to the problems. A recent report made certain observations. It referred to the past heavy investment in the city. It went on to state:

"This has not been without its cost and high rates and debt charges will be a burden to be carried into the next century."

That aspect of local government life today has often been mentioned in the Chamber. The report also states:

"Had this not been done its position today"—

in the city, that is—

"would be grave indeed."

The report recognises what the city council is about. It goes on to say:

"There is little evidence of political extremism, right or left wing, in the official political arena . . . although fundamental disagreement on policies inevitably exists, the interests of the City and its people remain the priority. Many other authorities would do well to consider the success of moderate politics."

The report goes on:

"If the Conservative Government remains in office, then the structure and service of Newcastle city council may have to severely alter if it is to remain intact.

The funding available through the Inner City Partnership has been used more effectively in Newcastle than appears to be the case elsewhere. The environment creates an image of stability which would impress prospective investors in the City.

The enthusiasm and determination of the local authority workers and officers give grounds for optimism."

My final quotation from this document is this:

"There is more to this City than meets the eye, and we feel confident that its present difficulties will be overcome."

Hon. Members may wonder from which report I am quoting. Is it a document produced by Labour party sympathisers or by trendy "Leftie" students? No, the report from which I have read extracts is the report of the Police Staff College's senior command course that visited the city of Newcastle less than 12 months ago.

I do not say that all the inner city problems have been caused by this Government. However, their policies have worsened and aggravated them. Those problems could have been eased, if not completely resolved. The Government's attacks, amounting to a virtual vendetta on local authorities, have prevented the bodies that could have tackled the problems from doing so effectively.

There are those who say that to make meaningful progress, to arrest the decline and to revive the inner cities means that Government policy will have to change. Most thinking people, as we shall soon see, know that what is really needed is a change of Government. That is what they will have, and the sooner the better.

11.40 am

Mr. Fred Silvester (Manchester, Withington): Like his hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox), the hon. Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Clelland) has displayed an attitude of mind that makes the wording of the motion a mistake. We could be discussing the inner citis on a much better motion. I shall return to that point later. Most hon. Members who have been considering this problem for some time will recollect that if, as the hon. Member for Tooting suggested, one takes the year 2,000—13 years hence—and then projects 13 years back to 1974, most of us were then taking part in similar discussions making similar analyses and writing similar pamphlets about the questions that were then facing the inner cities. It does not matter whether it is the Audit Commission, the Archbishop of Canterbury's report or that of the Manchester chamber of commerce; they all make the same analysis and come up with a similar list of problems.

We know that there has been a change in the industrial structure of the inner cities and that transport changes have affected the inner cities. People have moved out to the greener pastures of the suburbs. We know also that there has been an erosion of the rate base. All these problems have created the doughnut effect in the inner cities. That is not unique to this country. We have drawn on the experience of the United States and other countries which face similar problems.

Unlike the speeches of the hon. Members for Tooting and for Tyne Bridge, this motion is depressing because the problem has been placed in the context of a party political ding-dong. The hon. Member for Tyne Bridge smiles, but let me deal with what I believe to be a very important point. If one considers what has happened during the last

10 years or so to inner city policies one realises that most of the new initiatives have tried to achieve two objectives. They have tried to isolate as far as possible the practical activities that are designed to help the people who live in the inner cities from the cut and thrust of political ideology. They have also tried to involve private capital and voluntary as well as political bodies. The objective has been to initiate united and continuous activities. That is the first and most important lesson that we should learn about the inner cities. It is no use continuously analysing the problem and coming up with new proposals. It is important that those who are involved with the problems should be able to rely upon a continuity of activities.

Secondly, we now realise that the problems involved will cost a great deal of money to solve but that sums of money are not necessarily the only answer to them and that very large sums of money can be very unwisely spent and produce undesirable consequences. The hon. Member for Tyne Bridge referred to the housing developments of the 1950s and 1960s. He should not try to rewrite history and suggest that those developments were suddenly imposed upon councils. A certain attitude of mind pervaded local councils just as much as it pervaded the attitude of central Government. Many of the problems that arose from the planning to which my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Sir R. Eyre) referred were in the minds of all those who were involved. Huge sums of money were spent on estates that are now the slums of our modern towns. Very large sums of money will be needed to put right those problems.

Apart from asking whether the money is there, we have to ask whether it is being spent wisely and in the light of experience. There has been a very great increase in the amount of money that is spent upon the urban development programme while this Government have been in power. That is quite different from the argument about the general funding of local government which affects the inner cities and the shire counties and other areas. Urban programme money is specifically targeted on the problems that face the inner cities, and it is that money to which we have to address our minds.

We have learnt that by means of the urban development programmes we can bring together both private and public money. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) said that the docklands development is attracting a 6:1 ratio of private and public money. That is an excellent development. The Americans were there before us; they have been developing these schemes with great success. There has been a similar scheme in Liverpool. I am very pleased that the Government have introduced such a scheme in Trafford. I wish it well—as, indeed, do all the political parties.

What do we learn from all this activity? We learn not that we need to go round and round the same course arguing whether this party did this and whether another party did the other. Of course there are strong political divides. In her excellent maiden speech the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mrs. Barnes) referred to the Inner London education authority. ILEA's policies are causing great problems that are having an effect upon the training of young people and therefore on the possibility of their obtaining jobs. That tough political issue will have to be fought out. There will be arguments as to whether or not it is better for council services to be privatised or to be run by local councils. I am not suggesting naively that we can pretend that these political issues will not divide us, but we have demonstrated that it is possible to deal together with some of the practical issues. The hon. Member for Tyne Bridge referred to Newcastle. That is a perfect example of people of different political persuasions working together to produce what I might describe as an insulated activity so that an attack on a particular problem is successful and can be made to last from one generation to another. It will take a very long time to overcome these problems.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Sir B. Rhys Williams) referred to new problems that affect London but not Manchester. Those problems are caused by a city that is over expanding and therefore suffering the penalty of too much money being sucked in. New problems will have to be tackled in the same way.

I hope that it will be possible for us gradually to achieve a common policy which can be accepted, even if it means compromises. I shall give an example. There is no doubt that housing is one of the key problems in the inner cities. Everyone's analysis agrees, and we have reports coming out of our ears. We know that one problem is how to find rented accommodation which is at a reasonable price, in a reasonable state and is freely available, so that people are not on a waiting list, do not have to join a queue and go through the paraphernalia of the points system of a local authority housing department—in other words, a fluid, free and active private rented sector.

The hon. Member for Tyne Bridge said that many private houses are empty. Of course they are. It is difficult to persuade people in Manchester if a property comes on the market to keep it as rented accommodation and not to sell it off into private ownership. But there will never be reform unless people feel sufficiently confident that, if there is a change of Government, their reform will continue. There must be a means whereby parties come together in a compromise to provide stability in central areas. Unless that is done, there will not be the investment and change that will open the way to people having a housing choice.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that one way to ensure stability in local government and balanced views is to make sure that there is proper, fair and stable representation of those views on local authorities? The present unrepresentative electoral system completely distorts that. There is a swing from one end to the other, which does not reflect the voters' change of opinion or real opinion. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that reform would help enormously in political terms to achieve what he wants?

Mr. Silvester: I might or might not agree on another occasion, but that is irrelevant to this matter.

Mr. Simon Hughes: No, it is not.

Mr. Silvester: With respect, it is. If we are to throw into the pot all our particular political desires, we shall never get anywhere. It is possible under the present system, irrespective of changing the voting mechanisms, for people of good will and with a wide range of political attitudes to get together and adopt practical policies to solve these problems. We do not have to dig this matter up continuously, to reinvent the wheel or to find new policies and ideas. They are all lying around waiting to be picked up. There is plenty of money in different pots of gold all over the place and different forms of finance are available to back different schemes. There needs to be an effort of

[Mr. Silvester]

will by politicians of all parties to regard this not as an ideological but a practical matter and to tackle the problems through a joint effort.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am grateful for the hon. Member's brevity.

11.51 am

Mr. Reg Freeson (Brent, East): I agree with the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Silvester) that we do not have to reinvent the wheel or to continue digging up the problem, holding it up and analysing it, or whatever metaphor one chooses. With respect, the hon. Gentleman was being a little too bland. He said that, if only we all agreed, things would happen. I am not saying this in a party sense. I hope that, whatever I have to say about the Government, it will not be said that I do so simply because I am a Labour Member. Over the period to which the hon. Gentleman referred that is exactly what has been going on in central Government. It is a mixture of ignoring initiatives which have already been set in train and starting other hares running and of letting any sense of urgency disappear as soon as it appears.

I should like to go back just 16 months to our debate on 23 October 1985, following the horrifying "Urban Disturbances", as the debate's heading called them, in Tottenham and Handsworth. Those disturbances had followed earlier riots in 1981 in Brixton and Liverpool. Apart from Belfast they were the only riots of this kind that this country has experienced since the Gordon riots and hunger riots of the early to mid-Victorian period. Those riots shocked us, but already they seem to be a faint memory at the back of our minds. I should like to quote the comments of the Secretary of State for the Home Department, who led the debate for the Government. I shall forbear to comment on the speech of the Minister who replied. I think that our memory is clear on the quality of that speech. The amendment moved by the Home Secretary said that Her Majesty's Government have a

"commitment to early effective action in the light of the recent urban disturbances."

The Home Secretary said that the disturbances had been "shocking events." He went on to say:

"It is no good responding to them simply by the wringing of hands. We have to learn the right lessons from what has happened and to act on those lessons."

He spoke of the

"responsibility on the Government to shape policies that are calculated to avert disasters of this kind."

The right hon. Gentleman referred to the Opposition's desire for greater public spending in the inner city areas and our complaints on that occasion, as on many other occasions, about various cuts that had been imposed on expenditure in the urban areas. He went on, quite properly, to say:

"one has to be sure that the money already spent is going to the right places and that we have the right machinery for distributing it . . . that is why we must ensure that the resources are properly targeted."

He also said that

"local government spending is not targeted on specific and pressing need, such as the urban crisis."—[*Official Report*, 23 October 1985; Vol. 84, c. 354-56.]

Why do I pick on those phrases 16 months later? I pick on them in order to make one central point which has two or three aspects.

The hon. Member for Withington was right to refer back to the time when various initiatives took place. One can refer to studies that were put in hand in the 1960s. For example, there was one in Oldham which was mentioned earlier. There were the six town studies. In the late 1960s the late right hon. Anthony Greenwood, the then Minister of Housing and Local Government, who was a member of the Government at that time, announced the central Lancashire new town. There was concern about the impact that that new town would have on the industrial urban areas of the smaller townships nearby. A special study, a very good one, was established to try to understand what needed to be done economically, socially and in the areas of planning, environment and transport in the network of the towns that would be affected by the creation of that new-old town corporation, which is what the CLNT was, unlike most others. It was a combination of new town and old town renewal.

There were the inner city studies, which I chaired for three years, in Liverpool, Birmingham and Lambeth. In the wake of those studies and other examinations of the subject the inner city White Paper was produced in 1977. In my view, moderate initiatives were taken. I was responsible for them at the time but I felt that they were too moderate. I would like to have been far more radical but that is for another debate or seminar. Those moderate initiatives were taken with the dynamic view that if we could create what we called the partnership machinery in some cities and the programme authority machinery as we called it in others, we would begin to reshape local government and central Government methods in the direction later recommended by Lord Scarman.

After the 1981 riots, Lord Scarman produced a report, which dealt mostly with policing matters, but he made strong recommendations. He made an urgent plea for greater integration, co-ordination, unification of action by central Government and local government and other institutions to be drawn into a partnership to renew areas and neighbourhoods physically, socially and economically and to recreate and re-enhance community — however we may define that term—relationships. The partnership and programme authority initiatives of a few years earlier had been the beginnings of that, however inadequate. Various studies were made within those partnerships of how it could be developed.

I tabled a question to the Prime Minister recently. It was neutral and not asked in a partisan way. I asked

"if she will describe the duties of the Department of the Environment and the Department of Employment relating to the implementation of Government policies concerned with the regeneration of the inner cities."—[*Official Report*, 15 January 1987; Vol. 108, c. *273*.]

There was a reason why I tabled that question, which is relevant to my point. Both politically and from my contact with and knowledge about people who are deeply concerned and involved with the public and private sectors in inner city matters, such as regeneration, I knew that there was a growing sense of confusion and incoherence in Government policy and practice. So I asked that question to try to obtain clarification. I shall not go through the whole answer. Hon. Members can refer to it. The implications are more serious than what is in the text. They are that there is little general co-ordination policy, and I suspect that there is serious incoherence of policy and a good deal of competition between Departments.

One of the interesting things was the omission from the answer of a reference to the partnership and the programme authorities as coming within the oversight of the Department of the Environment. A junior Minister from that Department is here today. That is not just a matter of insignificant concern. It is significant in this respect. However inadequately they may be operated, as I believe to be the case, at least in theory the shadow of those partnerships remains. They are still identified. They are still the source for directing certain urban grant facilities, allocations, and so on. The same goes for the programme authorities, which were added to a year or 18 months ago. Yet, in describing those activities, the Prime Minister does not even mention what were originally, in the wake of the inner city White Paper, the beginnings of integration, co-ordination and coherence.

Mr. Steen: Can the right hon. Gentleman cast his mind back to February 1974? The then Labour Administration identified the problem of co-ordination of inner cities and appointed a Minister specifically with responsibility for the co-ordination of urban problems, but that disappeared without trace six months later. Clearly, the Labour Administration concluded that co-ordination at ministerial level would not solve the problem.

Mr. Freeson: With respect, the hon. Gentleman was not listening carefully enough to what I said. I was not suggesting that one Minister could co-ordinate all that I was talking about. I was referring to the machinery and using the word that the Home Secretary used in the debate 16 months ago. I recall that clearly. For about eight or nine months in the short Parliament in 1974 there was a Minister of State or Parliamentary Under-Secretary—I cannot remember which—responsible for urban affairs, who was one of our colleagues from Manchester. He worked closely with me for those nine months before the second general election. When the Government were reformed in 1974, all those responsibilities came to me. I took over the chair of the inner city studies and various other matters, so the responsiblity was not lost. There was nothing significant about the change. I believe that there is a strong case for a Minister with specific responsibility for urban renewal action.

I should like to refer to two or three areas where the Government are failing. I would say the same of any Government, if necessary, but it is this Government to whom we have to relate. There is incoherence and competition between Departments. We do not know whether the Paymaster General, the noble Lord Young or the Secretary of State for the Environment is taking the lead. No one in the Government knows who is taking the lead overall in urban regeneration policy and action. That is quite clearly on the record, no matter what the Minister may say today.

Several initiatives—for example, the urban regeneration grant—have been announced with fanfares, and I welcome those. However, it is clear from anyone who has contact with the Department of the Environment that the Department does not know what is happening and I suspect that Ministers are having to be re-educated by people in the Department who are in touch with people outside as to how the grant should operate. That grant is a very important part of the Housing and Planning Act 1986 and I wholly welcome it. I understood that that grant was supposed to apply to an area or neighbourhood approach by the private sector in conjunction with local authorities as part of the planning operation.

There is a case for co-ordination, and ministerial co-ordination. However, that should not be dressage at the top with a Minister given a specific title. There is a financial and administrative need to pull the threads together between the Department of Education and Science, the Department of Health and Social Security, the Department of the Environment, the Department of Employment, the Department of Trade and Industry and the various agencies for which they are responsible—the English Industrial Estates, the various health authorities, and agencies such as the Manpower Services Commission. There is a need to co-ordinate those bodies, to get them active, and to integrate them in a team-like fashion.

The nearest that we have come to that approach so far is the much-vaunted so-called city action teams, and subsequently the task forces. It would take too long for me to recount what some of us know is happening about the city action teams and the task forces. I do not intend any disrespect, but the city action teams consist of a number of civil servants who meet once a month to exchange ideas. There are supposedly eight task forces, although I do not suppose that more than two are doing anything, and the others, by their structure, are incapable of action although they have been running for months. That does not mean that they should not exist; it means that they are not operating. An important central reason why these initiatives are not operating is that they are not coherently conceived. They relate to tiny areas, they operate in different directions and they are responsible to different Ministers. What happens at the top, at Prime Ministerial level, I just do not know.

I was not going to make this kind of speech in this fashion although I intended to concentrate on this theme of the need for co-ordination, coherence and a neighbourhood approach because it is important. There are regional and planning strategy dimensions to the problem, yet those dimensions have been broken apart and thrown away in the past few years.

There is a need for a sense of direction and concentration. We have not had any riots for the past 18 months or so, but it does not follow that they cannot and will not happen again. Even if the riots do not take place, that does not mean that the social, environmental, economic and physical malaise of the inner cities does not exist.

I want to refer very quickly to other examples before I finish because they are all relevant. There has been a massive withdrawal of funding to the inner cities and urban areas. In the past few years about £3,000 million of resources have been withdrawn from the rate support grant. There has been a withdrawal of investment programmes. The public housing programme has been cut by about 40 per cent., or perhaps more. Even with the increases that were announced not so long ago, the Housing Corporation—the housing association movement—is operating at half the level of production in 1979. Then it was nearly 40,000 dwellings a year; now it is about 18,000 to 20,000, mostly in the inner cities.

I accept the point that is frequently made—I have made it myself in the past—that providing massive resources is not the only answer. But without them there can be no answer. We cannot cut housing programmes and then complain when hundreds of thousands of houses and

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left unnecessarily empty. They are unnecessarily empty because the local authorities do not have the resources to put them right. The fact that administration at local level is not always as it should be—that is not the general case, although there are some examples — does not answer the first point. Even if the authorities were the most efficient in the world, they would still need more resources.

I agree entirely with those who say that public money is not the only answer and that we should bring in other resources. I started to deal with the problem when I was in Government, and I have tried to do so as a Back-Bench Member who is interested in such matters since I left office. Several of us have been working on the problem. I am responding in this way because, on 5 February, an announcement made by the Minister for Housing, Construction and Urban Affairs effectively put at risk £500 million worth of private money—not even levered money — in housing investment initiated by the local authorities, housing associations and financial institutions, both national and in the Eurobond market. Those schemes have been cancelled, and the fact that the Local Government Bill, which had a Second Reading a couple of days ago, will require the Government's consent for each joint scheme of guarantees by local authorities for private funding will ensure that most of them will not go ahead.

I could give other examples where we need a jont institutinal approach between the public and the private sectors. It does not matter whether we have an urban renewal agency, an urban development corporation, a Birmingham-type scheme or a Newcastle-type-scheme. There are variations on the theme. Some people used to call it the new town approach in the old town. It must be a co-operative approach. Whatever machinery we might construct to fit the different areas, and whatever we call the schemes, they will not be helped by a lack of Government action. The Government must support such an approach to urban regeneration because it will provide lessons for our other cities and suburbs.

I ask hon. Members and others, whatever our differences on other matters, who want a coherent, continual evolution and development of the approach for which Lord Scarman called, not to throw party policial bricks at local authorities or at the Opposition. They must challenge the Government of the day, whatever their political nature, on what they are doing to give substance to the ideas that I have mentioned. We want the economic, environmental and social renewal of neighbourhoods. That is long overdue.

I should like to make just one more quotation:

"Urban regeneration is our most urgent and challenging task. The hearts of our cities are sick. If something is not done soon in Government and local government and in other institutions to cure that sickness, the whole of our society will become ill."

That is the opening paragraph of a report that I presented to the late Tony Greenwood just before the 1970 general election. I advocated and described action which could be taken. Just as I have argued today, I suggested a coherent urban renewal policy — an urban renewal agency approach. Worse will befall us unless we take such action. Seventeen years have elapsed since I made that report. People of all parties and of no party are still waiting for and advocating a coherent policy of urban regeneration which should be implemented at Government and local level.

12.16 pm

Mr. William Shelton (Streatham): We all owe a debt of gratitude to the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) for raising this issue, and I should like to take this apportunity to congratulate him on at last arriving at the Bench appropriate for him.

The hon. Gentleman is an old friend. I represented his constituency on the Greater London council and his constituency borders mine in Lambeth. He mentioned some of the problems that he experiences in Wandsworth. If the Boundary Commission announced that my constituency was not longer in Lambeth but had been moved to Wandsworth, the singing and dancing in the streets would go on for days. There would be a party such as has not been seen for a long time. The problems in Lambeth are far worse than those in Wandsworth.

I want to take this opportunity to speak about one issue which is a scandal and is oppressing people in my constituency and the rest of Lambeth. It is the conduct of the direct labour organisation run by the directorate of construction services of Lambeth council.

Lambeth council seems to be ideologically committed to using direct labour. On 18 February, I asked my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State whether he would take any further action against loss-making local authority direct labour organisations. He replied that he had asked two councils to submit special reports on their DLOs. The first was Lambeth borough council, the DLO of which lost some £1·4 million on major new building work in the three years 1982-83 to 1984-85 and which had still not produced figures for 1985-86 although they should have been submitted no later than 30 September 1986.

I know very well why those figures have not been submitted because I have them here. I have an appendix which was attached to the papers for a directorate of construction services committee meeting on 23 September 1986. The appendix is headed, "Costs to date of completed schemes." There are 22 schemes on the list and columns of figure running across the page. I do not know whether the hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) has seen these figures. If he has not he will be interested in what I am about to say. At the bottom are the totals of the 22 schemes. The left-hand bottom total is the "tender value" —that is, the total value of the tenders that the direct labour organisation put in for the 22 schemes—which is £28·2 million. However, the next column shows that the costs to date are not £28·2 million but £50·7 million. The DLO has overrun on its tendering by £22 million, which is just under 50 per cent.

How can that have happened? The only conclusion to which I can come is that, as it has to put work out for public tender, when the tenders come in, whatever the lowest tender from a private company, the DLO then puts in a lower tender and gets the job, with no hope, intention or purpose of completing it at the value of the tender. Otherwise, how can it have tendered for jobs at £28·2 million that cost £50·7 million? If my supposition is correct, this is illegal. It is fraudulent, and against the Government's legislation.

However, this is only a small part of the problem. I can go on. The next column to the right on this sheet is headed "valuation to date". This is what the district valuer judges

should be the cost of the work done on these 22 sites. He goes round looking at the work, and makes a list of what each site should have cost. Of the £50 million spent, he estimates that the work done should not have cost more than £35·2 million. That is a £15 million loss, which is 30 per cent. of the total spent. No wonder that Lambeth has not put in figures to the Department of the Environment.

The next column shows that the directorate of construction services, which runs the DLO, does not agree in every case with the district valuer. It has made its own valuations. Its estimate is that the district valuer has been a bit mean in saying that the work done is worth only £35 million, and states that it is worth £40·6 million. If it is right, the loss is not £15 million but only some £10 million. Whatever estimate one accepts, the ratepayers, taxpayers and citizens of Lambeth have lost not less than £10 million and probably not more than £15 million, or somewhere between the two, through inefficiency, and perhaps through more serious charges which one day may be laid.

Mr. Steen: Does not what my hon. Friend is saying explain why the rates of Lambeth are nearly four times the level of the rates in the borough of Westminster?

Mr. Shelton: The explanation is the inefficiency, lack of value for money, or worse. The hon. Member for Tooting spoke about funding. Of course we need funding in Lambeth, and substantial funding, although we have the highest HIP allocation of any inner London borough, but it is no good putting in money when there are such scandals as this run by Lambeth council.

With housing repairs, there is another wretched scandal. The Lambeth DLO spends about £20 million a year on repairs to council houses. These repairs are priced according to a "schedule of rates" for each job. In other words, windows cost so much, a new door knob costs so much, and a new door costs so much, and the DLO then charges the housing authority, which is itself short of money. The charges in this schedule of rates are set each year by putting out each job for competitive tender. That is fine, super, well done. However, the catch is that the only companies asked to tender competitively are those which are subcontracted by the DLO to do the jobs. Rumour has it—I shall say no more than that—that the prices in the schedule are one third to one half higher for each specific job than they would be if the jobs were offered genuinely on the open market. As a consequence, of the £20 million spent on housing repairs by the DLO, tenants are getting only £10 million to £15 million worth of value—another loss for the citizens of Lambeth.

As I have said, Lambeth council is ideologically bound to use its direct labour organisation, but at what a cost! However, if we look more closely, we find that it is not bound in that way; it is just another bit of wretched old hypocrisy, because, although the DLO gets a contract, it subscontracts much of the work to private companies. What is more, a small handful of private companies are involved, and one is a rather mysterious company called Ardmore Constructions.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Will my hon. Friend tell us about it?

Mr. Shelton: No, I will not—not even in the House. The contract for the Unigate site in my constituency was won by the DLO with a tender of £4·3 million and it cost £8·1 million. That is typical. The value of the work done was £6·6 million, giving a loss of £1·5 million. Nearly 50 per cent. of the work done on that site was carried out by subcontractors, who were subcontracted by the direct labour organisation. The Rowton House site was bought by Lambeth with Government funding. It was reconditioned using Government money under a tender contract won by the direct labour organisation. All the work on that site was carried out by Ardmore Constructions for £900,000. The DLO charged the Government £1 million and, presumably, made a profit of £100,000.

The head of the construction services department, which is in charge of the DLO, recently left Lambeth council. I understand that he was given glowing references and a golden handshake of £15,000. Clearly, therefore, he was not at fault in the scandal that I am describing. I do not know whether what has gone on in Lambeth DLO is typical of what goes on in other inner cities.

Mr. John Fraser: I hope that the hon. Gentleman recognises that there is a good deal of concern among members of the Labour group on Lambeth council about some of those matters, and that they are about to set up an inquiry into the direct labour organisation.

Mr. Shelton: I know that, but I suspect that the hon. Gentleman was not entirely aware of what was going on. By looking closely at some of the figures that I have quoted, he will see what I mean. When Lambeth pleads poverty, we should tell it to put its house in order. For the sake of my constituents, I urge my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to use his powers to direct Lambeth council to cease to undertake any further construction or maintenace work by its direct labour organisation.

12.30 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I am grateful for the opportunity to debate again a subject that is of the greatest national concern. If our cities, especially our inner cities, are not places of prosperity and harmony, that shows that our society is not a place of prosperity and harmony.

It is inevitable, as in every country, that a vast portion of the population will live in urban areas. It is inevitable also that suburban areas will be relatively the more affluent areas of our cities. The tragedy is—I say this to the Minister, a suburban Member, from my position as an inner urban area Member—that the greatest indictment of the Government is the widening gap between the haves and the have-nots since the Government came to office in 1979. That is clearly the position across the entire range of social and urban policy. The concentration of the have-nots in the inner city areas is greater than ever before.

The hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser), my political neighbour, has with him, as I have with me, a copy of our local Friday morning weekly newspaper, the *South London Press*. I shall quote from an article about a development in my constituency. It reads:

"The white structure on the left"—

there is a picture of a building that hon. Members may know, the old Courage Anchor brewery site near Tower bridge, a fine landmark on the riverside—

"will eventually be what developers have labelled 'the ultimate penthouse in London'—at a cost of £2·5 million.

It is thought it will be the most expensive flat south of the river.

The luxury four-storey Dockland flat is to be the centrepiece of the massive Anchor Brewery development next to Tower Bridge, Bermondsey . . .

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

> The price tag is £1·5 million more than the previous most expensive flat in the area — the unsold penthouse in the brewery's boilerhouse.
>
> Both flats form part of a complex being built by property developers Anchor Brewhouse Development.
>
> The company has already built 35 flats in the boilerhouse, and all except the £1 million penthouse have been sold at prices ranging from £170,000 to £295,000.
>
> The next phase will see the development of the brewhouse and malt mill into flats ranging from £280,000 to £2·5 million."

The final paragraph of the article is just as telling. It states:

> "The development has been criticised by council tenants in the area.
>
> Greg Mulligan, 29, who lives in Devon Mansions, Tooley Street, said, 'It reflects an imbalance between people. This area needs more money spent on it but it needs to be spent in a fairer way.'"

No one denies that we need investment policies, but the question that we must face is, "What is the best way to invest to obtain the best, fairest and most appropriate regeneration of our inner cities?"

From my constituency experience, there is a telling sign of the right answer. Eastwards, down river from the development to which I have referred, there was developed a couple of years ago within the New Concordia wharf a new block of flats. These flats were not quite so expensive as those tht will be part of the new Anchor Brewery development but they were in the £100,000-plus bracket. The other day the local community learnt that on a further neighbouring site, Jacobs island, where historically Bill Sykes was hanged and other interesting things happened, there are plans for the construction of a 220 ft high tower block comprising about 400 luxury flats. The council tenants of neighbouring estates are not the only people who have objected. Objections were also expressed by those living in the £220,000 private flats that have only recently been built. They said that it would be highly inappropriate to have a massive private development that would be out of keeping with the local community on the riverside.

Much more appropriate is the sort of development that is referred to elsewhere in the same issue of the *South London Press*, which would produce 600 rented housing association properties on the site near to the Bricklayers Arms, which is more or less outside my front door. That would be much more appropriate than the alternative private sale developments that we find in the inner city.

Housing is one of the areas where investment has gone wrong. It is crazy to say that all is well in the development of the docklands when it is "well" particularly and especially for those who can pay, but not "equally well" for those who equally, and desperately, need housing but have little to spend. If the latter wish to rent, the proportion of rented housing is small, and if they want to buy the chance of their being able to afford to do so is also small.

The Minister has young children. As he can well imagine, young couples come to advice centres such as mine every week saying "We want to buy. We want to stay and have our children here and contribute to the inner city". However, such people obviously cannot afford the prices now required for inner city developments. The balance is wrong, even allowing for some of the shared ownership schemes. There are a few cheap housing developments, but, overall, the balance is wrong and that distorts the type of development that we need in our inner cities.

The responsibility must rest partly, though not entirely, with the Government because they set the mood and define the parameters and objectives. When criticisms are made of local authorities — many are perfectly valid — there are often criticisms of the Government too, to which they do not respond.

I should like to ask the Minister one specific question about housing. On 10 December, the Home Affairs Select Committee, which, as the Minister well knows, is an all-party Committee recommended to the Government that

> "Tower Hamlets' HIP allocation be significantly increased, to at least the extent needed to prevent further deterioration in housing conditions in the borough."

The Committee stated:

> "Special assistance to a particular local authority is not something this Committee suggests lightly, but we see three compelling reasons for it"

Clearly I have an interest in the borough because my colleagues took over the administration last May. The Committee further stated:

> "There is good evidence however that management failings are being rectified"

and things are generally improving. The borough has a massive housing problem, primarily caused by a massive influx of Bangladeshi families, larger than has been seen by any other local authority in Britain. Only the Government have the resources to respond. I should be grateful if the Minister could advise us whether that borough, which has been the subject of particular housing need, is one of the places in which, in the coming year, the Government will provide some extra resources to alleviate the problems involved.

The tragedy is that three of the key elements crucial to the regeneration of the inner city are areas of public policy in which Government investment has declined. Although Government investment may be only a lever, if the amount of that investment is reduced, the amount of leverage is also reduced. The three greatest losers in terms of public expenditure since 1979 have been transport, education and science but, most of all, housing. Unless the Government reverse that trend, they should not be surprised that they are indicted for having the worst record for education and science—they have, for example, the lowest take-up rate for higher education — and the greatest crisis in homelessness and bad housing of any of their European partners. The Government must respond, but so far they have not.

A second example is that of jobs. I looked at the list of south London constituencies and their rates of unemployment. In Surbiton, the Minister has the lowest at 5 per cent. Mine is one of the highest at 20 per cent., and if one takes the rate for men only it goes up to nearly 30 per cent. If we are to get people back to work in the inner areas, we must recognise and act on this list. The Government recognised it in part through the creation of the London Docklands Development Corporation, but that has not yet done anything to match the employment needs of the inner London work force. Most of the jobs there are not being taken up by people living locally, who have trained locally and learnt their skills locally.

I hope that the Government will begin to recognise the compelling need in all London areas — for obvious reasons, I argue especially for inner London—for a co-ordinated development agency for employment. As a

subregion, inner London has the worst employment position of any area in Britain. It is as bad as any in western Europe bar one. It is about time that it was recognised and addressed as a subregional problem with the Government giving particular attention and direction to investment there.

Thirdly, if we are seeking to recreate employment we must do so in the context of partnership. Everyone pays lip service to partnership and all Governments seek to increase it, but the partnership must be not only between the public and private sectors, but with the voluntary caring sector. People are willing to volunteer. There is an enormous amount of community good will. Millions of people are willing to undertake part-time or full-time work for their community.

One major indictment of the Government is that their actions do not match their words. We had arguments about that when the Greater London Council was abolished. The London borough grants scheme was set up to fund voluntary agencies. Even today there is still a battle between the Conservative group and the other groups on that body. The Conservative group is not willing to fund the agencies to the extent to which the agencies say it is necessary to continue. The voluntary sector needs continuity of funding. If that is provided, the reward to society is enormous. The leverage is enormous and relatively little is paid for a great community reward. Law centres are an obvious example. Cutting funding to them is the most short-sighted policy, because when they work they help people to help themselves.

On 17 March the Chancellor of the Exchequer will introduce his Budget. That provides a great opportunity. If he wished, he could start to respond to the national mood. Comfortable, relatively affluent Britain is not saying, "We want great tax cuts please, Oh Chancellor." All the evidence suggests that comfortable Britain is saying, "We are willing to pay our share, Oh Chancellor" and is willing to have an economic strategy which favours those who need economic support and encouragement.

The hon. Member for Norwood said that that was the message from Greenwich. One message from Greenwich was, indeed, that services count and that people value them. The Health Service was the most important issue at Greenwich. The Tory candidate was rejected by a massive number of votes. He saw the greatest depreciation in the Tory vote since Sutton and Cheam in the early 1970s. That was caused partly because the Government do not recognise that adequate public, welfare, community services are fundamentally important. The Government's economic strategy undoubtedly favours disproportionately those in the higher income bracket, who during this Government's term of office have gained an additional 10 per cent. of income while those in the lower income bracket have been penalised to an even greater extent.

The Government have had an enormously good opportunity. In December 1985, the Church produced "Faith in the City", but that report was rubbished before it was published. Since then there has been one meeting between Ministers and the Archbishop of Canterbury and members of the commission. The Government could use the Church as the best moral conscience of the nation. The Church has a tradition of service in the inner cities and must continually engage in dialogue there. I should have thought that the Government could have responded to that experience and commitment.

Will the Minister convey to his colleagues the importance of recognising the moral message on priorities? I ask that senior Cabinet Ministers agree to meet members of the commission and to listen and respond to the points made. As yet, the commission has received only a faltering, partial response from the Government. That must be remedied both nationally and locally. If the President of the United States and the General Secretary of the Communist party of the Soviet Union can negotiate away weapons of destruction across our continent and our world, surely it is possible for the Government to set a national example by trying to solve a problem that is much more manageable—that is, reversing inner city decline.

A moral case is made out every time anybody comments and gives the benefit of their advice to the Government. On a regular basis, the Church have beseeched the Government to respond. It is a social and moral scandal that they do not respond. I hope that compassion as well as sound politics will produce a response for the inner city sooner rather than later. If the Government will take the lead at the national level, perhaps we shall have more community partnership and collaboration at the local level, in parishes and communities in the cities of our land.

12.45 pm

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I congratulate the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) on his choice of subject and success in the ballot. I congratulate also the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mrs. Barnes) on her admirable speech. The hon. Lady succeeds a fine man, and she appears to be worthy of the position.

The motion refers to three aspects—housing, health care and rates. I shall briefly address all three. I shall particularise the London situation, notably Ealing. Ealing is a microcosm of what we can expect if the Labour party is elected to Government.

I note that the main news this morning concerned the leaking of a letter from the Leader of the Opposition complaining about the loony Left and the damage that it causes to the Labour party. I remind the House that only three weeks ago the Leader of the Opposition sent a letter to a resident of Ealing in which he approved of Ealing council's policies. Of course, its policies include the promotion of the teaching of homosexual and lesbian interests, high rates and so on, and they were singled out in the Leader of the Opposition's leaked letter. It is difficult to know where the Leader of the Opposition stands on the matter.

Mr. William Shelton: He does not know himself.

Mr. Greenway: As my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Mr. Shelton) said, the Leader of the Opposition does not know.

In May 1986, Ealing had the lowest rates in west London. Industry was increasingly attracted to the borough. Unemployment in my constituency was 6 per cent. below the national average. The Conservative council brought about a rate reduction of 4 per cent. Less than a year later, the evil hard-Left council imposed a rate increase of no less than 65 per cent. Some call the council loony, but I think it is hard-Left. Some of its actions have have been evil.

Mr. William Shelton: It is mainstream Labour.

Mr. Greenway: I suppose all Labour councils are like it.

There has been a 57·5 per cent. increase in the industrial rate. I ask the House to consider the real world—if it is a real world — of loony Left councils under Labour control. I remind the House that domestic rates have gone up from minus 4 per cent. to plus 65 per cent. in less than a year. Council spending has gone up by 80 per cent. We know that its programme will cost an extra 80 per cent. in the coming year. The 15 per cent. not accounted for by the rate increase will be paid for by creative accounting. I understand that the council has been trying to sell the town hall. So far, it has been unsuccessful, but perhaps it will succeed in selling it, leasing it back and doing other extraordinary things.

Creative accounting will put extra rate burdens on my constituents in future. They do not bear the full burden now, but they will do so in future. The problem will be compounded by the fact that they will have to face other bills.

The effect upon industry is devastating. A food firm in my constituency will have a rate rise of £600,650. It will have to increase the price of tea, coffee, porridge, ice cream and the other foods that it produces or make people redundant, or there will have to be a combination of the two. Therefore, people face the prospect of losing their jobs and having to pay more for basic foodstuffs because of the direct actions of the Labour council.

The health aspect was referred to in very strong terms by the hon. Member for Tooting. Ealing hospital will have to pay an additional sum in rates, amounting to £306,000. How will it do it? Will it close wards and sack nurses? What will Ealing council use that money for? It will use it for its own evil purposes.

Another example is a small business man in my constituency, Ian Perryman. He told me last night that the rates on his business would be increased by £5,000. He employs five people, and he told me that there is to be a meeting today to decide which of them is to go.

Other people are affected in many and diverse ways. The Leader of the Opposition will have a rate increase of £337. I nearly said £337,000. I do not know whether he would have noticed the difference, judging by the way the Labour party handles figures. However, £337 is the true figure. This vicious rate increase is hard on everybody, but it is especially hard on the old, the disabled, those on fixed incomes and those who try very hard to manage and will not ask for rate rebates. There are many people like that —and why should they not have their pride? I am not saying that people should not have help if they are entitled to it, but there are those who do not like asking for help and they will struggle rather than ask for help.

Council tenants were told last May that their rents would not be increased if the Labour party won control of Ealing council. I understand that rents are not to be increased, but they will have to find an extra £5 or £6 a week—and some of them will have to find a lot more than that — for the rates element of their weekly payments. They, too, will be very hard hit. All this comes at a time of 4 per cent. inflation and wage increases of about the same level, which is reasonable.

Whatever the Leader of the Opposition may have said last night, the fact is that he supports Ealing council's policies. He said so in a letter that he wrote three weeks ago. What is the money to be spent on? New organisations are to receive £2 million in grants. Debt charges on a £100 million deferred loan payment will build up to £20 million a year after nine years. Furthermore, there are to be 1,225 extra staff, some of whom are said to be Labour councillors from other Labour-controlled councils. They will cost £1·3 million. There is to be a new office block costing £3·1 million a year to house the extra staff. There is also to be an anti-apartheid festival in July that will cost £12,000. A race equality committee that has a campaigning role is to receive £200,000 in subsidies and grants. There are to be women advisers in each department. Some people call them spies. That will cost £200,000. Each committee chairman — they are called "chairs" by the Labour council, but I think that chairs are for sitting upon — is to have a personal assistant and clerical support costing £500,000 a year.

Mr. William Shelton: It is shocking.

Mr. Greenway: Yes, it is.

Mr. Shelton: Did I hear my hon. Friend correctly? Did he say that the leader of the Opposition had written to someone in Ealing supporting the expenditure by Ealing council?

Mr. Greenway: Yes, that is so. My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) wrote to the Leader of the Opposition asking him whether he supported Sinn Fein coming to Ealing town hall, the flying of the SWAPO flag over the town hall and the non-flying of the Union Jack on the Queen Mother's birthday. He also asked him whether he supported the council's policy of promoting positive images of homosexuals and gays in schools. The Leader of the Opposition has written to a lady in Acton saying that he supports those policies, so he must take the consequences of his support.

Street cleaning has been de-privatised at a cost of an extra £1 million. Councillors' allowances have been doubled, and they all have free home telephones, Ansafones and electric typewriters. It has been said that some have computers. Those allowances will cost £180,000 a year.

Teaching jobs were advertised in *The Guardian* at a cost of £5·25 a line, as a way of getting at Mr. Rupert Murdoch instead of in *The Times Educational Supplement* at a cost of only £2·25. There has been a low response by teachers to *The Guardian* advertisements.

Mr. Steen: They do not read *The Guardian.*

Mr. Greenway: No.

Publicity material to promote the new council will cost £345,000 and there will be 10 public relations officers. A sum of £10,000 has been set apart to build so-called peace parks and another £10,000 is for the celebration of International Women's Day.

Mr. Steen: What will that do?

Mr. Greenway: God knows what it will do.

In addition to all that expenditure, the Labour council has conducted a strenuous nine-month campaign for homosexuality and lesbianism to be taught to children as being as valid as heterosexuality. A senior Labour councillor has said that sexual equality is more important to children in schools than mathematics and English.

Mr. Roger King: What about AIDS?

Mr. Greenway: That councillor forgets about all that. This costs an enormous amount in terms of council

officers' time, not to mention the grants paid to the gay and lesbian working party and its groups. It is sad that the Ealing football club was refused a £100 grant because it could not say that it promoted activities for gays and lesbians.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Does the hon. Gentleman recall that during the long discussions and acrimony about the projection of the images of gays and lesbian people in Ealing, a statement was eventually agreed with all parties and church support on the suitable methods of teaching positive images and positive respect for people within schools in the borough of Ealing? Would not the hon. Gentleman be more fair if he gave some credibility to the discussions in which many voluntary organisations and church groups have taken part with the council in agreeing this final statement?

Mr. Greenway: The hon. Gentleman is seriously out of date. It is true that the labour council produced a slightly changed form of words, but, according to a senior Labour councillor, the words have changed but nothing else has. the new wording has not been accepted by the Conservative group on the council, although it has been accepted by two of the three Liberals. The Conservative group voted against it. All the parents are against it and the Churches are considering their position. I promoted a conference on the family on St. Valentine's day to put forward the true values of society. The conference was addressed by Cardinal Basil Hume and leaders of the Moslem, Sikh and Hindu religions. To a man they upheld the family. The cardinal made it clear, although he had nothing to do with Ealing council's position, that the teaching of homosexuality is wrong; and so it is. Children from the age of five have been taking home letters about the council's homosexual attitudes. I think that is wrong.

Mr. Steen: I do not think it is wrong. It is wrong.

Mr. Greenway: Yes, it is wrong.

As the Opposition seem to be so sensitive about this matter, I must mention that gay and lesbian couples are being given housing priority. Think how people who have been on waiting lists for 10 or more years feel.

Mr. Steen: Is my hon. Friend telling the House that Ealing council, using ratepayers' money, is giving preference to lesbians and queers over other people on the housing list?

Mr. Greenway: That is right.

Mr. Corbyn: Priority over whom?

Mr. Greenway: It is giving priority over ordinary, normal people on the housing list.

Mr. Corbyn: Not true.

Mr. Greenway: It is absolutely true. Instead of the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) sitting there bleating, he should go and find out.

The motion refers to housing, and again I must mention the behaviour of Ealing council on that issue. Last May it inherited from the Conservative council a list of 30 homeless families in bed-and-breakfast accommodation costing £300,000 a year. It immediately abolished residence points which give reasonable priority to people who have lived in the borough for two years or more or who were born and bred there, since when people from all over the country and all over the world have been sucked into the borough and there are now 500 families on the bed-and-breakfast list. I am told that Ealing is a soft touch. It is encouraging people to declare themselves homeless and it is putting them into bed-and-breakfast accommodation. By April next year it expects to have 1,000 homeless families in bed-and-breakfast accommodation at a cost of £5 million a year.

How that can arise when there were only 30 families on the list in May is beyond comprehension. It is clear that the system is being abused. If one builds on every blade of grass in the London borough of Ealing, proudly known for so long as the queen of the suburbs, one will not rehouse everyone at that rate—*[Laughter.]* The point is made.

We are in a new planning situation with the relaxation of planning controls in country areas. Therefore, to suck people into the London borough of Ealing, while at the same time destroying jobs, as I have shown, is vicious, wicked and disgraceful, but it is typical of the modern Socialist party.

There is opposition by Labour councillors in Ealing to the development of Osterley park. I know nothing about that development so I shall make no comment upon it. However, those same councillors are seeking to take away Ealing green high school playing fields, which are urgently needed by the children. When I held a meeting to deal with vandalism in a certain area a few weeks ago, a Labour councillor stood up and said how concerned he was about it and how he would ensure that there were better facilities for children. That playing field is just down the road, yet the council proposes to take it away and fill up the area with concrete—without shopping facilities even.

Mr. Roger King: Could that have anything to do with the growing belief by many members on the Left of the political spectrum that non-competitive games would not need facilities such as playing fields?

Mr. Greenway: My hon. Friend has made an extremely good point.

There is another depressing aspect to the planning attitudes of Ealing council. It has bought from an industrialist a five-acre site known as the Sadia site in Northolt where the industrialist was expected to develop jobs. The council is seeking a change of use of the site for housing. It seems to have given up any idea of creating jobs. There is enormous opposition in the local community. I held a public meeting on Monday to which 500 people came, and more were queuing outside who could not get in. That shows the strength of the opposition. However, it remains to be seen whether the council has any democracy left in it to throw out this proposition.

Councils such as Ealing must be rate-capped for the sake of their citizens and industry. We see minimally and at borough level the attitude of the Labour party that we should see nationally if it were to win a general election.

Hoover has been an important employer in the London borough of Ealing for many years. It had to decide whether to keep its headquarters staff of 600 employees after the Labour party won the council election last May. Regrettably, it has decided to move out of Perivale, where it started all those many years ago. I have had many negotiations with parts of the company and with potential employers, one of whom employs people who work in computers. A deal has been successfully negotiated with

[Mr. Greenway]

him by me. He will retain those employed on the computer side of Hoover — 70 jobs will be kept and 30 added. However, it has not been possible to hold on to some other jobs in view of the heavy rate rise and what lies behind it.

The Ault and Wiborg factory, which employs 220 people, will close for the want of £1·25 million support, which the council refused to give.

Having set up an Ealing enterprise agency to bring jobs into the borough, having striven in every way that I can to hold on to jobs, create more and suck more in, at which I was being successful, I wonder what more one can do when faced with the imposition that industry now faces from a Labour council which just does not care about industry, jobs or people.

1.6 pm

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): I listened with some surprise and disappointment to the speech of the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway). He disappointed me recently. I thought that he had a reputation as a great patriot until I saw him, no doubt financed partly by the Fees Office, driving out of the House of Commons in a new French car. I thought that the hon. Gentleman has a reputation as a Christian ur til his speech, which went some way towards stigmatising people who have differences, and showed lack of compassion about those who come from overseas. He has given us a list of distortions——

Mr. Greenway: Not true. Does the hon. Gentleman know better?

Mr. Fraser: We must make our own choices.

The hon. Gentleman gave a list of distortions of the way in which Ealing council had acted. I do not try to get involved in local controversy about local authorities. People vote for them, make a choice of programmes and then live with the programme for which they voted.

Gays and lesbians on the housing list, as in many local authorities, are accorded equal treatment with others on the housing list. Whereas previously they may not have received priority in absolute terms in rehousing, they now receive it. That priority is not accorded over groups with other sexual tendencies. What we had from the hon. Gentleman was a list of abbreviation and distortion intended only to bring the Labour party into disrepute. That was the purpose of his speech. It contained very little —in fact, I would say nothing—that was constructive.

Mr. Greenway: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman did not listen to my speech. If he reads it tomorrow, he will see that I gave solid examples of what the rate increase will mean in terms of extra rates to be paid and the effect on prices and jobs. With regard to my Christianity, the hon. Gentleman might like to know that I was putting a point of view as a Christian which His Eminence the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster put only a few weeks ago. The hon. Gentleman may know better, but I am not sure that he does. I have never attacked people from overseas, and never will. If I drive a French car occasionally, I think that the hon. Gentleman may have done so himself.

Mr. Fraser: The hon. Gentleman also failed to point out that one of the reasons why an increase in expenditure by local authorities has such a sharp effect is the crazy, lunatic rate support grant system, which means that the more a local authority devotes to the service of its citizens and the more services it delivers, the more grant is withdrawn by the Government. That is one of the reasons why what are called the "slopes" tend to emphasise and exaggerate so greatly the increases in expenditure adopted by local authorities.

Having started on a tart and angry note, I should proceed to two notes of congratulation. First, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) not merely on his good fortune in the ballot but on choosing a subject of such importance. Secondly, I associate myself with the congratulations extended to the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mrs. Barnes) on her clarity, confidence and sincerity. I will not disguise the fact that we were disappointed not to win Greenwich, but we agree very much with what she said in her tribute to the former Member for Greenwich, Mr. Guy Barnett. I spent many nights, some cold, some rainy, and some uncomfortable, trying to ensure that the hon. Lady did not get into the House. However, I will not let that rob her of the accolade that she deserves for her speech today.

The main subject of the debate is the inner city problem. It is not simply a problem; it is a fearsome combination of factors, and I mean "fearsome" metaphorically as well as literally. If a man or a woman suffered from 10 or 12 diseases or disabilities, we would regard him or her as being severely and impossibly afflicted. However, that is exactly what has happened to many of our large city areas. Indeed, like the biblical plagues that afflicted Eygpt, the inner cities and the outer estates to which some hon. Members have referred have suffered concurrent and consecutive social and economic plagues. However, I emphasise that the same combination of factors does not affect all of our inner city areas. It would be wrong to impose a single solution on any particular inner city area. There is a multiplicity of afflictions.

I want to begin by considering the Department of the Environment's indices of deprivation. I would not necessarily choose the same set of indices of deprivation. Several hon. Members have referred to unemployment. According to the indices, there is typically 25 per cent. male unemployment. However, the figure is considerably worse among school leavers. According to the Audit Commission report, the figures for London show:

"Unemployment is relatively high, particularly among young people. In October 1986 . . . 34 per cent. of all men age 20-24 were registered as unemployed (the figure was 46 per cent. in Hackney and 44 per cent. for Lambeth); for young people of Afro-Caribbean origin, the figure is likely to be higher still—in 1984 the unemployment rate among West Indians was double that for Greater London as a whole."

There is an affliction of unemployment particularly among school leavers. Using the same month as that used by the Audit Commission, in October 1986 in Lambeth there were 3,500 school and college leavers without work. There were 2,600 out of work in Hackney and 2,300 in Haringey. In the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting, 1,500 were out of work. To put those figures in context, we should compare them with other boroughs in some cases within only a few miles. The borough of Richmond had only 350 unemployed school and college leavers, and that is only one tenth of the figure in Lambeth. In Sutton, the figure was as low as 250.

The second index of deprivation relates to overcrowding and poor housing conditions. Many of our inner city areas have single parent families. From the indices, Hackney has the highest number of such families and

Lambeth the second highest. It is not simply the fact of being a single parent family that should concern us; rather we should consider the circumstances involved. It is possible to be a single parent and rich and know no deprivation. However, we should be concerned about single parents who are poor, and who live in poor housing conditions with little prospect in the inner cities.

The Audit Commission states:

"The number of single parent families is high."

It is talking about London, but the position is similar elsewhere. It continues:

"In 1984, 31 per cent. of children were born into single parent families. (The figure was 39 per cent. in Southwark and 42 per cent. in Lambeth.) In 22 per cent."

that is, one in five—

"of the cases, the mother was under 20 years old."

That shows the lack of support, the lack of income and the risk that the children of that family will fall into circumstances of multiple deprivation from which it will be extremely difficult to escape.

There is often a high incidence of elderly people living in poverty and a lack of amenities. The Asian and black populations live in the inner city with an inheritance of discrimination, deprivation and an accumulation of redundant skills. They lack the bedrock of traditions and institutions which many other people in the inner city may have. In my constituency, Caribbean groups find it extremely difficult to obtain land on which to build their churches. The others have their bedrock, because they have their buildings, clubs and other institutions, but the ethnic minorities—the majorities in some wards in the inner city—do not have that bedrock on which to build. They are not helped by high land prices.

The inner cities have highly unstable populations. In some wards in my constituency — this is typical of London—there is a 27 per cent. turnover of population in one year. The velocity of population makes the administration of services much more expensive and difficult. Although I do not excuse the inefficiences and delays in paying housing benefit—if an authority cares for the poor it should pay them quickly—one reason why it is so difficult to do these things quickly is the velocity of population and the number of people wishing to move from hard-to-let accommodation and changing private bed-and-breakfast accommodation. The change in population has meant a breakdown not only in local authority services but in Government services. Sometimes the county court administration is in a shambles, as is the administration of single payments by the DHSS. Its offices in Lambeth and Southwark are often closed. The administration of single payments is so far behind that it is often done many miles from the centre of London. The inner cities are a tenure trap for some people and a speedy merry-go-round for others.

There is also the incidence of low skills in the inner cities, and attention must be paid to the need for retraining and skills education. The inner cities are full of contradictions, one of which is that there is often a shortage of people to fill jobs at a time of mass unemployment. The challenge is to match one to the other, although it is not easy when people are trapped in a cycle of deprivation. Poverty and high standards of education do not go together.

I am extremely worried about the fact that, during the past three years, the London Docklands Development Corporation has received £162 million in revenue and capital grants, yet employment among young people in the area has increased during that period. It must mean a mismatch between the skills that are available and the jobs that have been created by that investment. We must be careful about this. Investment in very high cost housing and inappropriate jobs for the community may make the problem worse. The problem of the inner city is often the contrast between richness and poverty.

Mr. Simon Hughes: One of the problems is that, when there is an uncontrolled market, there is no chance of the community exercising control over the purchase of local firms. One of the sad tales of dockland development is the number of small firms with small profit margins with pieces of land of massive investment value which have been bought out because they cannot compete and nobody is allowed to intervene on their behalf. As a result, jobs simply disappear.

Mr. Fraser: Yes. Despite the fact that many thousands of jobs will come from some of the dockland developments, smaller firms are having to make way for the big bang companies.

I could add other indices to those used by the Department of the Environment. Poverty is one. Some 20 per cent. of London's population is below the poverty line. The proportion is much higher among ethnic minorities and single parents. We have 5,000 homeless families a night in the capital. That is no saving because it costs much more to keep people in bed-and-breakfast accommodation than permanent housing.

It is not sufficiently appreciated how much people in inner cities suffer from poor health. Birmingham, Hackney, Lambeth and Gateshead have perinatal mortality rates which are substantially higher than the national standard of 100. The same is true of mortality rates, especially in northern cities. Birmingham has a standardised mortality ratio of 180 compared with the national standard of 100. The figure for Liverpool is 116, for Manchester 119, for Salford 119 and for Newcastle and Gateshead 111.

There are often poor relations between the police and the community in inner cities. Everybody agrees that people are deeply worried about crime, which is a serious inner-city problem. We have a Government who were elected on a programme of law and order, but there is nothing to show for it.

I am not too fond of the phrase "no go" because it devalues an area and is often not an accurate description. The *South London Press* said in an article about an estate in Southwark, that it was

"boycotted by doctors, social security staff, milkmen, cab drivers. Now the Post Office has taken the unprecedented step of refusing to deliver mail to 500 homes on the estate, following six attacks on postmen this year. Tenants now have to collect mail from the local sorting office."

This morning's *Daily Mirror* tells us that there are areas where

"Muggers and burglars are beating law and order on the streets of Thatcher's Britain. And if you want protection, don't expect it from the police.

The chilling message from a top Home Office crime expert yesterday to ordinary decent people was: 'You're on your own.' . . .

The report by the top Home Office researcher Mike Hough appears in the prestigious British Journal of Criminology."

[Mr. Fraser]

Its implications are that street crime and mugging will call for even more self-protection instead of protection from a police force which, in London, has been rate-capped, just like local authorities.

One of the problems of the inner city is lack of an agreed set of values. There is sometimes ambiguity about crime and drugs and what is regarded as anti-social behaviour. The inner city is explosive and capable of spontaneous combustion, as we have seen more than once in my constituency. There is a danger of the inner city creating its own self-reinforcing momentum, with its own weather and climate. Last time we had an inner city debate, I gave an example of how this happens. For example, because of high levels of crime, it is difficult to get insurance to run a business. Because of that, there is less business, because of that fewer jobs, so more unemployment, and therefore more crime, and the self-perpetuating spiral continues.

Another example has been highlighted by the Audit Commission. The inner city management of social services, local authority services and central Government services requires extraordinary skills to deal with some of the extraordinary aggravation that one gets, whether with the management of council estates, running of housing authority services or dealing with social work. Social workers are in personal danger.

In such circumstances, one needs outstanding management and outstandingly dedicated and skilled people working in the inner cities, but the problems of the inner city in London and high house prices militate against getting the right kind of management and skilled people working on the ground. In consequence, the quality of the services suffers, and the self-perpetuating momentum continues.

The cycle of decay is immensely difficult to reverse. We should be humbled and sobered by some of the prospects of our inner cities and the difficulty that they have in coping with the problem that has been recognised by all parties and Governments for some years. As the Audit Commission says:

"This catalogue of problems is so serious as to be difficult to comprehend by those who have never lived in a rundown Inner City area."

At the same time, the inner city has a vigour, even a wealth, and often a variety of opportunities, so one should not conclude on any pessimistic note. Opportunities are there. What we need is the political will to make things happen. There are contradictions, which make the inner city problem even worse and for some people even more offensive. It is offensive that there can be so much bounty and affluence set beside the grossest deprivation. I have to live with such deprivation day in, day out, as do other hon. Members representing inner city constituencies with a shortage of resources, particularly for community housing.

That deprivation does not exist throughout London. Within a brick's throw of some of the bad areas can be affluence. I have here a copy of an article about

"Homes Ahoy at Chelsea Harbour".

The article speaks about

"a 20-acre triangle of derelict land owned by British Rail and bounded by the railway, Chelsea Creek and the Thames."

That is not unlike some of the areas in Southwark, Lambeth, Manchester, Liverpool and Tyneside.

We are always being told about a shortage of resources, but in this development residential properties will be sold with 125-year leases at prices ranging from £150,000 to about £400,000, with penthouses a bit more expensive, ranging from £500,000 to £750,000. All the houses are spacious, but there are eight particularly large houses planned. They will have four bedrooms, three bathrooms, two reception rooms and 3,000 sq ft of floor space over five storeys. Their price is likely to be in the region of £3 million. In other words, the price of five of those houses will be equal to the entire partnership programme of the London borough of Lambeth. It is certainly much greater than the partnership programmes for Newham or Southwark, because they do not have any.

People were offended to learn just two weeks ago from one of the London evening newspapers that in some parts of London people will pay £35,000 for a garage. We were told by the hon. Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) that it is possible for people to buy homes in London. Apparently all that they will get for £35,000 is a garage. If one looks at the *South London Press* to find the price of property in docklands, one sees that the cheapest property advertised is a studio flat at £41,500. That is not within the reach of ordinary people in need of housing.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) spoke about a £2·5 million penthouse in the middle of an inner city area. It is not that we are jealous or envious, but it is deeply offensive to those who live in the inner city to be told that there is a shortage of resources and that they will have to pull in their belts and stand on their own feet when they are living side by side with the result of extravagant expenditure which does not assist them in any way.

In almost every inner city area there is a backlog of improvements to local authority and private sector homes. Some 10 per cent. of private sector homes in London are unfit for human habitation, and a large number of public sector homes require about £8,000 to be spent on each of them. What has happened to the resources? I have looked at the housing investment programme for next year, but there is no hope at all there.

The borough of Newham, which is deeply afflicted by problems of poverty and inner city deprivation, has had a cut in real terms in its housing investment programme of one fifth. Wandsworth has had a cut of almost one tenth, Haringey a cut of almost one fifth and Hackney, one of the most deprived boroughs in the country, has had a cut of 16 per cent. in its housing investment programme for the year 1986-87 to 1987-88. Since 1976, local authorities in London have suffered a cut in their housing investment programmes of about 62 per cent.

As Socialists, we have a moral and political duty to create equality and access to opportunity for homes and jobs, and we have a duty to eradicate the urban scrap heaps upon which the casualties of change have been flung. On the base of the Statue of Liberty there is a inscription which says:

"Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free."

Inner city policy ought to be about providing the symbols of liberty and emancipation inside the inner city so that the yearning masses of huddled poor do not have to look outside their own area.

What signs of hope and progress can we find? I am sorry to say that hopes are not too high. The report on inner cities by the Audit Commission brings little hope in

describing the conditions. There is no sign that the number of unemployed school leavers is diminishing. Overall, school and college leavers represent about eight in 10 of the unemployed, and in the inner city partnership areas they represent almost 13 people out of every 100 who are unemployed. Even in the last three years for which there are reliable statistics, unemployment in some of the inner city areas is still extremely high. It has risen by almost 2,000 in Hackney since January 1984, by almost 2,000 in Islington, by just over 2,000 in Lambeth, by about 300 in the London docklands, and by about 2,000 in Liverpool. Only a couple of inner city partnership areas show any abatement in unemployment.

There is little hope for those who want to get on with the job of doing something for the inner cities. Every inner city partnership area will find that its inner city partnership moneys will be cut next year when they are compared with the provision that was made for the preceding year. In a letter from the Minister for Housing, Urban Affairs and Construction I am told that

"Provision for the Urban Programme . . . is a reduction of 1·5 per cent. in real terms."

Faced with all the problems that have been canvassed in this debate and in every other inner city debate—there are the undoubted difficulties of unemployment, education, health and housing, for example — we are to experience a cut of 1·5 per cent. in inner city partnership funds for next year.

Following the dissolution of the Greater London council, there has been a cut in the amount of money that local authorities can make available for local initiatives and for the voluntary sector by grants under section 137 of the Local Government Act 1985. Until the dissolution of the GLC, each local authority put 2p in rating terms in the pool, which produced about £38 million in London. that money was used to support various initiatives, especially employment initiatives, and voluntary groups. the GLC was able to put into the pool the same amount as the London boroughs. There has been no increase in the moneys available for the voluntary sector following the GLC's dissolution. Many boroughs are finding that they cannot obtain any more moneys under section 137, even if they are using those moneys to fund schemes that the Government have urged upon them.

What constructive contribution can we make? Obviously we must tackle—I know that this is easier said that done— poverty and unemployment, which I believe to be the root causes of the problem. One sees great contrasts in the course of by-election campaigns. I was involved in the Fulham by-election and I am, of course, familiar with the streets in my constituency. There appears to be a great deal of money in many parts of Fulham, but I accept that there are centres of deprivation within the area as well. The presence of a great deal of purchasing power means that there are no derelict shops. It is clear that demand is able to foster jobs. That is something that does not take place in my inner city constituency. There is a great contrast to be drawn from the unemployment figures of the London boroughs. We must tackle poverty and unemployment.

There must be a training scheme that will enable us to deal with the mismatch of the skills and jobs that are available. There must be an intelligent targeting of funds to the creation of jobs that will serve the local community. It would be silly to think that every job created in Greenwich, for example, would go to a Greenwich person. The same applies to Southwark, and Lambeth. It would be preposterous to expect that to happen. It would be equally preposterous if jobs created with public money, or a combination of public and private money, served merely to increase house prices by encouraging others to come in from outside, or if jobs were created in areas where there is overheating of the economy.

Some figures for Southwark showed that, of the new jobs that were the result of job creation, only about 10 per cent. went to the local population and that 90 per cent. of them were taken by people not living in areas of deprivation. We must target much more intelligently to ensure that the jobs that are created go, as far as possible, to local people. Where there is a demand for labour, we must ensure that training matches the job opportunities that are created by job investment.

With my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East (Mr. Freeson), I sat on the Cabinet committee that considered the inner cities that led to the programme for the inner cities of 1977. At the heart of it was the necessity for cohesion between Government Departments. We do not want the advice that we receive nowadays from the Dispatch Box. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster tells people that they should leave the north, get on their bikes and come to London for work. However, the Secretary of State for the Environment comes to the Dispatch Box and advises people to steal somebody else's bike and cycle to the empty houses of the north if they find themselves homeless as a result of coming down south to do the jobs that are available here.

The Government should get their act together. They should also ensure that hospital closures do not take place in inner city areas. Government initiatives should draw together instead of pulling apart. The Government should stop penalising and cutting expenditure programmes for local authorities in inner cities and partnership areas. I have already mentioned the cuts that will take place next year in aid for inner city partnership areas. However, it is equally true that cuts have taken place in housing expenditure. Figures supplied to me by the Association of London Authorities state that there has been a

"25 per cent. cut in real terms"

in the allocation of total resources in the inner city boroughs in London since 1977. It continues to state that it is no good having an urban programme that is

"a smokescreen to conceal massive cuts in overall Government spending"

as well as now imposing cuts in inner city partnership expenditure, and having an urban programme which has "inadequate and erratic funding; restrictive targeting and project time limits".

We need to create jobs in the inner city by expenditure on housing and by supporting initiatives in, for example, the social services. If the right resources are given to local authorities and if Government work closely with them, there is an opportunity to create work and to meet needs in health, social services and housing. However, as well as that—that is not unimportant in itself—we must go for initiatives that are wealth creating and revenue generating, alongside the wholly necessary services that are revenue absorbing. We must get the best brains, the right resources and powers and the best practice to create jobs in the new industries and new services in our inner cities.

We can draw upon many good examples of the way in which that could be done. I know that my local authority is much reviled—we have heard it reviled today—but it

[Mr. Fraser]

does no service to the inner city if Tory politicians run up and down accusing many inner city boroughs, often Labour controlled, of being "loony" when we are trying to encourage the private sector to co-operate with those local authorities. There are many examples of good practice. In my borough of Lambeth about 1,000 jobs have been created in small enterprises, in which the local authority, the private sector, advisers from National Westminster bank and other people are working together to create new businesses, using the existing statutory powers and inner city partnership money to create jobs. Not all of them will be a success, but the nature of business is that some people will fall off the log.

We must put more weight and time behind creating new expanding businesses because private sector investment in the inner city does not just represent money coming into the inner city and the creation as well as the consumption of revenue, but means that there is a long-term commitment. Those people will be anchored in the inner city once the investment has been made, whether they live there and start up their own business, or bring in business from outside.

I want to see not just small businesses but the high quality success of firms such as Marks and Spencer in the inner cities. That firm has done a great deal to back inner city initiatives. It is important that inner city enterprises range from the big, high-quality stores, such as Marks and Spencer, which provide many jobs, to the single manufacturer.

We must avoid the antagonism which sometimes unintentionally occurs between local authorities and the private sector and which is fostered by silly remarks made about some of our inner city boroughs. The Tories must stop frightening business men away. *[Laughter.]* Yes, they must stop frightening business men away. They urge business men to co-operate with the Merseyside development corporation but warn them against partnership initiatives with Liverpool city council.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The hon. Gentleman is talking pure Conservative policy and, generally, I welcome that. Is he aware of the opposition of Southwark borough council to the policies that he is talking about and of opposition to councils run by his loony Labour friends? Why has it taken the Labour party 20 years to mouth the sensible generalisations that he is now mouthing?

Mr. Fraser: Southwark council has a long history of co-operating with the private sector to attract new industry and jobs to Southwark which dates from well before the creation of the LDDC. If a local authority were given the powers and resources that are given to an urban development corporation, it could probably do the same job. But the Government have used urban development corporations to bypass local authorities. They have given disproportionate resources to organisations which are not subject to democratic control and have denied the same resources and powers of land assembly to local authorities.

These matters must be dealt with on the basis of partnership. Both the private sector and local authorities have their strengths and they have different functions. We sometimes fall down on the time that it takes for action. Too long an interval elapses between a plan and action. I want to see a corporate targeted approach to the development of businesses and services in the inner cities which has the speed of response to which people are accustomed in business. That speed is not always present to the same degree in local authority administration for perfectly understandable reasons: democratic accountability takes longer than business decisions which do not have to be explained to electors.

Mr. Simon Hughes: The hon. Gentleman may be aware that until 1982 Southwark was willing to co-operate with the private sector. Sadly, since then, it has taken a more exclusive role. That was capped the other day when a conference to create jobs in the borough was opened by the leader of the council who welcomed any private sector people present with the words, "Welcome, comrades." That was hardly the way to engender partnership spirit for the rest of the day.

Mr. Fraser: I shall not get myself embroiled in every word said by every community leader. I simply assert that co-operation between local authorities and the private sector is vital. We must put together the best practices that already exist and I shall mention an institution which may be able to do something about that.

I shall now turn from the use of money and resources to the asset of people. The problem of the inner cities is twofold—resources, and the behaviour and the way in which people react to their environment. We must invest in people, who live in the inner cities with a greater sense of dignity and involvement in the control over their community. That can be done in a variety of ways—sometimes through the involvement of the Church, which is a strong stabilising influence, and sometimes through tenants' organisations or through community groups.

We must beware of short-term programmes. There is no use financing a local group for a short time only for the group to find that its time has expired before the programme is completed. There is more disillusionment at the end of its existence than at the beginning. Successful community enterprise must be possible. Tenants' and citizens' organisations must be able to survive beyond the short time spans supported by some inner city partnerships.

Support for inner city projects must have clear objectives and good expenditure tests. It is no good putting money into badly designed projects. We must think matters through and consider what advantage will flow from them. I shall be interested to see the benefit of investment in neighbourhood centres. I saw a strong, supportive Caribbean club in Moss Side. Investment in buildings and other facilities had nurtured a stong, supportive community spirit. Inner city partnership programmes need professional support. One of the reasons that many tenant associations fail is that they do not have the right kind of professional back-up. A good deal might be provided by the voluntary sector in that respect. Inner city projects need proper integrity of account monitoring and adequate advice.

We must try to sustain people in the community, especially single people and the sons and daughters of those who live on estates who are often forced to move out of their neighbourhoods. When people take pride in their neighbourhoods and have greater control over the management and design of them, and when minority groups in particular have their own social institutions, whether they be a bar, domino club, or sports club, community commitment is bolstered. Some people might

yearn for the right to escape from the inner city, but the general desire for mobility will not solve that inner city problem.

There must be a black dimension. The black population must participate in community policies through entering housing and employment in the professions, the bench, business and other forms of self-expression that involve community commitment.

We need to use good practice and skills that have come from present partnership initiatives. There have been many successes. We need a storehouse of excellence and a populariser of good practice, whereby the experience of local authorities and central Government in relation to consumers, tenants, community organisations and the voluntary sector can be exchanged and promulgated. Successful overseas experience cannot be ignored. Apart from all the other things that we have, we need an institute or a commission for urban renewal which in itself would be an act of partnership and would concern itself with advice and the promulgation of good practice. For instance, I refer to local employment and the way in which urban development corporations can be used in partnership with local authorities rather than working against them and bypassing them. We need such an institution to try to develop not a political consensus—that is not possible—but a consensus among those who deal with inner city policy matters so that successful good practice can be transferred from one area to another.

I do not underestimate the enormous challenge of the inner cities. When one looks back over the past few years and considers how little has happened positively in response to even limited expenditure, one realises what a big problem and challenge we face. It is no good finishing on a pessimistic note. We have vigorous people — sometimes their vigour leads them on to wrong paths— and there is often an excitement in the inner city, which the Archbishop's commission underlined. Provided that Government can act by forming a partnership with local authorities, if local authorities can form a partnership with the private sector and with community groups, and if we can use the undoubted available capital resources, the problem can be overcome. At the end of the day, an act of political will and faith in the city is required.

1.54 pm

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): I must record right at the outset the anger on this side of the House that so many of my hon. Friends, who are well known for their interest in urban problems, have been unable to speak because of the length of the speeches by Opposition Members. It merely reflects the fact that no Opposition Members were there to support the hon. Members for Tooting (Mr. Cox) and for Norwood (Mr. Fraser), who made very long speeches. The mover of the motion made a speech that lasted 42 minutes. The Front Bench Opposition spokesman has just made a speech that lasted for nearly 50 minutes. That has deprived Conservative Members——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that the longest Back Bench speech of the day was made on his side of the House.

Mr. Steen: I shall not argue with you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, about the length of speeches, but the length of Opposition speeches has robbed Conservative Members of the opportunity to make speeches in a very important debate. In terms of numbers and quality of contributions, we feel more strongly about this subject than do Opposition Members. My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Powley) had an important contribution to make. Unfortunately, he has been unable to make it. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) was planning to make a very important contribution on urban problems. He is still here, but he will not have the opportunity to speak. My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson), whose interest in urban problems is well known to the House, has had to leave.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, North (Mr. Baker) managed to make a short but impressive intervention. He is well known for his interest in these problems—he lives in the middle of this great capital—but he was unable to make a speech. Conduct of this kind in such an important debate is a great imposition on the goodwill of all hon. Members.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mrs. Barnes), who made an impressive speech because it was so short. The Opposition Front Bench spokesman could have learnt a good deal from the hon. Member for Greenwich. In her 10-minute speech she said all that was required.

When one is squeezed in at the end of a debate like this it is impossible to make a meaningful contribution, and I shall not try to do so, in protest at the behaviour of the Opposition. It is significant that while I am making my speech there are only two Opposition Members here— the Opposition Front Bench spokesman and the hon. Member for Tooting, who moved the motion. Only two Opposition Members are here when a subject is being debated that the Labour party says arouses burning feelings among its members. The Opposition Front Bench spokesman made a most measured speech, but it was twice as long as it ought to have been and he must bear some responsibility for the fact that all the Benches behind him are deserted today, while the Benches on this side of the House are filled with keen and enthusiastic hon. Members who want to make a contribution to the debate. As I have been told that my hon. Friend the Minister wishes to wind up the debate soon after 2 pm, I shall refer only to a few matters, so I shall have barely the opportunity to say anything.

The problems of the inner cities transcend party boundaries, but the two sides of the House find themselves in difficulty when they try to agree on a solution to those problems. The motion suggests that the "inner city" is a geographical area, but it is not. The greatest problems are to be found in the outer city estates, way beyond the early boundaries of the cities. People from the inner cities were decanted and put into vast, soulless council estates, and that is where one finds the greatest poverty, hardship and handicap. The hon. Member for Tooting referred at great length to the inner city problems, but that is not where the real problems lie. They lie in the outer cities where the vast majority of people now live. Those people suffer the greatest deprivation, and the motion ought to have identified that issue.

Labour Members always argue, "Give us more money." Conservative Members are more imaginative and flexible and geared towards private enterprise. Both approaches are valid, but Labour's approach has failed because, as more and more money is pumped into urban areas, conditions merely become worse. If I have a

[Mr. Steen]

criticism of the Government, it is that they have poured more money into the cities than any other Government, yet the problems are still getting worse. A new approach is needed to tackle urban problems. It is not a matter of pouring more money in—that has been proved, over the years, not to work—or of having an exclusively private enterprise economy or Hong Kong approach to urban deprivation. The Conservative and Labour parties have failed in that they have not involved local people in solving problems for themselves with help from central and local government.

The estate action programme which the Government initiated last year gives money to facelift council estates in the outer cities. Under the formula proposed by the local authorities, local people are involved not only in management but in employment. If the estate action scheme works, local unemployed people will have opportunities to give the estate on which they live a facelift with funding by public as well as some private money. This gives responsibility to the people living in inner cities and will ultimately start to solve the problems. Both mainstream parties have failed to advance that approach. I am delighted that, through estate action and £57 million this year, the Government are starting to realise that the solutions to inner city problems will not be found by pumping more central Government money in or by relying on private enterprise.

Another fundamental problem needs to be grasped. Some of the problems of the inner cities have been caused by the constraints that prevent people from doing things to help themselves. If planning controls were lifted dramatically in our inner city and outer city areas, giving people an opportunity to experiment and do things in their back yards, flats and garages, they would create their own jobs and own wealth. The dead hand of bureaucracy controlling the planning regulations has prevented many people from helping themselves. The Government must pioneer that approach. Only by giving people in neighbourhoods the opportunities and power and resources to help themselves will the problems about which we have been speaking all morning be resolved.

I have merely touched on matters which need to be developed. One was asked to make a substantial speech because of the shortage of speakers and Conservative Members were prepared to contribute, but, because of the Opposition's obsession with hogging the time available, I am afraid that those Conservative Members who would have liked to do justice to the topic have not been able to do so. I wait with great interest to hear my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State.

2.3 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Richard Tracey): I am sure that the House would wish me to say that this debate of almost five hours has been particularly graced by the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mrs. Barnes). I must confess to her that I share something with the hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser)—I, too, was in Greenwich trying to stop her from coming here. But the hon. Lady will understand how the process of democracy works, and she is now with us. I congratulate her on her maiden speech.

As we remember well, the hon. Lady's predecessor was a man of great common sense who was much respected by both sides of the House. The hon. Lady has shown that she is following well in that tradition. She commented on the local authority in Greenwich. She has commented also on the Inner London education authority, which today is trying to get the books to balance. I am sure that she will continue to make those comments and we look forward to hearing her in this place.

The hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) has done the House a service by raising this issue, although he would not expect me to agree with the terms of his motion. There is one small niggling point. I have seen at close hand his extremely good work as a constituency Member in Tooting and, in a way, I wish that he had brought to the House more of his experience and record on that part of the inner city, rather than perhaps an over-larding of the dogma of his party which did not do him the full credit that I would have expected.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) made the point, in one way or another, that this debate has been characterised by a heavy presence of Conservative Members speaking and wishing to speak on the important subject of the inner cities. Indeed, my colleagues who were not able to speak have made some extremely telling interventions. It is a shame that more of the large number of Conservatives in the Chamber were not able to put across their experience from all over the country on this subject.

There is a great deal of consensus about the problems of our inner cities. One of the most telling speeches was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Silvester), who fairly pointed out that it would be better if there was a common core view about the solutions to the many problems rather than attempts to score points on dogma and sometimes on cant. My hon. Friend made the House think seriously about the problems of the inner cities and some of the solutions that he believes are desirable. We are agreed that the problems are complex and deep-seated. They are certainly not confined to the older urban cores. The problems of some of our larger outer housing estates are just as severe. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Sir R. Eyre), a man of great experience in the House, on the inner cities, especially Birmingham, and in my Department, pointed that out clearly.

There is not so much common ground on the solution to the problems that can be identified. Twenty years ago it was largely assumed that a combination of bottom-up community projects and top-down exercises in social engineering was the answer. We now know that scattering financial resources like confetti creates work, raises expectations which cannot be fulfilled and is generally ineffective. At the same time we have seen now centralised planning and housing design that leave people out of the equation have blighted our cities. That point was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hall Green.

The Government's policy is to make inner cities more competitive and to improve the quality of life of their residents. That means turning the natural strengths of cities to their advantage rather than standing in the way of inevitable change.

Several of my hon. Friends referred to the depressing dereliction which exists in many urban areas. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King), mentioned one particular site. Not only does that undermine the confidence of residents but it deters investment. Derelict or under-used land is a wasted

resource. Failure to use it properly throws pressure on undeveloped land outside urban areas. So one of our prime objectives is to bring inner city sites back into use for development. That point has been raised many times in the House by my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams. I am sure that he would have gone into it in more depth if he had had the time.

The public sector must put its house in order. Land hoarding by local authorities and other public sector bodies is a serious problem. To tackle that, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing, Urban Affairs and Construction set up the land register system—50,000 acres of previously unused land have been brought back into use in the past four years. For the first time, the amount of land still on the register has dipped below 100,000 acres. I think that the House will agree that that is encouraging, but we are not satisfied with progress. That is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State initiated more than 100 forced disposal proceedings in 1986.

Apart from improving the supply of land for development, we are helping, through derelict land grant, to prepare sites for development amounting to more than 3,200 acres a year, or—you would expect me to use this comparison, Mr. Deputy Speaker—an area the size of Wembley stadium every working day. To show how much priority we attach to mobilising the urban land market, I should tell the House that the derelict land grant resources have doubled in real terms since the Government came to office in 1979.

We on the Conservative Benches are well aware that cities need enterprise and investment if their momentum and wealth are to be restored. These points were raised in interventions by my hon. Friends, including my hon. Friends the Members for Dorset, North (Mr. Baker) and for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson).

Both central Government and local authorities have an important part to play, but they must support the real business of wealth creation and regeneration. At national level, the Government have set the framework. Successful anti-inflation policies and the more effective use of public expenditure have created the conditions for six successive years of growth. There is no contradiction of that fact. We must make sure that inner cities do not miss out on that success.

In practical terms, that means using public resources where they can be made and seen to work. Some £3,350 million has been spent since 1979 on the Department's range of targeted urban initiatives, apart from the main programme support and programmes promoted by other Departments. That £3,350 million has led to more than £2,000 million in private investment.

I should like to deal with some confusion in the mind of the right hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Freeson), who is clearly mystified by the growing contribution that my colleagues at the Department of Employment are making to urban policy. I should have thought that, as an old Department of Environment hand, he would welcome that. The Manpower Services Commission is now making the inner city areas a priority for its work. We heard proof enough of the need for that in the speech by the hon. Member for Greenwich, who said that, in an area of high unemployment, the local jobcentre cannot fill vacancies that require only basic skills.

The city action teams and the inner city task forces are putting together the complementary and constructive efforts of all the Departments involved. For example, they are customising local training programmes to meet the needs of employers and creating jobs as a result of urban development grants. They are building links between local schools and local industry and commerce. They are helping to develop the skills and enterprise of local people. The right hon. Member for Brent, East should not dismiss that as confusion and incoherence. It is the exact opposite.

The right hon. Member for Brent, East mentioned partnership as though it started in 1979 and has now died. On the contrary, the approach of supporting coherent inner area programmes, drawn up by local authorities, has been extended. There are now 57 authorities preparing inner area programmes for 1987-88 compared with just 24 in 1979-80. Resources for the urban programme have risen by 73 per cent. in real terms, and for the urban programmes they have risen by 131 per cent.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Does the Minister deny that overall the money going to inner city areas has, since the Government came to power, been substantially cut? Despite specific project increases, overall there has been a substantial cut. Why has that happened?

Mr. Tracey: The hon. Gentleman was not in the Chamber when I began my speech. There is no doubt that some years ago, as I described it, money was used rather like confetti. We are now more precisely targeting those very important resources. We should not forget that the resources that we are using are raised from the taxpayers of this country. The alliance may regularly forget that fact. Taxpayers' money must be used, and it is being skilfully targeted by the Government.

The most spectacular example has been London docklands. We now take that for granted. However, we should not be blasé about the wholesale tranformation of one of the blighted and derelict areas of the country—an area which had been allowed to fall into greater and greater dereliction by a total lack of agreement between the local authorities of the area and the now defunct Greater London council.

Private investment commitments in the London Docklands Development Corporation's designated area total more than £1,500 million. Three hundred companies new to the area are operating there, providing 8,000 jobs; and 7,500 homes have been built or are under construction. We have heard the cry during this debate along the lines that local people seem to have lost out. It is not just the so-called fat cats and yuppies who have benefited in the docklands area. The LDDC has allocated 42 acres to the docklands boroughs for council housing, with space for more than 1,200 homes. Residents of the three dockland boroughs of Newham, Southwark, and Tower Hamlets make up 40 per cent. of all occupiers of new homes on LDDC sites. Of course, there are wealthy incomers. That is one consequence of success. No one should lose sight of the fact that that area is now far and away more wealthy than it ever was in the previous confusion.

The achievements of the Merseyside Docklands Corporation are sometimes overshadowed by those of the LDDC. Perhaps the MDC did not have geography on its side in quite the same way as the LDDC. None the less, no one can fail to be impressed by the redevelopment of the grade 1 Albert dock buildings or by the more than 3 million visitors who passed through the turnstiles of the Liverpool international garden festival.

[Mr. Tracey]

Building on success, the Government have announced proposals for four new urban development corporations in Trafford park, Teeside, the black country and Tyne and Wear. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be gratified by the congratulations that he has received this morning from my hon. Friends. Assuming that Parliament approves the designation, with the London and Merseyside corporations, they will cover 20,000 acres of urban land that must be reclaimed and serviced to provide a suitable environment for investors.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hall Green mentioned the Birmingham renewal agency. My right hon. Friend is aware of the proposals and has been in touch with the city council in respect of them. He strongly supports proposals which encourage private development in hard-pressed urban areas, and the Government exemplify this by the many programmes designed to encourage such private investment. The largest urban development grant of £6 million has just been offered to Hyatt hotels to support a £32 million hotel project next to the new convention centre in Birmingham. The successful urban development grant scheme has to date supported 234 projects, with a total investment of £593 million, with grant of £117 million.

Birmingham city council is making progress with its proposals in east Birmingham. The main issues to be resolved are what private investment is proposed over what area and the input required from the public sector through grants. The commitment of public sector grant must bear some relationship to the funds available, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is approaching the matter positively, but it is reasonable to assess what the output will be for a given grant input.

Dr. Hampson: I welcome all the initiatives, which will be a turning point in the regeneration of many of our inner cities, but is the Department taking the Scottish Development Agency as a model? Those of us in cities such as Leeds, which will probably never get an urban development grant, are attracted by the idea of an organisation that can deal with small projects, as the SDA did in Clydebank, or with major developments, as it did in east Glasgow. Such a body would be less likely to stamp on the feelings of local councils than would the large, imposed urban development corporations.

Mr. Tracey: That is a very interesting point. We have been watching other models and examples carefully. The Department wishes to find the best and most cost-effective ways to tackle the problems, and the example used by my hon. Friend is one that we are considering.

Hon. Members' minds have been occupied by the role of local authorities and whether they encourage enterprise in the inner cities. The attitudes and actions of local councils can make or break a local economy. The hon. Member for Tooting knows very well what is happening in Wandsworth, with a vast amount of building and a great deal of enterprise and industry springing up, so it was interesting to hear him cast aspersions on that council. Perhaps it was for party political reasons. The hon. Gentleman seemed to imply that the only way in which to improve services is to increase rates. He knows from first-hand experience in Wandsworth that that is not true. Wandsworth has streamlined administration, improved staff productivity, tested the costs of services by opening them to competitive tendering and generated revenue savings and capital receipts, which have been ploughed back to improve services and the housing stock.

Net revenue costs per head of population in Wandsworth and therefore half of those in Islington, Hackney, Lambeth and Southwark. That is why Wandsworth is able to spend more than its neighbours on improvements and sheltered housing while helping more people to control their housing conditions as owner-occupiers.

We can contrast the success of Wandsworth with Ealing, about which my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) gave an account. He gave the facts in a most measured way, and I could not understand why the hon. Member for Norwood took such offence. I imagine that, having heard the details, the Leader of the Opposition will have to set about writing more letters, certainly to Ealing and possibly to other Labour-controlled authorities, saying what horrific consequences there could be for the Labour party if the Ealing example is copied.

Mr. Greenway: I was unable to conclude my thoughts because of lack of time. Ealing council is increasing rates by 65 per cent. and has fallen out with its staff to the extent that the council's administration is today at a standstill. All of its workers are out on strike. Even emergency services are not working. A lady telephoned me earlier to say that a pipe had burst and that she cannot get service from the council. The council has achieved less than nothing.

Mr. Tracey: I am grateful for that extra information. It might be the coup de grace for the Leader of the Opposition, who might now have to write as an Ealing ratepayer to insist on his services being resumed.

What has happened at Ealing is horrific but not uncommon. We are becoming aware of rate increases being put through by other London boroughs. It is interesting that hon. Members who represent Hammersmith and Fulham, who normally make such a great contribution to these debates, are not here to speak about the effect of rates on their inner city area.

We have heard about the Audit Commission's report on the efficiency, or lack of it, of various inner London local authorities. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) mentioned the Archbishop of Canterbury's report, "Faith in the City." That report says that

> "the real need is for a thriving local economy to be developed which can offer employment."

That is at the root of our employment policy in the inner cities and the range of urban initiatives that we have developed since 1979. I only wish that our efforts to secure urban regeneration and cost effective use of resources were matched by those of many local authorities, particularly in the inner cities. The "Faith in the City" report relevantly comments:

> "The Audit Commission provide sufficient evidence that there is wastefulness and extravagance in the way some (not all) urban authorities meet local needs."

This——

It being half past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

GAMING (AMENDMENT) BILL *[LORDS]*

Read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the Whole House. —*[Mr. Moynihan.]*

Committee upon Friday 27 March.

Asylum Seekers

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Sainsbury.]*

2.31 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): My debate is about the treatment by the British Government of asylum seekers, from wherever they come in the world.

When I first applied for the debate, it was at the height of what the Minister and others call the "Tamil crisis". As the saga unfolded, we saw first the arrival of a considerable number of asylum seekers, all Tamil people from Sri Lanka. They arrived at Heathrow airport in the normal way, applied for political asylum in the normal way and were interviewed and then told that their cases would not be accepted. Then, through contacts in London, they sought the assistance of hon. Members, who placed stops on their removal, and they were duly placed by a number of hon. Members, including myself.

Two days later, we were told that the Home Office was not prepared to accept our stops on those removals. Subsequently, the Minister was challenged legally and at the very moment when he knew that this challenge was being made on his right to remove these people, who were seeking judicial review of the case of Sivakumaran and others, he sought to remove them from the country by having them taken to an airplane at Heathrow airport. It was only after the departure of the plane had been delayed that word came through that the judicial review had been granted, and an initial hearing subsequently took place.

After private notice questions from my hon. Friends the Members for Battersea (Mr. Dubs) and for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist), the Minister finally accepted that the case had to be fully heard in the courts, even though he would challenge it, and finally, on 3 March, a further statement was made by the Home Secretary. He said that the Home Office would not proceed with the contested judicial review of this case but would be introducing new legislation, and on Monday week we are due to debate the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Bill.

I find the Bill as distasteful as I find the atmosphere surrounding its introduction. The Minister and the newspapers have sought to build up a case against Tamil asylum seekers, who have been accused, first, of being bogus refugees on the ground that they are not fleeing from personal danger, and secondly, of coming here through immigration rackets and for economic benefit. Time and again, hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-East have asked the Minister to examine the situation in Sri Lanka before making such statements because it is important that that situation should be examined with great care.

Early this morning, I received a phone call from Sri Lanka from someone working on a fish farm there. He described graphically and with considerable emotion an incident that happened in Sri Lanka not long ago when there was a dispute some miles from his farm between the members of an army patrol and someone else. The army patrol headed straight for the farm, took out 26 farm employees and shot them, in the same way as thousands of other people have been shot in Sri Lanka. The amount of communal violence and murder that exists not just in the northern and eastern regions but in other parts of Sri Lanka, makes the description of the country as being in serious turmoil something of an understatement.

[Mr. Jeremy Corbyn]

Sri Lanka, however, is just part of what we are discussing. The Government claim that the Tamils are not genuine asylum seekers, but there is a great deal of evidence that people deported to Sri Lanka by the Government have faced persecution, either from the armed forces or from Sri Lankan gangs. The Government's relationship with the Government of Sri Lanka also merits examination. This Government enjoys close diplomatic relations with the Government of Sri Lanka. They help to train the Sri Lankan army and have offered training facilities in Britain. They sell arms to the Sri Lankan Government which are used in the dispute between that Government and those seeking a Tamil Eelam state. I hope that no one will be sent back to Sri Lanka and that there will be a proper examination of the relationship between the British Government and the Government of Sri Lanka. In the *London Daily News* of 4 March there is a report which, as far as I am aware, has not been disputed by the Government. The headline states:

"Sri Lankan' torture claims reveal new Whitehall links with mercenary row firm."

The report says:

"Security sources say the men, most of whom are ex-SAS, were sent with Whitehall's approval."

They will work as mercenaries for the Sri Lankan Government. The House requires an answer to that claim.

In this debate I should like to raise a number of other equally important and perhaps wider matters. I have here a copy of the provisional arrangements about the status of refugees from Germany. It was initialed in Geneva on 4 July 1936 and was presented to Parliament shortly afterwards. This is from a League of Nations treaty about the treatment of victims of Nazi violence in Germany who sought refuge in other European countries. In many ways it is an inadequate document and the record of the treatment of victims of Nazi oppression is not a good one. Nevertheless, it is instructive to note that in 1936 countries engaged in serious discussions about the protection of victims of Nazi oppression. The Government claim to support the 1951 Geneva convention. The Minister has frequently said that they support that convention, yet the Government are still deporting genuine asylum seekers. It is important for the House to consider the Government's record. The Government say that they support the United Nations Convention on Refugees which was signed in 1951. The preamble to that convention says:

"The High Contracting Parties

Considering that the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights approved on 10 December 1948 by the General Assembly have affirmed the principle that human beings shall enjoy fundamental rights and freedoms without discrimination.

Considering that the United Nations has, on various occasions, manifested its profound concern for refugees and endeavoured to assure refugees the widest possible exercise of these fundamental rights and freedoms.

Considering that it is desirable to revise and consolidate previous international agreements relating to the status of refugees and to extend the scope of and the the protection accorded by such instruments by means of new agreement.

Considering that the grant of asylum may place unduly heavy burdens on certain countries, and that a satisfactory solution of a problem of which the United Nations has recognised the international scope and nature cannot therefore be achieved without international co-operation.

Expressing the wish that all States, recognizing the social and humanitarian nature of the problem of refugees, will do everything within their power to prevent this problem from becoming a cause of tension between States.

Noting that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is charged with the task of supervising international conventions providing for the protection of refugees, and recognizing that the effective co-ordination of measures taken to deal with this problem will depend upon the co-operation of States with the High Commissioner,".

We should compare that with the statement by the Home Secretary on 3 March. During a lengthy series of exchanges, he said that there were many disputes and wars taking place between Third world countries for which European Governments could not be responsible and that they could not be expected to receive the victims of those wars. It is important that we consider what the United Nations High Commission for Refugees is saying and doing on these matters compared with what the British Government are doing.

The right of appeal and review of a case heard in this country is especially important. I can only compare the attitude that the Government took towards the application for asylum from the Vietnamese refugees in 1985 with their present attitude. I shall quote from the Government's reply to the third report of the Home Affairs Committee entitled "Refugees and Asylum with Special Reference to the Vietnamese". The recommendation was that

"The Home Office should decide in principle to extend the right of appeal to all asylum applicants."

It continues:

"The main category of asylum applicants without such a right of appeal is those refused entry at the ports. For this category of applicants there are other safeguards: representations by Members of Parliament, judicial review and the UKIAS referral procedure."

That may be so, but it seems from the Minister's statement last week in the House and the terms of the Bill that is to be debated on Monday week that a number of things have changed. First, by resolution of the House last year, it was agreed that Members had a right to place a stop on the removal of people from this country pending consideration of the case by the Minister. The Home Secretary has since said that he will no longer accept that right automatically and that he will excercise his own judgment. He has said also that the application for judicial review or the commencement of legal proceedings will no longer prevent people being removed from the United Kingdom. Lastly, he has said that referral to UKIAS is no longer automatic. In short, by the statements made last week and the Bill that is to be introduced, the right of a proper hearing for asylum seekers has been removed by Government decision.

The report of the 34th session of the Executive Committee of the United Nations High Commision for Refugees in 1983 states:

"*Recognized* the substantive character of a decision that an application for refugee status is manifestly unfounded or abusive, the grave consequences of an erroneous determination for the applicant and the resulting need for such a decision to be accompanied by appropriate procedural guarantees and therefore recommended that".

The third recommendation is that

"an unsuccessful applicant should be enabled to have a negative decision reviewed before rejection at the frontier or forcible removal from the territory. Where arrangements for such a review do not exist, Governments should give favourable consideration to their establishment."

That was in 1983. Four years later, the Government, having said that they supported the recommendation, have failed to consider it and, indeed, are moving in the opposite direction. It is important that the Minister

responds, perhaps today, to the need for an independent appeals system within this country for those who are refused the right of asylum.

We are not dealing with a new issue. I have a legal decision of 1893 in Regina *v.* Justices of the County of London, which states:

"In a free country the very essence of a system must mean that there should be an appeal to somebody who can say whether those officers are doing what is just. If no appeal were possible, I have no great hesitation in saying that this would not be a desirable country to live in, where every parochial officer might do as he likes in this matter."

In some ways, that judge was quite far sighted.

We are now moving into an era of Euro-xenophobia, which is being pursued and encouraged by the Government by the disgraceful statements made by the Home Secretary and the Minister over the past few weeks while dealing with the Tamil case, and by the general feeling that refugees are someone else's responsibility and problem. I hope that before we debate the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Bill, we give some further thought to it.

I will give some examples of what happens when people are removed from this country and of the conditions under which people apply for asylum here. Under the procedures that the Minister has announced, he is, in effect, saying that the only people who can have a case for political asylum heard in this country are those who have come here openly and legally, who have an exit permit from their own country if that is appropriate and a visa to enter this country if that is necessary. Only those people have the right to come here and have their application heard. If the Minister considers the history of asylum seekers, from victims of Nazi oppression in the 1930s to people fleeing the horror of the Iran-Iraq war, fascism in Chile or any oppressive Government anywhere in the world, he will find that those people are often poor, desperate and alone. They often resort to all sorts of methods, including the use of bogus documents and forged passports and travel on airlines and ships that have been provided by various immigration racketeers. It is no solution to the problem for Britain to say, "Those people are nothing to do with us." We are closing our doors on those people in exactly the same way as the Minister is encouraging other European countries to do.

I ask the Minister to consider the case of a person from Iran who applies for political asylum here and who is deported back to that country, where Khomeini's holy war is killing God knows how many thousands of people every year. What chance do such people have of a fair hearing in Iran? What chance is there of a fair hearing in Chile for a political refugee from the Government of General Pinochet, or for people from South Africa or so many other places? In the current atmosphere, I find the deliberate misquoting of the numbers of people involved surprising. The Minister was apparently able to decide on the validity of asylum for the 58 refugees who applied from Sri Lanka in a few hours, when he could not even have mastered the names of those concerned in that time yet many cases take one to two years or even longer to decide. I have before me the statistical report for 1985 on applications for refugee and asylum seekers. The largest number—even larger than that of applications received—is that of applications outstanding at the end of the year. In 1985, 5,780 applications were outstanding at the end of the year and only 4,899 were received. Only 836 people were granted refugee status that year. That is not very many and it shows how difficult it is, to achieve political asylum under the old procedure, let alone under the procedure that the Minister now has in mind.

In addition, we must consider the general attitude towards asylum applications. A person who makes an application has the right to have it determined within a reasonable period of time, but I see no reason why people should be kept in detention during that period or kept for a long time on the string of "exceptional leave to remain". It is important that people are given a good and fair hearing as early as possible, within the terms of the 1951 Geneva convention that the Government claim to support. I hope that the Minister will reconsider the whole issue more carefully, not just that of the 64 Tamils which he has said that he will consider carefully, but the entire attitude and atmosphere of the statements that he has made.

We live in a world in which, tragically, many people are forced to seek political asylum from oppression. Down the decades, British Ministers have prided themselves on the liberal record of Britain in respect of asylum seekers, as indeed have other European countries. Only two years ago, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr. Poul Hartling, was critical of European Governments as a whole for their attitude to refugees and asylum seekers. He said that their record compared very badly with those of poorer, Third world countries. I hope that the Government will reflect that we are working in entirely the wrong way in telling people seeking to flee from oppression that we are not prepared to consider their case or to give them the asylum that is necessary. The Minister is deliberately stirring up feelings of racism and xenophobia, encouraged by the media's refusal to report the real cause of the asylum seekers. People fleeing Sri Lanka are seen as the problem today, but if the legislation is passed and the Minister's proposals become our law and practice, refugees all over the world will be the losers and it will set a precedent for other European countries.

2.49 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Waddington): We have always adopted a most generous policy towards asylum seekers. We have observed punctiliously our obligations under the United Nations convention, and often those who have not shown that they are refugees in the terms of the convention have nevertheless been allowed to stay on an exceptional basis.

The facts speak for themselves. Since 1979 more than 8,000 individuals from all over the world have been granted asylum and over 6,000 more who failed to qualify for asylum have been granted exceptional leave to remain. In 1985, 907 Sri Lankan Tamils were granted exceptional leave to remain on an annual basis, and in 1986 about 1,600 Sri Lankans were granted exceptional leave to remain. Add to those figures the 20,000 Vietnamese refugees who have settled here since 1979 and the more than 1,000 Poles who have been allowed to stay following events in Poland in 1983, and no fair-minded person can argue that British policy has been other than generous.

Furthermore, it is ironic that those who accuse the British Government of a lack of generosity are often Socialists, like the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn), with a hankering to turn Britain into an Eastern European-type state.

It is worth remembering that countries in Eastern Europe do not have any problem of people trying to enter, pretending to be refugees when they are not. Eastern

[Mr. David Waddington]

Europe has a refugee problem, but the problem is trying to stop people leaving, not trying to stop then getting in. Sane people do not volunteer to enter a prison.

It is important when people criticise Western countries for not being sufficiently generous to refugees that they know that not a single country behind the iron curtain — not one Socialist country, so much admired by Opposition Members — has even signed the refugee convention, which the hon. Gentleman now chides us for not observing properly.

Furthermore, I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman has the faintest idea how Tamils, for example, are treated in a Socialist country. I came across an article in the Sri Lankan *Saturday Review* of 7 February headed "Socialist Humanism." It is interesting reading:

"Twenty Sri Lankan Tamils were deported from Romania on 27th January after being held for six days in Bucharest's freezing airport with almost no food, Western diplomatic sources said here today, according to Reuter.

The British Consulate intervened out of humanitarian concern and sent bread, fish and meat out to the airport for the Tamils,, who had almost no money and were not given food or bedding by the Romanian authorities.

The diplomatic sources said, the Sri Lankans were not able to contact any consular authorities for help but they received assistance from a British consular official who discovered the drama by chance when visiting the airport."

Britain, unlike Socialist countries, has a proud record of giving refuge to people fleeing from persecution.

The United Kingdom helped formulate the United Nations convention and was among the first to accede to it. We were then among the first to ratify the 1967 protocol, and we have been scrupulous in its observance. But in Western Europe, Canada and America there has been a growing problem in the past year or so. There have been more irregular movements, to use the language of experts in refugee matters, more forged documents and more abusive applications. In 1985-86 there were 150,000 irregular movements in Europe. In 1986 almost 100,000 people sought asylum in West Germany alone. Both the Germans and the Danes have been forced to introduce legislation to stem the flood.

We would be grossly irresponsible if we allowed matters to develop in a similar way. We have acted to prevent that happening. Clearly, we must strike a balance between protecting the genuine refugee and preventing abuse of our generous procedures. We believe that the action that has been taken achieves that end.

In theory, a genuine refugee might come here with false documents. One certainly must not assume that a person who comes here with a forged passport or with one that has been mutilated on the journey cannot be a refugee. On the contrary, one must look at each case individually on its merits — the person's circumstances, not the circumstances in which he came here. Those who imagine that normal genuine refugees just turn up at our ports without papers do not have the faintest idea of what they are talking about.

First, most applications for asylum in this country are made by people who have come as visitors or students and have been here for a long time. They come to the end of their legitimate stay and say that, because of changed conditions in their own country, they do not wish to return.

Secondly, applications can be made at any of our embassies or high commissions. In Sri Lanka a person can get to the high commission just as easily as he can get to the airport at Colombo. As an illustration of some of the absurd allegations that are being made, I am told that, on television the other night a Tamil said that an intending refugee could not get to the high commission because it was ringed with soldiers. I checked that matter yesterday. There is precisely one policeman outside our high commission in Colombo—no impediment whatsoever to anybody who wishes to go in.

Thirdly, if a person is a genuine refugee, the natural thing for him to do is to go to the nearest safe place. Afghans go over the border to Pakistan. Sri Lankans go to southern India. It seems odd that anyone who is just fleeing from terror should not stop at the first place of safety.

I shall say a word about people who wish to get out of Eastern Europe. We could see the hon. Gentleman's political colour. He did not mention the persecution on the other side of the iron curtain. It was countries other than Socialist countries that he had the impudence to mention. Without permission from the authorities, a person in a country such as Russia has little chance of getting anywhere near an airport or an aeroplane. People from Russia get here not as a result of getting on to a plane, with or without documents; they get here as a result of our issuing a visa promise letter and the authorities giving them an exit visa. Without an exit visa, they are lucky to get out, unless they are prepared to risk getting shot crossing from East Germany to West Germany.

I shall give two recent cases. The poetess, Ms. Ratushinskaya, obtained a visa to come here. She did not come here on false documents. Mr. Scharansky, who was mentioned by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), the Opposition spokesman on Home Affairs, did not come here as a result of getting forged documents. He crossed from East Berlin to West Berlin and eventually came here on an Israeli passport, having become an Israeli citizen. A great deal of nonsense is talked about the way in which people normally come here and apply for refugee status.

The hon. Member for Islington, North talked about events that took place over a fortnight ago. When the 58 Tamils were put on the plane at London airport, we were eventually told that an order had been made that they should not be removed. In observance of that order, we took them off the plane, just as people would have expected us to do. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary in his statement said that he would look at the cases again, and that has brought the legal proceedings to an end. More than two weeks had already gone by when my right hon. Friend made that statement. Two weeks had gone by since they had been taken off the plane as a result of the court order. The legal tangle was no nearer to being unravelled, and the litigation was likely to drag on and on.

ne of the bones of contention was whether the cases should have been referred to the United Kingdom immigration advisory service. My right hon. Friend decided that the sensible thing to do was to refer them. The UKIAS had been asked to make its representations within a fairly small time scale. One of the important points to recognise in this debate is that, unless we process cases quickly, we often lose the opportunity of returning people abroad who quite clearly are not refugees. The countries from which the refugees come say that they have been in Britain for far longer than they have been in their countries and that therefore it is Britain's responsibility, not theirs.

The hon. Gentleman failed to mention that Sri Lanka is a democracy and that Tamils are entitled to seats in the Sri Lankan Parliament. Also he entirely failed to mention that the chief justice of Sri Lanka is a Tamil and that the principal cause of the trouble there is undisciplined troups often reacting to attacks by Tamil tigers and Tamil tigers attacking as a result of action by undisciplined troups.

Many parts of the world are gravely disturbed, but that does not make all the inhabitants who live in disturbed parts of the world refugees. It would be quite absurd if we were to give the impression that the West has an obligation to take every person who lives in Sri Lanka because of the troubled state of affairs there.

The hon. Gentleman referred to Germany before the war. I have made some inquiries about that. In 1938 the British Government imposed a visa requirement on Germans and Austrians. From that time onwards, Germans and Austrians fleeing from Nazi persecution came here with visas, having satisfied the British authorities that they had the wherewithal, or that they had people here who were prepared to look after them.

As for rights of appeal in this country, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said the other day that all we are saying at present is that not everybody can expect his case to be referred to UKIAS. There are bound to be exceptional cases when it will not be possible to do so—

The motion having been made at half-past Two o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned accordingly at one minute past Three o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 23 February 1987.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL FOR SCOTLAND

Salmon

Mr. Kennedy asked the Solicitor-General for Scotland what is his prosecution policy under section 15 of the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries (Protection) (Scotland) Act 1951 as amended by paragraph 9 of schedule 4 to the Salmon Act 1986; and if he will make a statement.

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: Should any such cases be reported to procurators fiscal for prosecution, they will be considered in the usual way. No special prosecution policy for these offences exists.

BBC Scotland (Police Raid)

Mr. Dalyell asked the Solicitor-General for Scotland why the petition for search warrants for the BBC Scotland premises was originally dated 30 January.

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: The petition craving a search warrant for the BBC Scotland premises was first presented on 30 January. The petition which was subsequently presented to Sheriff Lockhart on 31 January was prepared using a copy of the original petition with a revised crave and was accordingly amended by the assistant procurator fiscal to give the correct date.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

EC (Food Export Pricing Policy)

71. **Mr. Teddy Taylor** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will raise at the next meeting of the European Economic Community Council of Ministers the impact on Third world economies of the food export pricing policy of the European Economic Community.

Mrs. Chalker: In all relevant discussions in the EC and in wider international fora, the Government keep fully in mind the effects of agricultural support policies of developed countries, including the CAP, on developing countries. These effects are complex, and vary widely between individual countries.

Vietnamese Refugees

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list in the *Official Report* the numbers of Vietnamese refugees in Hong Kong who were resettled and in what country for the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Renton: The table lists the places in which Vietnamese refugees from Hong Kong have been resettled and the numbers for the years 1982-86.

Country of resettlement	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*
Australia	414	915	736	557	459
Austria	—	—	—	6	—
Belgium	2	2	11	1	—
Canada	1,088	536	1,008	1,302	975
China	2	—	—	—	—
Denmark	180	47	49	18	45
Finland	—	57	54	1	69
France	218	181	65	90	47
Germany (FR)	45	13	1	45	4
Hong Kong	52	12	18	41	70
Italy	—	—	1	—	—
Japan	11	1	34	52	5
Netherlands	110	26	18	13	82
New Caledonia	21	8	3	—	—
New Zealand	99	16	20	23	26
Norway	78	6	27	39	114
Sweden	13	207	11	—	101
Switzerland	14	3	9	—	22
United Kingdom	241	101	88	44	474
USA	6,657	2,065	1,541	1,721	1,323
Vanuatu	—	2	—	—	—

European Year of the Environment

59. **Mr. Patrick McNair-Wilson** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what initiatives are planned by the Overseas Development Administration to mark the European Year of the Environment.

Mr. Chris Patten: To underline the importance of the environmental factor in economic development, I have suggested that the subject should be on the agenda of the Development Council of the European Community in May. I have allocated £60,000 towards the cost of the sustainable development conference organised by the International Institute for Environment and Development and the World Bank in April and I plan to publish a booklet at the same time to describe in detail the way in which we take account of environmental factors in the British aid programme.

Aid

64. **Mr. Kennedy** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proportion of gross domestic product the United Kingdom devotes to overseas aid; and what information he has about the equivalent figure for other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries.

Mr. Chris Patten: In 1985, the latest year for which figures are available, Britain's net official development assistance represented 0·34 per cent. of gross national product. The equivalent figure for OECD aid donors as a whole was 0·35 per cent.

72. **Mr. Deakins** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has about total aid to the 29 poorest African countries and their total repayments of debt and interest in 1985; what were the comparable figures for United Kingdom aid and for repayments of debt and interest to public and private sources in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten: The total gross aid flow to the poorest 29 countries of sub-Saharan Africa in 1985 is estimated by the OECD to have been $7·8 billion. The

OECD also estimates that actual repayments of principal and interest on debt, including interest on short-term debt but excluding IMF repurchases, was $3 billion.

British gross public expenditure on aid to these countries in 1985, through both bilateral and multilateral channels, is estimated to have been some £380 million. Figures on total debt service payments to Britain alone are not available. British aid debt repayments in 1985-86 amounted to only £2·3 million.

UNICEF (Immunisation Programme)

65. **Mr. Grist** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will be increasing support for UNICEF's immunisation programme.

Mr. Chris Patten: I recently announced a grant of £5 million, mainly for UNICEF's immunisation programmes in China, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Our contribution to UNICEF's regular budget, which also contributes to immunisation programmes, will be increased by £500,000 to £7 million this year.

AIDS

66. **Mr. Alton** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what additional help his Department is providing to developing countries particularly affected by AIDS.

Mr. Chris Patten: We have recently given £250,000 to the World Health Organisation's global AIDS programme. New WHO proposals for expanding this programme will be available shortly and I expect to provide further support. We believe that support for programmes co-ordinated by the WHO is the most effective way of assisting developing countries to combat AIDS.

Mr. Chapman asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the technical assistance part of the United Kingdom's overseas aid programmes, including the number of people involved.

Mr. Chris Patten: The purpose of technical co-operation is to provide training and expert advice in aid recipient countries. At the end of 1985 we had 1,899 wholly or partly financed experts working in such countries. We also provided substantial support towards the costs of 1,188 volunteers. The total number of students and trainees from developing countries on courses in Britain funded from the aid programme was 11,250 in 1985-86.

68. **Mr. Soames** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the size and content of the British aid programmes to Botswana, Mozambique and Zimbabwe.

Mr. Chris Patten: For Botswana we expect to spend about £13 million this year, £8 million of which is expenditure by the Commonwealth Development Corporation. The remainder is for technical co-operation.

For Mozambique we expect to spend about £11 million, mainly on essential supplies for the industrial sector, technical co-operation and food aid. In addition, I have recently announced over £3 million of emergency relief and a new grant of £5 million for long-term development projects.

For Zimbabwe we expect to spend about £12·5 million, mainly on resettlement schemes, programme aid and technical co-operation. I announced a new pledge of £10 million for Zimbabwe during my recent visit.

Women

69. **Mr. Kirkwood** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the impact of existing bilateral aid projects on women in the recipient countries.

Mr. Chris Patten: It is not easy to make such assessments but progress is being made. In the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD, donor agencies collectively are working out ways of focusing more specifically on this issue in the future.

Tanzania

70. **Mr. Dorrell** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on aid to Tanzania.

Mr. Chris Patten: In recent years the focus of our programme to Tanzania has been on projects in agriculture, transport and health. We have also maintained a substantial programme of technical co-operation. Last June we offered Tanzania £25 million of programme aid to support economic reforms agreed with the IMF. Some £15 million has been committed so far, mainly for agriculture and transport.

I hope to visit Tanzania soon to see something of our aid programme at first hand.

Development Conference, Gaborone

Mr. Madel asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the recent southern African development co-ordination conference in Gaborone.

Mr. Chris Patten: I attended the annual consultative meeting of the Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference in Gaborone on 5 and 6 February. During the conference I made a new pledge of £10 million. This brings to £35 million the total we have pledged for assistance through this organisation.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Custody of Children

53. **Mrs. Virginia Bottomley** asked the Attorney-General whether there are any proposals to limit the time taken over decisions on the custody of children in divorce cases.

The Solicitor-General: The Law Commission has just published a working paper (No. 100) on "Care, Supervision and Interim Orders in Custody Proceedings". This will be followed by responses from organisations and the public, after which the Commission will publish its final report. Ministers will wish to consider the proposals in the report before issuing their own recommendations.

National Security

54. **Mr. Campbell-Savours** asked the Attorney-General what representations he has received on his role as it relates to national security.

The Solicitor-General: I am not aware of any such representations.

Project Zircon

56. **Mr. Winnick** asked the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the progress of inquiries into disclosure of information about the Zircon satellite.

The Solicitor-General: I am informed that the inquiries are progressing.

Soviet Union

58. **Mr. Adley** asked the Attorney-General if he will seek a meeting with his opposite number in the Soviet Union.

The Solicitor-General: My right hon. and learned Friend has no plans to seek such a meeting.

Duplicate Land Certificates (Gloucester)

Mr. Rooker asked the Attorney-General how many applications are currently lodged with Her Majesty's land registry office in Gloucester for duplicate land certificates; and what is the average length of time taken for each such application to be processed.

The Solicitor-General: At the present time 90 applications are being dealt with at the Gloucester district land registry for replacement of land or charge certificates which have been lost or destroyed. Such applications normally take 30 working days to complete.

Mrs. Cynthia Payne

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Attorney-General what was the total cost of the court proceedings in the Cynthia Payne court case.

The Solicitor-General: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 16 February 1987 at column *407*.

Parrot Corporation

Mr. Abse asked the Attorney-General whether the investigations relating to the affairs of the Parrot Corporation are now complete; what steps are being taken to apply for the extradition of Mr. Frank Peters; and whether any proceedings are to be commenced in respect of any other past directors or officials of the Parrot Corporation and any past or present officials of the Welsh Development Agency.

The Solicitor-General: I am advised by the Director of Public Prosecutions that police inquiries into the affairs of the Parrot Corporation have been completed and a decision has been made regarding the institution of criminal proceedings. It would, however, not be in the interests of justice were I to divulge publicly any further information regarding this matter at this stage.

WALES

Departmental Computers

Dr. Hampson asked the Secretary of State for Wales what his Department has spent on *(a)* computer hardware and *(b)* computer software for each year since 1984; and what is the projected expenditure for 1987.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Expenditure on computer equipment by my Department is as follows:

	Hardware £	*Software* £
1985-86	328,802	74,103
1986-87 (Estimated)	907,587	201,373
1987-88 (Forecast)	600,000	182,000

Expenditure incurred on turnkey projects has been included in the hardware figures.

Dr. Hampson asked the Secretary of State for Wales to which firms his Department has awarded contracts for computer hardware for each year since 1984; and what was the value of each contract.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: One major contract costing over £10,000 has been awarded since 1984; to IBM (UK) Ltd. in 1986. To disclose the price would be a breach of commercial confidence.

Secondary School Libraries, Clwyd

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he proposes to take steps to ensure that secondary schools in Clwyd spend on their libraries the minimum necessary according to the 1985 Her Majesty's Inspectorate survey of secondary school libraries;

(2) what is his policy on the amount which a secondary school in Clwyd should spend per pupil on its library; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what percentage of school libraries in Clwyd are unsatisfactory according to Her Majesty's Inspectorate's definition contained in the 1985 survey of secondary school libraries.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: In 1985 the Department of Education and Science published a survey by Her Majesty's Inspector (England) of secondary school libraries in six English local education authorities. The survey did not define a satisfactory standard of provision nor specify a minimum necessary level of expenditure for school libraries. My right hon. Friend's policy is that decisions on the appropriate level of spending on school libraries is a matter for local education authorities and schools to determine in the light of local needs and the resources available to them and of the importance of maintaining a satisfactory stock of books and materials.

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is the latest information available in the expenditure per pupil in Clwyd secondary schools on libraries.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Information on expenditure on school libraries is not collected centrally.

Agricultural Land

Mr. Alex Carlile asked the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations there were between the Welsh Office and outside bodies, prior to the issue of the draft circular on development involving agricultural land; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: None. The circular on development involving agricultural land has been issued in draft to enable outside bodies to give their views.

Mr. Alex Carlile asked the Secretary of State for Wales, following the adoption in Wales of annex B of draft circular development involving agricultural land, what proportion of agricultural land in Wales will be subject to consultation with him as to planning proposals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Consultation would be required for schemes involving the loss of 20 hectares or more of grades 1 or 2 agricultural land—or where the proposed loss is less than 20 hectares but it would be likely to lead to further losses amounting cumulatively to 20 hectares or more—and which, in the opinion of the local planning authority, would materially conflict with or prejudice the implementation of the development plan. In Wales, 2·4 per cent. of agricultural land is in grades 1 or 2.

Mr. Alex Carlile asked the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of agricultural land in Wales is of grade 1 and grade 2 classification, respectively.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: 0·2 per cent. of agricultural land in Wales is classified as grade 1 and 2·3 per cent. as grade 2.

Milk Quotas

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will introduce regulations to restrict buyers of milk quotas only to those who are already or who intend to become dependent on agriculture for a significant part of their livelihood and who themselves own, or rent, adequate land to use the quotas which they so purchase.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: No.

European Regional Development Fund

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the amount of European regional development fund grant which was, and which is expected to be, decommitted in each financial year from 1975-76 to 1988-90 at current prices.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The information is not available in the form requested. Details of decommitments for the calendar years 1975 to 1985 were provided in my answer to the hon. Gentleman on 13 February at column 375. These cannot readily be converted to current prices because of the different budgetary basis on which the Commission operates. As I have previously indicated, decommitments are effected because projects do not ultimately proceed as originally envisaged by the sponsoring authority; estimates of decommitments over the years 1986 to 1980 cannot therefore be made.

Development Agencies (Expenditure)

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list *(a)* the total expenditure of Mid Wales Development and the Welsh Development Agency for each financial year since their inception and their projected

expenditure for 1987-88, 1988-89 and *(b)* the annual total of each of the above expenditures met by direct Government grants during the period in question; and if he will give these figures at outturn and current prices.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The information is as follows:

Welsh Development Agency and Development Board for Rural Wales Spending 1976-77 to 1987-88

£ million

	1976-77	*1977-78*	*1978-79*	*1979-80*	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*Latest estimated out-turn 1986-87*	*[1]Planned Expenditure 1987-88*
WDA												
Cash prices £m												
Gross expenditure	22·8	33·3	52·2	62·6	88·0	88·1	76·2	67·5	74·7	66·7	73·2	86·5
Public expenditure contribution	9·4	23·4	38·5	48·4	65·6	76·9	56·4	44·3	41·1	33·3	36·3	46·3
1986-87 Prices[2]												
Gross expenditure	56·0	71·8	101·6	104·2	123·6	112·7	90·9	77·1	86·7	68·7	73·2	83·4
Public expenditure contribution	23·1	50·4	75·0	80·6	92·1	98·3	67·3	50·6	45·0	34·3	36·3	44·6
	WDA Report and Accounts 1976-77 (15 months)											
DBRW												
Cash Prices £m												
Gross expenditure	—	4·6	7·2	9·2	6·7	8·4	9·6	9·5	11·7	12·6	12·8	13·5
Public expenditure contribution	—	4·2	6·4	8·4	5·9	6·4	7·1	7·2	7·9	8·3	8·2	8·1
Housing subsidies	—	1·3	1·4	1·6	1·6	1·8	1·8	1·9	1·8	2·0	1·9	2·0
1986-87 Prices[3]												
Gross expenditure	—	9·9	14·0	15·3	9·4	10·7	11·5	10·8	12·8	13·0	12·8	13·0
Public expenditure contribution	—	9·1	12·5	13·9	8·2	8·2	8·5	8·3	8·7	8·6	8·2	7·8
Housing subsidies	—	2·8	2·7	2·7	2·5	2·3	2·2	2·2	2·0	2·1	1·9	1·9

[1] Provision for 1987-88 is subject to parliamentary approval of the supply estimates.
[2] The Treasury's latest GDP deflator has been used, taking 1986-87 financial year as the base.
[3] The DBRW gross expenditure figures exclude finance charges arising from repayment of National Loans' Fund advances. The public expenditure contribution includes grant in aid and advances to the DBRW from the national loans fund. It excludes housing subsidies, which are shown separately, and which are available to help defray repayments to the NLF falling to the board.

For the years 1988-1989 to 1989-1990 I refer the hon. Member to CM 56 II.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Counter Trade Agreements

73. **Mr. Beith** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on his policy towards counter trade agreements between developing and developed nations.

Mr. Alan Clark: The Government's policy is to support the further development of an open cash-based multilateral trading system and to view with concern the growth in methods of trade, including many forms of counter trade, which may hinder this. Counter trade is however, a requirement in certain markets and I hope British exporters will consider carefully the commercial opportunities that exist.

AE (Turner Newall Bid)

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will appoint inspectors to inquire into the alleged activities of Cazenove and Hill Samuel in setting up with the aid of Barclays and Midland Banks a share buying mechanism in connection with the bid by Turner and Newall for AE, in respect of which the two banks were subsequently indemnified against any loss; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Channon: My Department has been kept informed by the Bank of England about the inquiries which as part of its supervisory activities it is making into this matter. The information available from this and other sources does not constitute sufficient grounds to justify an investigation under the Companies Act.

Smith and Nephew

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give details of Government grants to Smith and Nephew during the last five years in *(a)* Birmingham and *(b)* Pendle.

Mr. Butcher: Except where information has already been published in "British Business" as a condition of support, it is not customary to provide details of the Department's grants to individual companies, for reasons of commercial confidentiality. The information published in "British Business" covers regional development grants and grants under certain schemes under the Industrial Development Act 1982, and is published only when a payment of grant has been made. During this period no such information has been published in respect of Smith and Nephew's activities in these areas.

Departmental Contracts

Mr. Mates asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the contracts, with the subject of the assignment, awarded to management consultancy or accountancy firms by his Department in 1985, with the name of the consultants concerned.

Mr. Butcher: The following is the list for the 1985 calendar year:

Firm and subject of assignment

Coopers and Lybrand Associates Limited
Contract Monitoring

CSP International Limited
Spectrum Pricing Study

ECOTEC Research & Consulting Limited
Evaluation of Regional Policy Measures

ERA Technology Limited
Production of Guidelines on Siting of Windtunnels

Ewbank Preece Power and Water Limited
Project Case Study

General Technology Systems Limited
Co-ordination of Remote Sensing Activities

Merrow Systems Limited
Study of Small Electronic Companies

MIL Research Limited
Study on BOTB Publications

PA Consulting Services Limited
Management of Office Automation Publicity Campaign

PEIDA Limited
Study of Regional Development Grants Scheme

PEIDA Limited
Evaluation of Regional Policy Measures

Research Associates
Policy Study on British Overseas Trade Board Scheme

Research Associates
Companies Registration Office Users Study

Research Associates
Study of Innovation Support

Spicer and Pegler Associates
Market Intelligence Study

Touche Ross and Company
Industry Study

COCOM Export List

Mr. Warren asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many items are on the COCOM export list today compared with five years ago.

Mr. Alan Clark: The figures taken from the "Security Export Control" booklets published by "British Business" are:

	1985	*1980*
Military list	23	21
Atomic Energy list	22	23
Industrial list	125	101

Departmental Computers

Dr. Hampson asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to which firms his Department has awarded contracts for computer hardware for each year since 1984; and what was the value of each contract.

Mr. Butcher: The main suppliers of computer hardware to the Department of Trade and Industry are: ICL, WANG and DEC. In addition, the following companies have supplied hardware to the Department: IBM, McDonnell Douglas, Norsk Data, Datapoint, Apricot, Perkin Elmer. The details of the contracts placed are commercially confidential.

Dr. Hampson asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what his Department has spent on *(a)* computer hardware and *(b)* computer software for each year since 1984; and what is the projected expenditure for 1987.

Mr. Butcher: Expenditure by the Department of Trade and Industry on *(a)* computer hardware, including hardware maintenance, and *(b)* software, excluding software development undertaken in-house by civil servants and consultants, in connection with administrative computer systems is as follows:

(£000)s

	(a) Hardware	*(b) Software*
1983-84	5,030	819
1984-85	9,347	905
1985-86	10,789	1,442
1986-87	14,453	1,485

House of Fraser (Takeover)

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has yet reached any conclusions on the information supplied to him by Lonrho plc regarding the circumstances surrounding the takeover of the House of Fraser by the Al Fayed brothers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: No. My right hon. Friend is still considering that information.

European Community (Regional Policy)

Mr. Mason asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent approaches have been made to the European Economic Community Commission in regard to the proposed European Commission's integrated operations in relation to regional policy; when it is likely that a decision will be taken on the areas to be recognised in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The United Kingdom Government submitted on 22 January an application in respect of an integrated operation for Birmingham. There have been a number of recent contacts with the European Commission about other possible applications for integrated operations, for example in relation to certain areas identified in the Commission's communication of last July about action to help industry areas. I hope that the Government will reach a decision on further possible applications within a few weeks. The Commission has indicated that it would expect to arrive at a decision on a particular proposal about six months after the date of the application.

Unemployment (Barnsley)

Mr. Mason asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether, in the light of the further rise in unemployment in Barnsley and district since the assisted area map was last revised, he will now grant the Barnsley district development area status; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: No. Stability in regional industrial policy is important to companies considering investment decisions. It is only just over two years since the assisted areas map was revised and it is too soon in my view to contemplate changes. I would also refer the right hon. Member to the answer which I gave the hon. Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins) on 17 February at column *526-27*.

Mr. Mason asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has as to what new investment has taken place, how many jobs have been created and in which places in the specific enlarged intermediate status area in Yorkshire which includes the Barnsley travel-to-work area, since the assisted area map was last changed.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The following table gives information about investment projects supported with Government regional selective assistance in the intermediate areas of Yorkshire and Humberside since the assisted areas map was last changed in November 1984.

Travel to work area	*Number of projects*	*Total projects costs £*	*Total assistance £*	*Number jobs created/ safeguarded*
Barnsley	11	4,027,270	254,000	233
Sheffield	49	34,797,260	3,665,750	1,737
Doncaster	15	93,674,421	5,309,000	3,448
Bradford	90	88,337,543	8,781,200	3,256
Grimsby	17	84,786,500	5,418,000	1,302
Hull	36	150,664,064	10,515,000	2,386

Investor Protection

Mr. McCrindle asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps have been taken in the implementation of the Financial Services Act 1986 to ensure that the level of investor protection in cases where the intermediary is a member of a recognised professional body is on the same level as in cases where the intermediary is authorised by a self-regulation organisation; whether he has discussed this matter with the Securities and Investments Board; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: The Financial Services Act provides that a self regulating organisation or professional body can only be recognised if it has rules governing the carrying on of investment business which afford investors protection at least equivalent to that afforded by the rules and regulations made by the Secretary of State or designated agency. Recognition cannot be granted to an applicant who does not satisfy this criterion. The standard of investor protection established under the Act is therefore the same for members of recognised self-regulating organisations and persons certified by recognised professional bodies.

Yorkshire Fine plc

Mr. Whitfield asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he is prepared to reconsider the question of the bringing of prosecutions following a report made to his Department by the Insider Dealing Group of the Stock Exchange on certain dealings in the shares of Yorkshire Fine plc which took place in August and September 1982 immediately prior to that company going into receivership in September 1982.

Mr. Howard: The investigations carried out following the report did not yield sufficient evidence to support a prosecution, and the prospect of obtaining such evidence over four and a half years after the relevant transactions is too remote to justify instituting further investigations. However, I would be prepared to consider doing so if new information came to light which suggested that further inquiries might be fruitful.

CR6 Taxi

Mr. Bendall asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer of 5 February, *Official Report*, column 799, what figure was given as a grant to the firm building the CR6 taxi; and how much of that money has now been repaid.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I am unable to provide the information requested since such matters are commercially confidential.

Leyland Trucks

Mr. Bruce asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the future ownership of Leyland Trucks.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I have nothing to add to my right hon. Friend's statement on 19 February.

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what will be the total membership of the management board of the joint venture bringing together Leyland Trucks, Freight Rover and DAF Trucks; and how many people will represent Leyland Trucks and Freight Rover.

Mr. Giles Shaw: It is planned that Rover Group will be represented by one member of the management board of the joint venture which will then have a total membership of eight, and two members of the Supervisory Board which will then have a total membership of nine.

Gestetner Ltd.

Mr. Norman Atkinson asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the effects of the Government grants made to Gestetner Ltd. in recent years on the number of jobs and the development of new technology set out in the original agreement.

Mr. Butcher: Gestetner Ltd. has in recent years received assistance under schemes run by my Department for certain projects to develop new technology to meet the requirements of a fast-changing market place. The details of such assistance and the evaluation of the results of individual projects are a matter of commercial confidentiality between the Department and the company.

Manchester Ship Canal Company

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will appoint inspectors under section 446 of the Companies Act 1985 to investigate dealings in the shares of the Manchester Ship Canal Company following the takeover bid by Highams;

(2) if he will require information from the Manchester Ship Canal Company under section 444 of the Companies Act 1985 concerning its ownership;

(3) if he will restrict dealings in the shares of the Manchester Ship Canal Company under section 445 of the Companies Act 1985 while inquiries into its ownership are carried out.

Mr. Howard: Information received from my hon. Friend is under consideration to see whether a Companies Act investigation would be appropriate. At this stage it is not certain that the relevant provisions of the Companies Act 1985 apply to the Manchester Ship Canal Company.

Sweden (Exports)

Mr. Nicholls asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the value of United Kingdom exports to Sweden during the last 12 months for which figures are available.

Mr. Alan Clark: For the 12 months ended December 1986 United Kingdom exports to Sweden amounted to £2,308 millions.

Industrial Research

Mr. Michael NcNair-Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what funds have been made available for research and development since 1979; and if he will list the main beneficiaries.

Mr. Pattie: In the seven-year period from 1 April 1979 to 30 March 1986 my Department spent nearly £2,000 million on support for research and development. In the current financial year it expects to spend £375 million. It is not our policy to provide details of the support given to individual companies, for reasons of commercial confidentiality.

Insider Dealing

Mr. Robin Cook asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he now expects to receive the final report of the inquiry into suspected insider dealing in his Department.

Mr. Howard: The inquiry is continuing as expeditiously as possible but I am unable to say when it will be concluded.

European Community Documents

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he is satisfied that the documents required by members of the First Standing Committee on European Community documents for the meeting on 12 February and received in the Vote Office at 4.30 pm on 11 February were sent to the Vote Office by his Department in good time.

Mr. Butcher: Yes. They were sent to the House of Commons Library and to the Vote Office on Friday 6 February 1987. My Department has received confirmation that one set of the documents was received in the Library on Monday 9 February but for some reason the second set was opened en route to the Vote Office and was not received in the EEC Section until Wednesday 11 February.

TRANSPORT

Bus Regulation

10. **Mr. Dixon** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what evidence he has of the effect of bus deregulation on the purchase of second-hand buses by bus operators; and what assessment he has made of the implications of this for safety.

Mr. David Mitchell: Several operators have disposed of considerable numbers of second-hand vehicles but there is no evidence of the extent to which these have been brought back into service by other operators. The number of new minibuses brought into service is far more significant. Safety standards will be maintained as all public service vehicles are subject to an annual test and spot checks.

45. **Mr. Wallace** asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the research into bus deregulation being conducted by his Department in conjunction with the Scottish and Welsh Offices to be published.

49. **Mr. Alex Carlile** asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to publish the research into bus deregulation being conducted by his Department in conjunction with the Scottish and Welsh offices.

Mr. David Mitchell: A review of the opening stages of deregulation, by the Transport and Road Research Laboratory, was published in January of this year. Copies are available in the Library of the House. I expect first reports of the detailed area studies to be published in the summer. Other reports on various aspects of the research programme will be published from time to time.

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many individuals have written to him following deregulation in Cleveland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: I have received representations from five individuals. The overall position in the county is that the level of services has been broadly maintained and the council has achieved very substantial savings in subsidies.

Freightliner Depots

15. **Mr. Allen McKay** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions his Department has had with British Rail concerning proposed closures of freightliner depots.

Mr. David Mitchell: My Department was kept informed by British Rail and its subsidiary, Freightliners Ltd., of the decisions they have taken which were designed to ensure the successful future of the freightliner business.

24. **Mr. Dubs** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if, when he next meets the chairman of British Rail, he will raise with him changes in the financial targets for Freightliner depots and their implications for the long term survival of Freightliner.

Mr. David Mitchell: No. The targets BR sets for its subsidiaries are a matter of management for the board.

M23, Crawley

16. **Mr. Soames** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what improvements he plans for the M23 near Crawley.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I have told West Sussex county council that I agree in principle to their constructing an interchange on the M23 south-east of Crawley for the proposed Maidenbower development.

British Airways

17. **Mr. Chapman** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the outcome of the recent flotation of British Airways.

Mr. John Moore: The successful flotation of British Airways is another major achievement in the Government privatisation programme. I wish British Airways, its management, staff, shareholders and customers well in the private sector.

39. **Mr. Colvin** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a further statement on the privatisation of British Airways.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Mr. Chapman) earlier today.

43. **Mr. Robert Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what was the total cost of the flotation of British Airways.

Mr. Moore: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo) on Wednesday 18 February 1987, at column 628.

UK-France (Air Services)

18. **Mr. Forth** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what steps have been taken to remove restrictions on air services between the United Kingdom and France.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I met M. Douffiagues on 4 February. I urged him in particular to take a more flexible attitude towards fares between London-Paris, and to bring to an end outdated regulatory requirements which bear increasingly little relationship to developments in the market place or the needs of travellers.

Driving Tests

19. **Mr. Peter Bruinvels** asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many people took a driving test in 1986; what was the percentage success rate; and how many were taking their second or subsequent test.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We do not keep records of individuals taking driving tests. The number of tests conducted in 1986 was 2·01 million. The pass rate was 48·6 per cent.

Channel Tunnel

20. **Mr. Dykes** asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he next plans to meet representatives of British Rail and the SNCF to discuss forward plans for collaboration between the United Kingdom and French railway systems after completion of the Channel tunnel.

Mr. David Mitchell: I expect to meet the French Minister of Transport on 25 February. The Government are not directly involved in the frequent discussions which take place between the railways themselves.

Road Maintenance

21. **Mr. Watts** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what action has been taken to improve the efficiency of road maintenance by local authorities.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Regulations providing for local authorities to put more of their highway work out to competition as from 1 April 1987 were laid before the House on 19 February.

The objectives are better value for money for ratepayers and increased opportunities for the private sector.

Passenger Rail Services

22. **Mr. Teddy Taylor** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on his policy towards the privatisation of passenger rail services.

Mr. David Mitchell: The Government's policy towards the railway was clearly set out in the letter on objectives sent to Sir Robert Reid last October. There has been no change since then. We are keen to see increasing private sector involvement in supplying services to the railway and have asked British Rail to set up specific programmes to this end.

Air Services (Competition)

23. **Mr. Powley** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what steps have been taken to increase competition in the British air services industry.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Competing services have been introduced on many domestic routes. In Europe we have negotiated more liberal arrangements with a number of other states and made substantial progress in discussions within the Community. On longer haul routes, we are negotiating for the introduction of a second British carrier to Tokyo.

Airport Security

25. **Mr. Stephen Ross** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received from the British Airline Pilots Association concerning airport security; and what has been his response.

Mr. Michael Spicer: BALPA is represented on the National Aviation Security Committee chaired by my Department and participates fully in its deliberations, which cover the whole spectrum of aviation security. I am not aware that they have made any other representations to my right hon. Friend in recent months.

Severn Crossing

26. **Mr. Roy Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he has received any proposals from private contractors concerning the construction and future operation of the proposed second Severn crossing.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: No definite proposals from private contractors have been received. It is a bit early.

Green Light Taxi System

27. **Mr. Amess** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement following his visit to Basildon on 17 November 1986 regarding the green light taxi system safety devices demonstrated for him.

Mr. David Mitchell: In a letter of 12 January I told the secretary of the East Anglian Federation of Taxicab Associations that a taxi could be equipped with signs illuminated by a steady light, with a suitable message that could be switchod on by the driver in an emergency.

Arundel Bypass

28. **Mr. Michael Marshall** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received regarding the early start to the Crossbush section of the Arundel bypass on the A27.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I have received representations from my hon. Friend, the Lyminister parish council and some local residents that the Crossbush section of the Arundel bypass should be started in advance of the remainder and as soon as possible.

Bypasses

29. **Mr. Neale** asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many bypasses are currently in the trunk road programme.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: At present, there are 19 bypasses or relief roads under construction and 133 bypasses or relief roads in preparation.

Bradford-Leeds Railway

30. **Mr. Madden** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received about the proposed electrification of the Bradford-Leeds railway.

Mr. David Mitchell: I have received written representations from the city of Bradford metropolitan district council, from Bradford chamber of commerce and from one individual member of the chamber of commerce, and from hon. Members including the hon. Member for Bradford, West. I have also paid two visits to Bradford in the course of which I received a number of representations about the train services to London.

Road and Rail Investment (Scotland)

31. **Mr. Kennedy** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will state the projected extent of road and rail investment, respectively, in the north of Scotland over the next five years.

Mr. David Mitchell: Future rail investment is a matter for the British Railways Board in the first instance. Roads in Scotland are a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Network South-East

32. **Dr. McDonald** asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he next proposes to meet the chairman of British Rail to discuss the level of service provided by Network South-East.

Mr. David Mitchell: My right hon. Friend and I have regular meetings with the chairman of British Rail at which we discuss a wide range of issues including, from time to time, performance of services in Network South-East.

British Airways

33. **Miss Boothroyd** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has as to the final distribution of shares in British Airways between small shareholders, institutions and foreign buyers.

41. **Mr. Litherland** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has as to the value of British Airways shares sold to large institutions.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The final allocation was:

	Number of shares allocated (million)	*Value of shares allocated at offer price (£ million)*
United Kingdom offers		
Employees and pensioners	62·7	78·3
United Kingdom public applications	255·7	319·6
United Kingdom institutions	260·2	325·2
Foreign interest applications	5·7	7·1
Overseas offers	119·6	149·3
Loyalty share bonus retentions	17·3	21·7
	720·2	900·2

37. **Mr. Campbell-Savours** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is his policy towards the role of the sale of British Airways in expanding the numbers of small shareholders.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The objective of the British Airways marketing campaign was to deepen rather than widen share ownership.

Bus Service Levels

34. **Mr. Key** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has as to the effect the full implementation on 26 January of the Transport Act 1985 has had on bus service levels.

Mr. David Mitchell: Despite Opposition forecasts to the contrary, there was no major change in the overall level of bus services on 26 January. In fact, more new services started on that date than were withdrawn.

Barnstaple Urban Relief Road

35. **Mr. Speller** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he proposes to take to ensure that the Barnstaple urban relief road is completed by the time that the north Devon link road from Tiverton to Barnstaple is completed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Barnstaple urban relief road is a Devon county council responsibility. We have accepted it for transport supplementary grant. We understand that it is programmed to be completed by the time the north Devon link road and the Barnstaple bypass are opened to traffic.

Freightliner

36. **Mr. Conlan** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will allow greater flexibility in the financial targets applied to Freightliner; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: We have set an objective that the non-supported businesses should between them earn a return of 2·7 per cent. as a current cost operating profit on net assets before interest by 1989-90, and that they should plan on the basis of a required rate of return of 5 per cent. on programmes of new investment. It is for British Rail to set targets for individual businesses within this framework.

Transport Act 1985

38. **Mr. Frank Cook** asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he last met representatives of transport authorities to discuss the impact of the Transport Act 1985.

Mr. David Mitchell: I have had various recent opportunities to meet representatives of local authorities with transport responsibilities.

Bus Services

40. **Mr. Michael Cocks** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is his latest information concerning improvements in bus services as a result of bus deregulation.

Mr. David Mitchell: I am glad that new services, including those operated by minibuses, continue to be introduced, some to places which have not had bus services before.

Taxis (Local Services)

42. **Mr. Waller** asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he is satisfied with the number of applications by taxi operators to provide local services under the provisions of the Transport Act 1985.

Mr. David Mitchell: Some 80 local bus services have so far been registered by taxi proprietors. This is a promising start to the entry of the taxi trade into a market which was previously closed to them.

Settle to Carlisle Railway

44. **Mr. Meadowcroft** asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he intends to announce a decision on the future of the Settle to Carlisle railway.

Mr. David Mitchell: This is a large and complex case involving consideration of British Rail's financial case for closure, the TUCC's report on hardship and the wider social and economic aspects, so we must allow ourselves sufficient time to consider it properly. I cannot say when we shall be ready to announce a decision.

Parking Policies

46. **Mr. David Atkinson** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to seek to introduce common standards among local authorities on parking policies.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Common standards are already required for certain features of parking such as parking control equipment, traffic signs and order-making procedures. There are no plans to extend common standards to aspects of parking not already covered.

Travelcard Schemes

47. **Mr. Allen Adams** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has on the effect of the Transport Act 1985 on the provisions of travelcard schemes.

Mr. David Mitchell: A number of travelcard schemes are continuing, though the position varies from place to place.

Drivers' Hours

48. **Mr. Fry** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received about the effect on coach operators of current European Economic Community legislation on drivers' hours, particularly in respect of part-time drivers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: In the last three months the Department has received about 70 letters from coach operators about the current European Community regulations on drivers' hours; 26 referred to the question of part-time drivers. We are in close touch with the industry over the implementation of these regulations.

Mini-roundabouts

Mr. Evennett asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether consideration has been given to the use of filter-in-turn priority arrangements for mini-roundabouts in urban areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The filter-in-turn priority arrangement is not considered suitable because it is likely to cause considerable delays to traffic without an appreciable increase in safety.

Roads (Public Inquiries)

Mr. Cash asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will consider appointing two independent assessors with experience of the field of conservation and agriculture, to sit with an inspector in relation to public inquiries into highway routes.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Inspectors nominated by the Lord Chancellor and appointed by the Secretary of State to conduct public inquiries into road scheme proposals are experienced in the general nature of problems faced, including conservation and agriculture. In certain cases, where particular specialist knowledge is required, assessors have been appointed to assist inspectors, and this practice will continue.

Railways (London-Glasgow)

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will discuss with the chairman of British Rail comparative advantages of investing in a London to Glasgow route via *(a)* Edinburgh-Linlithgow-Glasgow and *(b)* Edinburgh Fauldhouse-Glasgow.

Mr. David Mitchell: No. BR is at an early stage of assessing whether there is a case for electrifying any possible route from Edinburgh to Glasgow and it would be wrong for me to intervene.

Southampton-Eastleigh-Portsmouth (Rail Electrification)

Sir David Price asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will approve the proposal of British Rail to electrify the railway links between Southampton, Eastleigh and Portsmouth; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: I have not so far received a proposal from British Rail, which plans to electrify the line no earlier than 1997. I am discussing with the local authority its suggestion that this date be advanced.

Eurotunnel (Loan Finance)

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the statement of the hon. Member for Hampshire North-West (Mr. Mitchell) of 3 February, *Official Report*, column 869, under what authority the European Investment Bank proposes to make loan finance available to Eurotunnel with the contingent liability borne by the clearing banks of member states; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: The EIB is an independent entity and, subject to the provisions in its statute, requires no authority to propose such a loan to its board of directors.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a further statement on the policy of Her Majesty's Government on the provision of public funds for the Channel tunnel project in the light of the negotiations between Eurotunnel and the European Investment Bank of a facility of £1 billion.

Mr. David Mitchell: Any loans from the EIB to Eurotunnel would not be public money and repayment would not be guaranteed by Governments. The bank obtains its operating resources mainly by borrowing, in its own name and on its own credit, in domestic and international capital markets.

Road Accidents (Leicester)

Mr. Greville Janner asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many road accidents have been reported on roads in Leicester regularly used by school children in each of the past 10 years; how many men, women and children, respectively, have been injured and killed, as a result of such accidents; and what steps have been taken during the past 10 years in order to render the roads safe.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The information requested is not available in the Department. All the roads concerned are local roads and the responsibility of Leicestershire county council.

Civil Aviation Authority (Chairman)

Mr. Wallace asked the Secretary of State for Transport how often he has met the chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority in the last three months; and what subjects were discussed.

Mr. Michael Spicer: My right hon. Friend has met the chairman twice, including during a visit to the London Air Traffic Control Centre. They discussed a number of matters of mutual interest.

Air Traffic Controllers

Mr. Wallace asked the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received from organisations representing air traffic controllers within the last three months; and what was the nature of these representations.

Mr. Michael Spicer: None.

Mr. Wallace asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many air traffic controllers were employed on Civil Aviation Authority contracts in each of the years 1977 to 1987.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The total number of air traffic control officers employed by the CAA in the National Air Traffic Services was:

	Number
31 March 1977	1,440
31 March 1978	1,420
31 March 1979	1,437
31 March 1980	1,493
31 March 1981	1,559
31 March 1982	1,559
31 March 1983	1,492
31 March 1984	1,446
31 March 1985	1,448
31 March 1986	1,394
31 December 1986	1,367

Mr. Wallace asked the Secretary of State for Transport what contingency plans exist to provide cover in the event of industrial action by air traffic controllers.

Mr. Michael Spicer: This matter is the responsibility of the Civil Aviation Authority. The scope for mitigating the effects of industrial action would depend upon the scale of a dispute. The CAA's contingency plans must remain confidential.

Mr. Wallace asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he is satisfied with the adequacy of the procedure for reporting near miss air collisions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The procedure for reporting near-miss air collisions is the responsibility of the Civil Aviation Authority. I have no reason to doubt its adequacy.

Severn Bridge

Mr. Roy Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is the outstanding debt on the Severn bridge at the latest date.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: £55·8 million at the date of the last published account—31 March 1985.

Mr. Roy Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Transport how much has been collected in tolls since the Severn bridge opened in September 1966.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: £29·7 million by 31 March 1985.

Mr. Roy Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is the estimated annual revenue from the new tolls on the Severn bridge.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Some £8 million, assuming 14 million vehicles cross the bridge in 1987-88.

Bridges (Strengthening)

Mr. Wallace asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is the estimated cost of work to be undertaken to strengthen bridges to carry 38 tonne lorries.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: A general statement on the cost of remedial action is set out in the Government's expenditure plans 1987-88 to 1989-90, volume 11, part 3.8, paragraph 49. It is not possible to relate this cost to individual HGVs as single axles and groups of axles govern the loading for the short span range.

Road Safety

Mr. Wallace asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is currently spent on road safety by (i) Government and (ii) local authorities *(a)* in total, *(b)* on public information, *(c)* on research and *(d)* on road engineering.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Public expenditure on road safety can be either specific — for example, the cost of the national rolling publicity campaign—or part of the costs of wider functions of which casualty reduction is one element—for example, road construction and improvement. An analysis for 1982-83 was provided to the Transport Committee (Minutes of Evidence: 12 March 1984: 286-ii). I am sending the hon. Member an updated set of figures.

Trinity House and Northern Lighthouse Board

Mr. Wallace asked the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what information he has as to the number of persons employed in administrative posts in *(a)* Trinity House and *(b)* the Northern Lighthouse Board in each year since 1978;

(2) what information he has as to the number of persons employed on operational duties by *(a)* Trinity House and *(b)* the Northern Lighthouse Board in each year since 1978.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The information is not available in this form; but in broad terms the personnel employed in administrative posts are at the head offices and those at other locations are on operational duties. The numbers as at 31 March in each year since 1978 are:

	Trinity House		*Northern Lighthouse Board*[1]	
Year	*Head office*	*Other locations*	*Head office*	*Other locations*
1978	196	1,277	81	617
1979	210	1,292	83	642
1980	206	1,342	83	708
1981	233	1,284	85	690
1982	236	1,250	86	678
1983	234	1,236	89	662
1984	239	1,211	89	658
1985	236	1,184	88	646
1986	226	1,114	86	605

[1] Including part-time staff.

Sound Fog Signals

Mr. Wallace asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has considered the implications for shipping in British coastal waters of the recent resolution of the International Association of Lighthouse Authorities on sound fog signals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: My Department has noted this resolution, but any action taken on it is a matter for the general lighthouse authorities.

ENERGY

Nuclear Power Stations

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Energy what studies have been undertaken of the cost, social and economic impact of extending the area covered by the emergency plan for nuclear power stations at Sizewell; if he will publish these studies; if he will make it his policy to ensure information on such topics is available to Members before the debate in the House; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: In his report on the Central Electricity Generating Board's application to build Sizewell B, Sir Frank Layfield makes recommendations about emergency planning. In view of my right hon. Friend's quasi-judicial role it would be inappropriate for me to comment.

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Energy, further to his reply to the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury on 3 February, *Official Report*, column 577, concerning a review of arrangements for reporting and publishing incidents at civil nuclear power stations, when he expects this review to be completed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: I have nothing to add.

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will take steps to stimulate and extend the use of combined heat and power systems as a means of conserving substantial quantities of finite fuels.

Mr. David Hunt: The Government recognise the potential of economic combined heat and power to increase the efficiency of energy utilisation and are

supporting a range of initiatives. They are contributing £750,000 towards the cost of studies by three lead city consortia to explore the techno-economic prospects for combined heat and power schemes in Edinburgh, Belfast and Leicester. In the industrial and commercial sectors, proposals for novel, economic combined heat and power projects can be considered for support under the energy efficiency demonstration scheme and, under the energy efficiency survey scheme, applications can be considered for assistance towards combined heat and power feasibility studies.

British Coal Enterprise Ltd.

Mr. Mason asked the Secretary of State for Energy what information he has as to how many jobs have been created to date by National Coal Board (Enterprise) in the Barnsley travel-to-work area and in South Yorkshire, respectively.

Mr. David Hunt: I regret that information is not available in the form requested. Total job opportunities created in Yorkshire by end January were 2,375.

Gas and Electricity (Disconnection)

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Energy whether the terms of the codes of practice relating to the payment of fuel bills and disconnections continues to apply after disconnection; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: No. The code of practice relating to the payment of fuel bills and disconnections is designed to safeguard genuine cases of hardship from disconnection.

Nuclear Installations Inspectorate

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Energy, further to his reply to the hon. Member for Yeovil on 19 December, *Official Report*, column *764*, when he expects the reviews of Calder Hall and Chapel Cross to be concluded; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 January 1987, c. *403*]: I am advised by Her Majesty's Nuclear Installations Inspectorate that it expects the further work being carried out by British Nuclear Fuels, referred to in my replies of 16 June 1986 at column *387* and 3 December 1986 at column *675-6* to be completed later this year.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Mrs. Cynthia Payne

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis as to the total amount of police time spent on the Cynthia Payne court case.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that about 520 hours of police time were spent in active investigation of this case. A further small amount of police time was spent on other work connected with the case but this cannot be separated out without disproportionate cost.

Mr. Clay asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police for the Metropolis as to the total expenditure on the investigation of the case of Mrs. Cynthia Payne; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I shall reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department who made the decision to prosecute Cynthia Payne.

The Solicitor-General: I have been asked to reply.

The decision to prosecute Mrs. Cynthia Payne was made by the Crown Prosecution Service.

Sri Lankan Tamils

Miss Boothroyd asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give the numbers of Sri Lankan Tamils who have arrived at United Kingdom ports on a month by month basis since January 1986 to the latest available date.

Mr. Waddington: Information in the form requested is not available. In particular, the ethnic origin of arriving passengers is not recorded. The table below gives the total number of Sri Lankan citizens admitted to the United Kingdom in each month from January to September 1986, the latest date for which this information is currently available. The figures exclude those granted temporary admission while subject to further consideration or investigation.

Sri Lankan citizens admitted to the United Kingdom, January to September 1986

Month	*Total Number*
January	2,010
February	1,110
March	1,500
April	1,930
May	2,370
June	2,400
July	3,210
August	3,620
September	3,720

Mr. Michael Morris asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the daily cost to public funds of looking after *(a)* the 58 Tamils claiming refugee status and *(b)* the six to whom limited rights of stay have been granted.

Mr. Waddington: I will reply as soon as possible.

Miss Boothroyd asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give the numbers of Sri Lankan Tamils held in detention centres in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement as to the intentions of Her Majesty's Government in relation to these detainees.

Mr. Waddington: The ethnic origin of those detained under powers in the Immigration Act 1971 is not recorded. The available information, which is given in the table, relates to those of Sri Lankan nationality detained at the establishments listed overnight on 14-15 February 1987 and may include passengers detained pending further examination or following refusal of entry, illegal entrants and persons to be deported.

All cases involving detention are reviewed to ensure that it is kept to a minimum.

Each case is dealt with separately on its merits and it is not possible to determine the outcome of those represented by the figures.

Place of detention	*Number of detainees*
Queen's building, Heathrow	1
Harmondsworth	21
Latchmere house RC	25
Erlestoke YCC	60
Beehive suite, Gatwick	2
Total	109

Metropolitan Police (Armoured Personnel Carriers)

Mr. Dubs asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis as to why the Metropolitan police have acquired armoured personnel carriers; and under what circumstances they may be used.

Mr. Hurd: Following his review of public order after the riots in Brixton and Tottenham in 1985 the commissioner sought and obtained authority for the purchase of 24 ballistically protected vehicles, a decision which I announced in reply to a question from the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Tom Cox) on 2 July 1986 at columns 529-31. These vehicles, which will protect police officers against firearms and petrol bomb attack, are for use only in situations of serious disorder. They will play no part in normal day to day policing. Pending delivery of these vehicles a small number of armoured protected vehicles, which are only for use in similar circumstances, have been borrowed by the Metropolitan police from the Ministry of Defence, arrangements which I explained during the debate on policing London on 11 July 1986 at columns 588-89.

Firemen

Mr. Merlyn Rees asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will ascertain from Her Majesty's Inspector of Fire Services the adequacy of firemen in the City of Leeds for checking on fire precautions in houses in multiple occupancy.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Fire Service Inspectorate has confirmed that all inspections on fire precautions in houses in multiple occupation in Leeds, which are undertaken in response to request from Leeds city council as housing authority, are carried out by qualified fire prevention officers.

Visas (Sri Lanka)

Mr. Hind asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is proposing to take to combat evasion of the visa requirement for Sri Lanka; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: In reply to questions by private notice on 16 and 17 February, my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State explained the decision to seek to return to Bangladesh the organised group of 64 Tamils from Sri Lanka who had arrived claiming asylum on 13 February with forged or mutilated passports, or having destroyed them. An application was made on their behalf for judicial review of my decision, and an order obtained on 16 February staying their departure until the application could be heard today. The matter is subjudice, but I can confirm that the Government will be vigorously opposing the application. We are in no doubt that for the reasons given by my right hon. and learned Friend that speedy action is required in some cases if the right of asylum is not to be distorted into a means of evading immigration control.

It will not, however, be enough to deal with the instant cases or to take any future cases as and when they appear. It is necessary also to consider what preventive steps may be taken.

It is crucially important that airlines and other carriers should not bring into this country from abroad people who do not hold the necessary visas or other documents. Carriers are already required to pay the detention or other costs of those they bring to the United Kingdom who are refused entry and subsequently removed.

The Government are considering urgently whether to follow the example of certain other countries, including the Federal Republic of Germany and Canada, in taking powers to impose financial penalties on carriers who bring people to this country without the necessary passports, visas, or other documents. The Government are also considering whether these powers should enable the imposition of penalties to be retrospective to the date on which they announce their proposals.

In the meantime, the Department of Transport will be speaking to airline representatives to impress their responsibilities upon them. I have also sent an urgent message to the Belgian presidency of the European Community stressing my continuing support for the work begun on these problems by the Ministers of the Interior during the United Kingdom presidency last autumn. I have expressed the hope that this work can be accelerated and that a report prepared for Ministers during March.

The right of asylum is a prized tradition in this country. It is clearly defined in the 1951 United Nations convention on refugees which we shall continue to respect. We and our partners in Europe need to find effective means of distinguishing between this right and its abuse as a means of evading immigration control.

Parliamentary Constituency Boundaries

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the criteria for determining whether parliamentary constituency boundaries are to be subject to interim reviews.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: There are no statutory criteria. Under section 3(3) of the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 it is for the commissions to decide whether or not to carry out an interim review of the area comprised in any particular constituency or constituencies. I understand that the Parliamentary Boundary Commission for England would normally carry out an interim review in any case where constituency boundaries needed to be aligned with altered local government boundaries, unless a general review or further local government boundary reviews affecting the area were in prospect.

Radio (Green Paper)

Mr. Warren asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department why there has been a delay in publication of the Green Paper on radio; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: The Green Paper, which needed careful preparation to ensure that it covers the ground thoroughly, will be published very soon.

Durham Prison

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department *(a)* how many category A women prisoners there are in Her Majesty's prison Durham and *(b)* how many strip searches were made on category A prisoners in Her Majesty's prison Durham in January, indicating (i) strip searches before and after consultation with legal advisers, (ii) after visits and (iii) after cell changes, wing search and cell search.

Mr. Mellor: There are at present four women prisoners in Durham prison who are, or who are provisionally, in category A. During January, the following numbers of strip searches of women prisoners who are, or who are provisionally, in category A were carried out in Durham prison:

	Number
After legal visits	Nil
After other visits	8
At the time of cell changes; during wing searches and cell searches	7
Total	15

Mr. Thomas McQuire

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from Merseyside police on the recent detention of Mr. Thomas McQuire by the Merseyside police under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984.

Mr. Hurd: I have written to the hon. Member.

Terrorism

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many persons have been detained on Merseyside under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) legislation since 1974 to the latest available date; how many have been charged and how many found guilty under the Act; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how many exclusion orders have been made against persons from Merseyside under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) legislation since 1974 to the latest available date.

Mr. Hurd: I shall reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons convicted under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) legislation since 1974 to the latest available date have also been found guilty under other legislation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: The Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Acts 1974, 1976 and 1984 created a number of offences specifically related to terrorism and to the provisions of the legislation. It is unlikely that persons charged with offences under those Acts could, on the same evidence, have been charged with offences under other legislation. Even if they had been so charged, it is, of course, impossible to say whether or not they would have been found guilty.

Vietnamese Refugees

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many refugees from Vietnam at present in Hong Kong he expects to accept for settlement in the United Kingdom in 1987.

Mr. Waddington: We hope to make an announcement shortly.

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what advice he has received from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees about his policy on the resettlement of refugees from Vietnam at present in Hong Kong.

Mr. Waddington: My right hon. Friend and I discussed this issue with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees when he visited London in October of last year, and officials remain in close contact with the UNHCR's representative in London. In the usual way, the content of such discussions are not disclosed.

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Vietnamese refugees from Hong Kong were resettled in the United Kingdom in the last three months of 1986.

Mr. Waddington: Twenty-four Vietnamese refugees were resettled in this country during October, 16 during November and 12 during December. All of these people were from the camps in Hong Kong. Most had arrived in the United Kingdom before October, but were accommodated in reception centres until suitable resettlement destinations could be arranged. I would refer the hon. Member to my answers to Mr. Alton on 28 November, which explain the background to our commitments on resettlement from the camps in Hong Kong.

Infant Life (Preservation) Act 1929

Mr. Evennett asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) pursuant to his reply of 9 February, *Official Report*, column *8*, why no advice is given to the police on the implementation of the Infant Life (Preservation) Act 1929;

(2) whether he has received any request from the police for advice concerning the Infant Life (Preservation) Act in regard to the offence of child destruction;

(3) whether he has any plans to issue advice to the police concerning the implementation of the Infant Life (Preservation) Act.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The investigation of alleged offences under the Infant Life (Preservation) Act 1929 is a matter for the police. I can find no record of the Department having given advice to the police on the subject; nor of the police asking for such advice.

Hospital Demonstration, Sandwell

Mr. Snape asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of the west midlands as to the reasons why a demonstration at the Sandwell district hospital in West

Bromwich on Friday 13 February was recorded on film by plain clothes police officers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the chief constable that video film of this demonstration, and of the related police operation, was taken primarily for debriefing and training purposes. If criminal acts had been committed, the film might also have been used in evidence. In the event there was no disorder. I understand that the police intend to erase the recording when the debriefing exercise has been completed.

Mr. Mark Thatcher (Wedding)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis as to how many police officers were on duty in connection with the marriage of Mr. Mark Thatcher; and what was the total cost involved.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I shall reply as soon as possible.

Visas (Colombo)

Mr. Michael Morris asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the number of visas issued for each month by the British High Commission in Colombo since visas were introduced, broken down into *(a)* Sinhalese, *(b)* Tamil, *(c)* muslims and *(d)* others.

Mr. Waddington: The information available centrally is given in the following table:

Sri Lankan citizens issued with a visa in Sri Lanka to enter the United Kingdom

Number of persons

	Total	*Of whom, Tamils*
1985		
June[1]	1,130	na
July	1,150	na
August	980	na
September	900	210
October	540	150
November	450	120
December	420	130
Total (since 30 May)	5,560	na
1986		
January	500	180
February	270	80
March	620	150
April	700	40
May	840	210
June	750	190
July	1,010	220
August	770	na
September	870	na
October	670	na
November	380	na
December	430	na
Year	7,800	na
1987		
January	170	na

na = Not available.
[1] Including 30 May, when the visa requirement was introduced and 31 May.

Police (Humberside)

Mr. Hickmet asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department for how long the post of assistant chief constable of Humberside police remained unfilled between 1984 and 1986; what representations were made to him about that matter; by whom; what representations were made by him or Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary to Humberside county council police committee about the non appointment of an assistant chief constable; what effect the non appointment had upon policing in the county; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: One of the two assistant chief constable posts in the Humberside force fell vacant on 26 June 1983 and was not filled until 1 February 1986. During this period my hon. Friend wrote to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Brittan) and also asked three questions about this matter. We wrote to the Humberside police authority seven times in the same period to urge it to make an appointment. Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary for the region also raised the matter with the authority in writing and in person on a number of occasions. In our view, the effective management of a force of the size of that in Humberside requires two posts at assistant chief constable level and that the long vacancy in one of the posts harmed the efficiency of the force. The filling of the vacancy has restored the senior management team to its correct strength and it is now better placed to secure the operational and financial efficiency of the force.

Mr. Hickmet asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department by how much spending on Humberside police was reduced between 1983 and 1986 in real and percentage terms; what effect that had upon the civilianisation programme, recruitment and policing; what representations were made to him and by whom about the reduction in the police budget; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Real term changes in public expenditure are calculated by using the gross domestic product deflator as an index of general inflation. Taking the net revenue expenditure of the Humberside police authority in 1982-83 and 1985-86, as notified to the Home Office by the authority, and applying the GDP deflator, there has been an increase in expenditure of 2·1 per cent. in real terms between these years.

Soccer Hooligans (Passports)

Mr. Boyes asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will consider withdrawing passports from individuals from the United Kingdom who are responsible for violent behaviour before, during or after football matches abroad; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: No. The passport is a document which establishes nationality and identity, and is not a licence to travel. The refusal or impounding of a passport would not be effective in preventing hooligans from travelling abroad, even if it was considered right to take such action against this one particular category of offenders or suspected offenders.

Zircon Project (Police Files)

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if, when the police return information seized

in relation to the Zircon project which is no longer needed for the purpose of their inquiries, they will ensure that all copies, extracts, summaries or abstracts of that information will be deleted from their files; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: At the conclusion of their investigations the police in England and Wales ensure that the only copies, extracts, summaries or abstracts retained by them are the minimum required for submission to the prosecuting authorities and to provide a record of police action taken in the case. The latter record is necessary in order to safeguard the police, should they subsequently be called upon to justify their actions—for example, in the event of accusations of wrongful arrest or unlawful seizure of property. The position in Scotland is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Advocate.

Rape

Ms Richardson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many men have been prosecuted for rape in each of the last five years in England; how many men have been convicted in each of these years; of these, how many have not been sent to prison; how many have been sentenced to terms of imprisonment of less than three years, between three and five years, between five and 10 years, and over 10 years, respectively; and what orders were made in respect of those convicted but not sent to prison;

(2) how many men have been prosecuted for rape in each of the last five years in Wales; how many men have been convicted in each of these years; of these, how many have not been sent to prison; and how many have been sentenced to terms of imprisonment of less than three years, between three and five years, between five and 10 years and over 10 years, respectively; and what orders were made in respect of those convicted but not sent to prison.

Mr. Mellor: I will reply as soon as possible.

Italian Nationals

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what requestss have been received from the Italian Government for the extradition of Italian nationals resident in the United Kingdom since 12 June 1986; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: Since 12 June 1986, requests have been received from the Italian Government for the extradition of six Italian nationals resident in the United Kingdom. The offences of which they are accused comprise murder, drug offences, theft, and handling stolen goods. A new extradition treaty between Italy and the United Kingdom was signed on 12 March 1986, but will not come into force until three months after the date of ratification. The Italian Government are not yet in a position to ratify the new treaty. Meanwhile, requests for extradition to or from Italy are made and dealt with under the existing treaty of 1873.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether his Department is notified by the Government of Italy if Italian nationals, resident in the United Kingdom, are convicted of serious crimes in Italian courts in their absence; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand that it is the practice of the Italian authorities to notify the United Kingdom National Central Bureaux of Interpol when an Italian known to be resident here is sentenced to imprisonment by an Italian court in his absence.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to seek further information from Italian police regarding members of an organisation responsible for bombings in Bologna who are resident in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: I will reply as soon as possible.

Public Order Act 1986

Mr. Hanley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to bring into effect those provisions of the Public Order Act 1986 not currently in operation.

Mr. Hurd: Some provisions of the Act were brought into effect on 1 January. Parts I and III, and the rest of parts II and V, will come into force on 1 April. The necessary commencement order was published last week. My Department is today issuing a circular to the police and others, a copy of which is being placed in the Library. I intend to bring the remaining part of the Act, part IV —exclusion orders—into force before the beginning of the next football season.

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those occasions since 1984 when the Metropolitan police have provided mutual aid to other police forces in the United Kingdom; stating the numbers and ranks of officers involved and the reason given for each occasion, naming the aided force.

Mr. Douglas Hogg [*pursuant to his reply*, 29 January, c. 341]: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that since January 1984 the Metropolitan police have provided mutual aid to other forces in connection with the miners' dispute (1984-85); the TUC and Conservative party conferences at Brighton (1984) and demonstrations at RAF Molesworth (1985). The following table shows the police forces to which aid was given on these occasions and the total numbers of officers, by rank, supplied to these forces over the whole period for which aid was given.

Police force	*PC*	*Sergeant*	*Inspector*	*Chief Inspector*	*Superintendent*	*Chief Superintendent*
Miners' dispute						
Nottinghamshire	12,520	1,252	626	88	26	26
Derbyshire	10,240	1,024	512	70	20	18
Humberside	3,400	340	170	25	6	3

Police force	PC	Sergeant	Inspector	Chief Inspector	Superintendent	Chief Superintendent
Leicestershire	2,280	228	114	20	6	8
South Yorkshire	2,700	270	135	19	9	0
North Yorkshire	1,240	124	62	7	4	1
Warwickshire	720	72	36	10	5	0
Kent	620	62	40	7	0	1
Durham	100	10	5	1	0	0
Essex	80	8	4	0	0	0
TUC conference						
Sussex	600	60	30	3	1	1
Conservative party conference						
Sussex	400	40	20	2	1	1
RAF Molesworth						
Cambridgeshire	180	18	9	3	1	1

Greater London

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the total number of written communications between his Department and local authorities in the Greater London area in *(a)* 1979-80 and *(b)* 1986-87, to date.

Mr. Hurd [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 February 1987, c. 435]: No central record is kept of written communications between the Department and local authorities.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the additional functions and responsibilities undertaken by his Department of a temporary or permanent kind as a result of the abolition of the Greater London council, stating the total estimated cost to public funds in 1986-87 and the total number of officials involved.

Mr. Hurd [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 February 1987, c. 435]: For the first three years of its existence, I have certain statutory functions in respect of the London Fire and Civil Defence Authority, which was created under section 27(1) of the Local Government Act 1985 to be responsible for the provision of a fire service in London following the abolition of the Greater London council. These duties, under section 85 of the Act, relate to the authority's establishment, arrangements for obtaining services, supplies and facilities, and its organisation and administration. By virtue of section 68(5) of the Act the London Fire and Civil Defence Authority is deemed to be subject to part I of the Rates Act 1984 and I have certain responsibilities with regard to the determination of the authority's expenditure limit and maximum precept. In addition, I have assumed a responsibility for determining the level of capital allocations to be made to the London Fire and Civil Defence Authority for 1986-87 and 1987-88.

Under section 13 of the Local Government Act 1985, I assumed certain administrative functions with regard to the coroners service in London previously carried out by the Greater London council. No officials are involved full time on this work and the total estimated cost is not separately identifiable.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all regional and sub-regional outposts of his Department responsible for functions or services within the Greater London area, stating functions and responsibilities of such outposts and giving the total cost of such offices to public funds in 1986-87 and the total number of officials involved.

Mr. Hurd [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 February 1987, c. 435]: There are number of Home Office administrative, technical or inspectorial sections which have regional responsibilities bearing on the Greater London area as well as other areas; but the information requested could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all functions and responsibilities currently undertaken by any division and organisation within his Department which is concerned with local authority services solely within the Greater London area, stating the total estimated cost to public funds in 1986-87 and the total number of officials involved.

Mr. Hurd [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 February 1987, c. 435]: No division of the Home Office has responsibilities which relate solely to local authority services in the Greater London area.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the action he has taken since the abolition of the Greater London council to ensure that the functions and responsibilities of his Department and its related non-departmental public bodies dealing with the Greater London area are co-ordinated with each other.

Mr. Hurd [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 February 1987, c. 435]: My Department and non-departmental public bodies consult each other as necessary on matters of mutual concern.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Lancashire County Council

Mr. Hind asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the Lancashire county council education capital allocation for 1987-88.

Mr. Dunn: Lancashire's prescribed capital allocation for 1987-88 was £5,994,000 against the authority's spending plans of £18,800,000. Its allocation for capital expenditure by governors of voluntary aided and special agreement schools was £793,000; in addition, grant aid on up to £415,000 of expenditure on projects which started

before 1985-86 will be met, if claims are submitted during 1987-88, from a central reserve, giving a total of £1,208,000 against plans of £1,284,000.

Individual local education authorities' allocations of prescribed capital expenditure on schools for 1987-88 were calculated, on the basis of information supplied by the LEAs, by giving priority to committed expenditure (up to a level previously notified to the authority), expenditure on projects required to meet basic need, and expenditure required in connection with the removal of surplus school places. Although these priorities had been made clear in the Department's letter of 30 June 1986 to all local education authorities, less than one third of Lancashire's planned schools capital expenditure for 1987-88 fell into the high priority categories, against two-thirds of its planned expenditure for 1986-87. In particular, the authority's commitments were £2·8 million compared with the provisional indication of £5 million previously notified to them. What remained for allocation after these priorities had been met was distributed between authorities by means of a formula based on the information supplied by LEAs about the incidence of substandard accommodation and on each authority's planned expenditure in other categories relating to schools.

For further and higher education, priority was given to committed expenditure (on the same basis as for schools), tertiary projects arising from statutory proposals to remove surplus places, and the provision of computers and technical equipment. Again, Lancashire's planned expenditure in the priority categories was low, and its allocation reflects this.

Sex Education

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what action he proposes to take in the case of teachers who are put under pressure by Ealing council to teach homosexuality and lesbianism as ordinary subjects; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what steps he is taking to ensure that Ealing council does not bring pressure upon Ealing schools to teach that homosexuality and lesbianism are as normal as heterosexuality; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend has instigated further inquiries urgently of Ealing local education authority, to draw the authority's attention to the law and to establish what policies the authority is now adopting on the treatment of homosexuality in the school curriculum and what specific steps it proposes to take to implement them. When the authority's reply is received, he will consider whether there is evidence of any breach of powers and duties under the Education Acts.

Expenditure Steering Group

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what are the members and terms of reference of the expenditure steering group (education); what reports are produced by this body; whether he has any plans to publish the reports of this body; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: Each year the Secretary of State for the Environment consults the local authority associations at member level through the Consultative Council on Local Government Finance and its working groups, on local authority expenditure. The consultative council is supported by joint working groups of officials from the associations and central Government for eight local authority services, including education. Each working group has a steering group which prepares a report to CCLGF in accordance with a common remit, projecting expenditure in cash for its service in the following year. The membership of the expenditure steering group (education) comprises officials of the DES, HM Treasury and the Department of Employment, and representatives of the local authority associations. There are no plans to publish its report.

Birkenhead (School Amalgamation)

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has been sent all the documentation from Wirral education authority he requires for his decision on the amalgamation of Marion High school and Bishop Challenor school, Birkenhead; and when he expects to make a decision on the amalgamation and on the capital allocation for the new school.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend has received the necessary documentation, and, as I explained in my answer to the hon. Member of 9 February at column 12 he expects to make a statement shortly.

Capital Allocations

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will state in the *Official Report* the determining factors and basis on which the 1987-88 capital allocations were announced; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: I refer the hon. Member to my answer to the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) on 16 February at columns *443-444*.

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the division nationally of the 1987-88 capital allocation between schools and further and higher education.

Mr. Dunn: The available resources were allocated on the basis of a notional division of £254 million for schools capital expenditure and £43 million for further and higher education. Authorities are, of course, free to use their allocation as they judge best in the light of local circumstances and priorities.

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received about the cut in capital expenditure allocations for 1987-88 to Liverpool polytechnic; what plans he has to review the situation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Walden: My right hon. Friend has received representations about the capital allocation for 1987-88 from the rector and chairman of the governors of Liverpool polytechnic and from a member of the European Parliament. All the resources available for education capital allocations for 1987-88 have been distributed. It is for Liverpool local education authority to determine what the level of capital expenditure at Liverpool polytechnic should be, taking account of the total spending power available to the authority.

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if, following the meeting between officials on 10 February, he now considers it appropriate to receive an all-party delegation of councillors from Lancashire county council to discuss the 1987-88 capital allocation.

Mr. Dunn: I understand that my right hon. Friend has agreed to do so and that a date for a meeting is being arranged.

Genetic Handicap (Research)

Mr. Galley asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) whether the Medical Research Council has now been informed of, or is involved in, any current or proposed rsearch project into genetic handicap which necessitates or would necessitate the use of the human embryo;

(2) if he is aware of any publicly funded current or proposed research project into genetic handicap which involves or would involve the use of the human embryo;

(3) if he has been notified of any privately funded current or proposed research project into genetic handicap which involves or would involve the use of the human embryo.

Mr. Walden: I shall reply as soon as possible.

School Accomodation

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science, (1) further to his reply to the hon. Member for Yeovil on 2 February, *Official Report*, column *470*, concerning recent information on substandard places in primary schools, what comparable or broadly comparable information is available from responses made by local education authorities in other years since 1979; if he will place copies in the Library of each circular letter sent by his Department in any year since 1979 requesting information of sub-standard primary places or schools; if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table similar to that given in his reply of 2 February, showing figures for the earliest year since 1979 for which such figures are available; and if he will make a statement;

(2) further to his reply to the hon. Member for Yeovil on 9 February concerning recent information on substandard places in secondary schools, what comparable information is available from responses made by local education authorities in other years since 1979; if he will place copies in the Library of each circular letter sent by his Department in any year since 1979 requesting information of substandard secondary places or schools; if he will publish in the *Official Report*, a table similar to that given in his reply of 9 February, showing figures for the earliest year since 1979 for which such figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn [*pursuant to his replies* 9 and 12 February 1987, c. *29* and *309*]: Similar information was sought on two occasions between 1979 and 1986. Copies of the relevant letters have been placed in the Library. The information supplied by LEAs is shown in the following tables. The caveats I have already given as to its use continue to apply.

Table 1—LEAS' responses to Department's letter of 5 February 1982[1]

Local Education Authority	*(1) Places in unremodelled primary schools constructed before 1903*	*(2) Number in (1) in areas of educational and social disadvantage*	*(3) Places in unremodelled secondary schools*[2]	*(4) Number in (3) in areas of educational and social disadvantage*
Barking	721	721	nil	nil
Barnet	1,690	915	1,135	nil
Bexley	1,200	250	nil	nil
Brent	1,200	1,200	1,250	1,250
Bromley	4,000	[3]420	1,200	[3]420
Croydon	2,084	n/a	1,830	n/a
Ealing	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Enfield	2,525	[3]2,280	360	[3]2,280
Haringey	3,345	1,947	2,998	1,937
Harrow	nil	nil	nil	nil
Havering	1,750	[3]575	1,100	[3]575
Hillingdon	742	nil	nil	nil
Hounslow	850	nil	nil	nil
Kingston-upon-Thames	650	nil	ni:	nil
Merton	1,340	930	1,249	577
Newham	3,504	3,504	2,102	2,102
Redbridge	3,755	[3]968	1,453	[3]968
Richmond-upon-Thames	556	nil	n/a	n/a
Sutton	156	nil	nil	nil
Waltham Forest	3,120	2,850	3,490	3,020
Inner London	49,016	17,204	15,125	10,228
Birmingham	12,256	10,824	6,697	3,454
Coventry	1,600	1,050	nil	nil
Dudley	5,400	1,200	3,700	1,050
Sandwell	2,718	[3]4,119	1,835	[3]4,119
Solihull	nil	nil	nil	nil
Walsall	2,544	2,544	600	nil
Wolverhampton	1,545	[3]1,6365	1,450	[3]1,635
Knowsley	nil	nil	nil	nil
Liverpool	6,544	[3]3,988	5,184	[3]3,988

Local Education Authority	(1) Places in un-remodelled primary schools constructed before 1903	(2) Number in (1) in areas of educational and social disadvantage	(3) Places in unremodelled secondary schools[2]	(4) Number in (3) in areas of educational and social disadvantage
St. Helens	1,034	n/a	1,060	n/a
Sefton	3,300	950	2,080	300
Wirral	1,378	704	3,823	296
Bolton	4,035	2,480	490	490
Bury	2,268	1,096	nil	nil
Manchester	2,600	[3]1,800	1,500	[3]1,000
Oldham	2,483	[2]2,043	300	[2]2,043
Rochdale	410	nil	nil	nil
Salford	1,560	[4]450	600	[4]450
Stockport	2,900	595	nil	nil
Tameside	1,503	1,503	3,120	3,120
Trafford	350	nil	1,750	nil
Wigan	1,850	750	nil	nil
Barnsley	2,268	439	n/a	n/a
Doncaster	1,270	[3]130	1,415	[3]130
Rotherham	3,144	[2]1,464	2,430	[2]1,464
Sheffield	1,685	135	2,609	1,220
Bradford	20,058	10,195	6,070	3,180
Calderdale	5,645	1,145	2,397	815
Kirklees	3,600	924	n/a	n/a
Leeds	14,515	1,410	9,300	1,825
Wakefield	4,256	1,728	911	672
Gateshead	3,045	1,465	nil	nil
Newcastle upon Tyne	1,796	670	nil	nil
North Tyneside	1,675	[3]197	338	[3]197
South Tyneside	717	182	nil	nil
Sunderland	2,201	147	830	nil
Isles of Scilly	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Avon	18,144	686	8,927	2,681
Bedfordshire	2,991	[3]1,012	507	[3]1,012
Berkshire	4,640	[2]2,196	1,437	[2]2,196
Buckinghamshire	1,200	n/a	nil	nil
Cambridgeshire	7,000	n/a	3,699	n/a
Cheshire	10,500	2,350	483	n/a
Cleveland	1,775	439	nil	nil
Cornwall	10,330	10,330	nil	nil
Cumbria	7,475	2,078	1,840	391
Derbyshire	29,073	7,255	6,236	5,680
Devon	18,000	[3]600	550	[3]600
Dorset	7,181	[3]310	3,267	[3]310
Durham	3,800	[3]170	2,380	[3]170
East Sussex	7,500	875	nil	nil
Essex	12,263	1,053	3,328	nil
Gloucestershire	13,322	1,487	4,059	nil
Hampshire	14,900	[3]5,500	650	[3]5,500
Hereford and Worcester	2,555	1,825	nil	nil
Hertfordshire	2,120	420	nil	nil
Humberside	8,760	4,320	880	780
Isle of Wight	2,865	458	735	121
Kent	30,168	[2]264	9,565	[2]264
Lancashire	25,895	6,160	4,145	840
Leicestershire	11,499	[4]4,480	2,871	[4]4,480
Lincolnshire	11,456	nil	3,836	nil
Norfolk	11,476	n/a	570	n/a
North Yorkshire	9,500	400	nil	nil
Northamptonshire	1,723	nil	nil	nil
Northumberland	2,559	1,012	944	549
Nottinghamshire	9,540	1,456	2,689	1,140
Oxfordshire	3,613	252	nil	nil
Shropshire	4,325	[2]2,905	1,450	[2]2,905
Somerset	8,973	1,908	n/a	n/a
Staffordshire	11,578	[2]2,352	650	[2]2,352
Suffolk	10,900	[3]1,100	1,000	[3]1,100
Surrey	16,285	[3]1,860	524	[3]1,860
Warwickshire	4,878	n/a	nil	nil
West Sussex	4,795	n/a	n/a	n/a
Wiltshire	8,721	1,015	1,380	n/a

[1] Substandard places expected to be occupied in 1984-85.
[2] In which the oldest teaching accommodation was built before 1919 and in which less than one third of total teaching accommodation is in post-1945 construction.
[3] The authority did not distinguish between primary and secondary places: the figure shown covers both.
n/a The authority did not complete the relevant section of the form.

Table 2 LEAS' responses to department's letter of 29 June 1984[1]

Local education authority	*(1) Places in unremodelled primary schools constructed before 1903*	*(2) Number in (1) in areas of educational and social disadvantage*	*(3) Places in unremodelled secondary schools*[2]	*(4) Number in (3) in areas of educational and social disadvantage*
Barking	1,586	1,292	n/a	n/a
Barnet	1,230	n/a	1,170	n/a
Bexley	1,200	250	nil	nil
Brent[3]	500	500	nil	nil
Bromley	500	nil	nil	nil
Croydon	nil	nil	nil	nil
Ealing	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Enfield	1,813	1,813	n/a	n/a
Haringey	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Harrow	nil	nil	nil	nil
Havering	1,750	575	1,100	n/a
Hillingdon	260	nil	nil	nil
Hounslow	1,038	nil	nil	nil
Kingston-upon-Thames	175	n/a	nil	nil
Merton	1,675	1,092	356	nil
Newham	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Redbridge	3,107	502	1,125	517
Richmond-upon-Thames	490	nil	nil	nil
Sutton	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Waltham Forest	3,966	3,399	2,520	2,020
Inner London	51,179	20,676	9,301	2,631
Birmingham	8,600	7,000	3,200	1,800
Coventry	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Dudley	4,600	1,050	3,700	950
Sandwell	2,256	1,866	1,396	1,396
Solihull	nil	nil	nil	nil
Walsall	3,200	3,200	600	nil
Wolverhampton	1,016	829	600	600
Knowsley	nil	nil	nil	nil
Liverpool	5,513	3,330	nil	nil
St. Helens	771	351	680	680
Sefton	1,885	680	572	nil
Wirral	1,070	915	3,328	930
Bolton	3,500	2,050	nil	nil
Bury	2,130	641	nil	nil
Manchester	2,250	1,740	510	510
Oldham	1,981	1,584	nil	nil
Rochdale	1,155	430	100	nil
Salford	1,090	150	400	400
Stockport	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Tameside	1,500	1,500	2,490	2,490
Trafford	330	nil	1,560	nil
Wigan	3,330	530	n/a	n/a
Barnsley	1,600	720	nil	nil
Doncaster	1,130	127	nil	nil
Rotherham	3,050	740	830	nil
Sheffield	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Bradford	17,169	8,675	4,003	2,002
Calderdale	4,960	1,230	2,925	845
Kirklees	2,300	578	nil	nil
Leeds	13,939	1,825	3,464	1,056
Wakefield	2,660	1,623	701	491
Gateshead	n/a	n/a	nil	nil
Newcastle upon Tyne	2,000	830	n/a	n/a
North Tyneside	1,250	nil	350	nil
South Tyneside	180	nil	nil	nil
Sunderland	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Isles of Scilly	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Local education authority	(1) Places in unremodelled primary schools constructed before 1903	(2) Number in (1) in areas of educational and social disadvantage	(3) Places in unremodelled secondary schools[2]	(4) Number in (3) in areas of educational and social disadvantage
Avon	30,114	1,683	6,849	1,912
Bedfordshire	2,187	566	nil	nil
Berkshire	3,765	1,232	2,688	nil
Buckinghamshire	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Cambridgeshire	6,600	950	2,945	648
Cheshire	8,177	1,540	592	9
Cleveland	1,750	1,610	n/a	n/a
Cornwall	11,231	2,932	987	498
Cumbria	2,078	763	3,290	2,860
Derbyshire	27,726	4,901	6,535	4,616
Devon	16,000	450	nil	nil
Dorset	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Durham	3,850	190	2,315	n/a
East Sussex[3]	5,010	620	nil	nil
Essex	7,205	1,077	4,346	n/a
Gloucestershire	13,696	1,749	nil	nil
Hampshire	14,000	4,700	600	600
Hereford and Worcester	2,107	nil	600	nil
Hertfordshire	1,205	30	n/a	n/a
Humberside	8,148	3,020	819	720
Isle of Wight	1,473	425	786	nil
Kent	26,719	68	9,313	n/a
Lancashire	22,980	4,970	3,105	770
Leicestershire	13,990	4,885	2,385	520
Lincolnshire	13,000	nil	3,000	nil
Norfolk	15,571	nil	nil	nil
North Yorkshire	8,300	2,100	nil	nil
Northamptonshire	1,107	n/a	215	n/a
Northumberland	3,085	1,447	654	401
Nottinghamshire	7,435	2,970	1,701	385
Oxfordshire	2,521	150	nil	nil
Shropshire	3,384	420	2,375	nil
Somerset	7,912	1,688	nil	nil
Staffordshire	6,582	827	463	nil
Suffolk	9,550	1,005	600	nil
Surrey	6,149	1,057	960	161
Warwickshire	3,712	nil	nil	nil
West Sussex	3,900	nil	nil	nil
Wiltshire	8,917	1,338	595	nil

[1] Substandard places expected to be occupied in 1987-88

[2] In which the oldest teaching accommodation was built before 1919 and in which less than one third of total teaching accommodation is in post-1945 construction

[3] The authority did not supply the information requested in their response to the Department's letter of 29 June 1984; the figures given were supplied in response to the letter of 15 December 1983

n/a The authority did not complete the relevant section of the form

University Funding

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what estimate he can make of the cost of *(a)* arts and *(b)* science-based university students studying for initial degrees; what variations there are within *(a)* the Arts and *(b)* the sciences; and how these variations are reflected in the recurrent grant and other moneys distributed to the universities.

Mr. Walden: The following figures relate to all university students and costs include the costs of research funded via the University Grants Committee. Information is not available in respect of first degree study alone. The estimated average net recurrent institutional expenditure per student in the 1984-85 academic year was £3,930 for arts subjects and £6,320 for science subjects.

Information is not readily available on variation in the overall costs per student within the arts. The average cost for students of clinical medicine, dentistry and veterinary science was estimated to be £8,670. The equivalent estimate for other science subjects is £5,960, and for all subjects £5,210.

The UGC's method for allocating recurrent grant is described in circular letter 22/85 (a copy of which is in the Library). It takes account of variations in the relative costs of 37 subject-related cost centres.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the percentage change in real terms, measured by the gross domestic product deflator, in the funding of each university by the University Grants Committee between 1980-81 and 1987-88, excluding those amounts representing compensation for changes in home student fees, compensation for redundancy and early retirement, changes to take account of minor capital works from the recurrent grant and changes in the level of local authority rates *(a)* including and *(b)* excluding additions made for the information technology and new blood programmes; and if he will give similar figures for the provisional distribution to 1989-90.

Mr. Walden *[pursuant to his reply, of 19 February 1987]*: It is not possible to answer this question in the form requested—and in any event such figures would be an unrealistic representation of the overall changes in grants

to universities since 1980-81. The following table sets out the proportionate real terms changes (taking account of the GDP deflator) in recurrent grants to each university between 1980-81 and *(a)* the UGC's initial allocation for 1987-88, and *(b)* the UGC's provisional basic distribution for 1989-90. For each academic year the grant figures used exclude amounts for local authority rates and for capital works from recurrent grant. No specific provision has been made in the total of university funding, or the allocations to individual universities, for 1987-88 and later years for the change in levels of home fees in 1982-83, the 1982-84 redundancy and early retirement scheme, or the 1983-86 information technology and new blood programmes. The UGC will be announcing supplementary allocations of recurrent grant for 1987-88 later this year. The committee's provisional basic distribution for 1989-90 also totals less than the amount which the Government plan to make available for university funding in that year.

Percentage change in recurrent grant since 1980-81

University	*1987-88 initial allocation*	*1989-90 provisional basic distribution*
Aston	−21·0	−25·1
Bath	+13·6	+20·2
Birmingham	−5·9	−8·4
Bradford	−21·2	−23·4
Bristol	+0·4	+4·5
Brunel	−11·2	−12·9
Cambridge	+5·2	+7·3
City	−15·8	−18·8
Durham	−0·3	−5·4
East Anglia	−1·6	−11·9
Essex	−2·4	−3·8
Exeter	−1·4	+0·8
Hull	−4·6	−8·1
Keele	−26·5	−31·7
Kent	+1·6	+4·2
Lancaster	+1·8	+1·0
Leeds	−4·7	−6·5
Leicester	+5·9	+6·2
Liverpool	−9·8	−10·6
London Graduate School of Business Studies	+23·7	+4·8
London University	−9·1	−7·9
Loughborough	+14·0	+13·5
Manchester Business School	−27·6	−46·3
Manchester	−2·7	−2·3
University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology	−20·1	−21·5
Newcastle	+0·4	−4·0
Nottingham	+0·3	+0·4
Oxford	+1·2	+2·1
Reading	−4·4	−6·3
Salford	−32·9	−35·1
Sheffield	−5·0	−8·2
Southampton	+7·7	+10·6
Surrey	−14·5	−16·9
Sussex	−3·4	−8·1
Warwick	+15·2	+18·6
York	+24·0	+29·7
Aberystwyth University College	−7·4	−10·8
Bangor University College	−6·2	−16·8
Cardiff University College	−6·1	−9·5
St. David's Lampeter	+20·8	+20·1
Swansea University College	−5·3	−11·1
University of Wales Institute of Science and Technology	−7·4	−7·1
Welsh National School of Medicine	−2·1	—
Aberdeen	−16·5	−23·8
Dundee	−12·6	−24·0
Edinburgh	—	−4·5
Glasgow	+3·6	+3·7
Heriot-Watt	+4·6	+3·2
St. Andrews	−8·2	−10·5
Stirling	−13·0	−16·9
Strathclyde	+2·5	+1·7
Total	−4·5	−5·7

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Food Aid

Mr. Frank Field asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what groups will be eligible for free Common Market food; and through which groups the food will be distributed in *(a)* Birkenhead and *(b)* the Wirral.

Mr. Jopling: As regards eligibility, I refer the hon. Member to the reply which I gave on 12 February to my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) at column *333*. I gave the list of charitable organisations responsible for distribution of the food in my reply on 29 January to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), at column *338*. Most of these organisations have a national coverage, and I would expect a number of them to have branches in the area named. I am not, however, in possession of a precise breakdown by geographical area.

Departmental Computers

Dr. Hampson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to which firms his Department has awarded contracts for computer hardware for each year since 1984; and what was the value of each contract.

Mr. Jopling: For reasons of confidentiality, it is not possible to divulge the value of individual contracts. I am able to say however that contracts with a value in excess of £10,000 for computer hardware have been awarded to the following suppliers in the year indicated:

	Year
Access Data Communications	1984-85, 1985-86, 1986-87
ACT Ltd.	1984-85
Apricot UK	1985-86, 1986-87
Aylesbury Computer Group	1986-87
Blackwell Technical Services	1984-85, 1986-87
Camtec Electronics	1984-85
Case Communications	1984-85, 1985-86, 1986-87
Cass Micros	1984-85
Complete Computer Systems	1986-87
Dowty Information Systems	1986-87
GEC	1984-85
Hewlett Packard	1986-87
IBM	1985-86
ICL	1985-86
Intelligent Interfaces	1986-87
McDonnel Douglas	1985-86
MBS Computer Group	1986-87
ME Electronics	1986-87
Microdata	1984-85
Microfin	1984-85
Norbain Micros	1985-86
Perisoft	1984-85, 1985-86, 1986-87

	Year
Prime Computers	1984-85, 1985-86, 1986-87
Programs Unlimited	1984-85
Scan Computers	1984-85
Telefile Computer Products	1986-87
Torch Computers	1984-85, 1985-86
Wootton Jeffrey	1984-85

Dr. Hampson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what his Department has spent on *(a)* computer hardware and *(b)* computer software for each year since 1984; and what is the projected expenditure for 1987.

Mr. Jopling: In my Department records of computer hardware and software contracts are not kept in a form that permits this question to be answered as specified without considerable effort. It is, however, possible to provide details of capital and running costs expenditure as follows:

1. Capital expenditure on computer hardware was:

	£ million
1984-85	3·4
1985-86	4·4
1986-87 (forecast)	3·4
1987-88 (forecast)	5·3

2. Running costs expenditure on computer hardware, software and consumables was:

	£ million
1984-85	0·9
1985-86	1·5
1986-87 (forecast)	1·8
1987-88 (forecast)	2·5

In broad terms, running costs expenditure is made up of hardware maintenance (70 per cent.) software licences and maintenance (20 per cent.) and consumables (10 per cent.)

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Mr. Colvin asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if, in the light of his statement on designating additional environmentally sensitive areas, he will now include the Test valley.

Mr. Jopling: In my statement I said that we would build on the existing shortlist from the Countryside Commission and Nature Conservancy Council. The Test valley is on that shortlist and I shall therefore give careful consideration to the case for designating the area.

Agricultural Land

Mr. Alex Carlile asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proportion of agricultural land in England is of grade 1 and grade 2 classification, respectively.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The percentage of agricultural land in England classified as Grades 1 and 2 are approximately 3 per cent. and 17 per cent. respectively.

Food Aid

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the supply of European Economic Community food surpluses to pensioners and others in the Denton and Reddish constituency; and what steps he is taking to make it easier for groups to get food to distribute.

Mr. Gummer: As I made clear in my reply on 12 February to my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin), the food is being made available to the most needy.

Distribution is for the charitable organisations listed in my reply on 29 January to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes). Most of these have a national coverage, and I would expect a number of them to have branches in the area named. I am aware of no complaints from the organisations about delays in obtaining release of butter and beef from intervention stores. Milk, cheese and the other milk products concerned are generally available from commercial sources.

PRIME MINISTER

Living Standards

Mr. John Mark Taylor asked the Prime Minister what representations she has received concerning the Central Statistical Office report of 16 February 1987, and in particular concerning living standards in Britain.

The Prime Minister: None.

National Security

Mr. Dalyell asked the Prime Minister if she will refer to the Security Commission the disclosure of information to Duncan Campbell relating to Zircon.

The Prime Minister: While the police investigation into this matter is in progress, it would be premature to consider whether a referral to the Security Commission is appropriate.

Departmental Computers

Dr. Hampson asked the Prime Minister (1) what her office has spent on *(a)* computer hardware and *(b)* computer software for each year since 1984; and what the projected expenditure is for 1987;

(2) to which firms her office has awarded contracts for computer hardware for each year since 1984; and what was the value of each contract.

The Prime Minister: The annual expenditure on computer hardware and software is:

	Purchases			
Financial year	*Hardware* £	*Software* £	*Maintenance*[1] £	*Total* £
1985-86	—	—	11,381	11,381
1986-87[2]	5,355	—	17,000	22,355
1987-88[3]	50,000	10,000	17,000	77,000

[1] It is not possible to split the maintenance costs between hardware and software.
[2] Provisional.
[3] Estimate.

There are seven contracts currently in operation, only one of which has been awarded in the period. The contractors are CASU Electronics Ltd., The Imtec Group plc and ICL (UK) Ltd.

In order to preserve commercial confidentiality it would be inappropriate to provide the details of each contract.

BBC Scotland (Police Raid)

Mr. Dalyell asked the Prime Minister if, in view of the statement of the Secretary of State for the Home Department of 3 February, *Official Report*, column 823, and subsequent statement by the Secretary of State for Scotland, she will take measures to improve co-ordination between Ministers in respect of information relating to the police raid on the British Broadcasting Corporation in Queen Margaret Drive.

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd) and my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands have made it clear that they have no role in the conduct of police investigations or the obtaining of search warrants.

Official Expenses

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Prime Minister (1) what has been the annual cost of official entertaining associated with the office of Prime Minister since May 1979 to date;

(2) what has been the annual cost of her foreign travel from May 1979 to date;

(3) what has been the total cost to public funds of the Prime Minister in all her offices, duties, accommodation and expenses in each year from 1979 to date;

(4) what has been the cost of running No. 10 Downing Street and Chequers each year since 1979, both in current and constant prices; what has been the percentage increase annually in real terms; and what has been the annual cost since 1979 on entertainment and allowances for accommodation.

The Prime Minister: The costs of all my offices are as follows:

Year (April-March)	*Total costs*		
	Current prices[1]	*Constant prices (1985-86)*[1]	*Year on year percentage variation*[1]
	£	£	
1979-80	1,429,268	2,311,908	
1980-81	1,767,949	2,410,719	4·3
1981-82	2,442,406	3,032,387	25·8
1982-83	2,728,421	3,158,553	4·2
1983-84	3,055,684	3,386,437	7·2
1984-85	3,817,676	4,055,662	19·8
1985-86	4,437,357	4,437,357	9·4
1986-87 (Estimate)	4,984,491	4,839,700	9·1

[1] Year to year comparisons are not necessarily valid (see notes 2 and 3 below)

Notes:

(1) I would refer the hon. Gentleman to my reply to the hon. Member for Central Fife (*Official Report*, 23 July 1986, columns 229-30) which gave the costs of my office on a consistent basis.

(2) The basis for the total costs changed in (i) 1981-82 when charging by Ministry of Defence for its aircraft was introduced; (ii) 1983-84, when the Property Services Agency introduced charging for buildings and services; (iii) 1984-85, when Ministry of Defence introduced charging for the Service staff at Chequers; and (iv) 1986-87 when the cost of office services was included for the first time. After allowing for the inclusion of the costs at (iv) above, the estimated cost of all my offices will not have increased since 1985-86.

(3) Following the abolition of the CPRS, the policy unit in the Prime Minister's Office was strengthened by four staff. In the last full year of its existence (1982-83) CPRS employed 35 people and cost £1,109,000. Thus, while the cost of my Office increased as a result of the abolition of the CPRS, substantial net overall savings were made.

(4) Salaries and wages, notional pension liability and administration costs and the grant-in-aid to the Chequers Trust are included. My salary as a Cabinet Minister is included but my pay and allowances as a Member of this House are excluded.

(5) Billing delays prevent some costs from being shown in the financial year in which the goods and services were provided. The above figures, therefore, do not necessarily reflect when the expenditure was actually incurred.

(6) Since the answer given on 23 July 1986 to the hon. Member for Central Fife (*Official Report*, 23 July, 1986, columns 229-30), the GDP deflator, used to measure the constant price effect, has been re-based from 1984-85 = 100 to 1985-86 = 100.

The annual costs since 1979 of entertainment, accommodation allowances and foreign visits are as follows:—

Year (April to March)	*Current prices*	*Constant prices (1985-86)*	*Year on year percentage variation*
	£	£	
Entertainment			
1979-80[1]	12,546	20,294	—
1980-81	17,649	24,066	18·6
1981-82	15,684	19,473	−19·1
1982-83	13,778	15,950	−18·1
1983-84	13,837	15,335	− 3·9
1984-85	23,104	24,544	60·1
1985-86	24,888	24,888	1·4
1986-87[2]	25,000	24,272	− 2·5
See Notes (5) and (6) above			
Accommodation			
1983-84	505,230	539,917	—
1984-85	506,787	538,379	− 3·8
1985-86	525,689	525,689	− 2·4
1986-87[2]	528,602	513,206	− 2·4
See Notes (2)(ii) and (6) above			
Foreign Visits			
1979-80[1]	151,864	245,647	—
1980-81	133,206	181,635	−26·1
1981-82	556,000	690,306	280·1
1982-83	523,587	606,130	−12·2
1983-84	216,146	239,542	−60·5
1984-85	414,259	440,084	83·7
1985-86	457,483	457,483	4·0
1986-87[2]	418,505	406,316	−11·2
See Notes (2)(i), (5) and (6) above			

[1] From May 1979
[2] Estimate

SCOTLAND

Domestic Violence

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he is considering any new measures to deal with the problem of domestic violence in the light of the report by the Women's National Commission entitled "Violence Against Women"; and if he will make a statement on his consideration of measures affecting the victims of violence in general, particularly those who do not have orders under the Matrimonial Homes Act.

Mr. Lang: I have nothing to add to the reply I gave to the hon. Member on 12 February 1987 at column 324.

Housing Revenue Account (Capital Payments)

Mr. Maxton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide details of the housing revenue account

capital payments for 1978-79 to 1985-86 inclusive, detailing the amount of capital spending by local authorities for each year on *(a)* modernisation, *(b)* capital repairs, *(c)* new dwellings, *(d)* gross lending and *(e)* other, expressing these figures in (i) cash prices and (ii) 1985-86 outturn prices.

Mr. Ancram: The information requested is set out in the tables. Local authorities' capital payment returns do not distinguish between council house modernisations and capital repairs.

£ million cash prices

	Modernisation and capital repairs	*New dwellings*	*Gross lending*	*Other*
1978-79	110·927	77·804	0·066	8·260
1979-80	134·957	86·307	1·499	9·647
1980-81	141·852	86·477	8·768	7·220
1981-82	162·018	66·300	14·884	9·491
1982-83	172·451	66·633	13·399	15·720
1983-84	210·179	68·219	8·545	18·277
1984-85	174·483	63·985	4·947	13·099
1985-86	207·211	62·006	2·438	21·720

£ million 1985-86 outturn prices

	Modernisation and capital repairs	*New dwellings*	*Gross lending*	*Other*
1978-79	209·688	147·075	0·125	15·614
1979-80	218·299	139·606	2·425	15·604
1980-81	193·425	117·917	11·956	9·845
1981-82	201·155	82·315	18·479	11·784
1982-83	199·638	77·138	15·511	18·198
1983-84	232·929	75·603	9·470	20·255
1984-85	185·360	67·974	5·255	13·916
1985-86	207·211	62·006	2·438	21·720

Note.—All figures in the above table are expressed in constant prices by applying the GDP deflator, base year 1985-86.

Children in Care

Mr. Maxton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many children in *(a)* Strathclyde and *(b)* Scotland were taken into local authority care during each of the years 1978-1979 to 1985-86 inclusive for the primary reason that (i) their family was homeless, or (ii) their accommodation was unsuitable.

Mr. John MacKay: The information for Scotland, excluding Strathclyde, is as follows:

	Family homeless	*Accommodation unsuitable*
1978-79	46	22
1979-80	37	34
1980-81	41	22
1981-82	18	23
1982-83	22	16
1983-84	13	8
1984-85 (provisional)	26	18
1985-86 (provisional)	7	12

The information provided by Strathclyde Regional Council relates only to 1984-85, when the numbers of children concerned were respectively 15 and 0.

Highlands and Islands Development Board

Mr. Wallace asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will make it his policy to appoint a resident of either Orkney or Shetland to the board of the Highlands and Islands Development Board when the next opportunity arises; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: Members of the board of the Highlands and Islands Development Board are not appointed to represent any particular part of the board's area. My right hon. and learned Friend appoints members on merit for their personal qualities and experience. It is not intended to depart from this policy.

Mr. Wallace asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all persons resident in either Orkney or Shetland, who have been board members of the Highlands and Islands Development Board; and if he will state the period of their appointment.

Mr. Lang: Two persons who have resided in Orkney and Shetland have been board members. The late Mr. Prophet L. J. Smith was a full-time member from 1 November 1965 to 31 October 1976 and Mr. Thomas C. Graham was a part-time member from 1 May 1977 to 31 October 1980.

BBC Scotland (Police Raid)

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Scotland who informed his officials on Friday 30 January about the intended police raid on the British Broadcasting Corporation in Glasgow; and by what method.

Mr. Rifkind A Strathclyde police officer telephoned my official.

Forestry (Sutherland and Caithness)

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list the areas of the Forestry Commission's plantable reserve in the flow county of Sutherland and Caithness;

(2) if he will list the areas proposed for planting by the Forestry Commission in the flow county of Sutherland and Caithness in 1987-88.

Mr. John MacKay: The information is as follows:

Location	*Area of Plantable Reserve (hectares)*	*Area to be Planted 1987-88 (hectares)*
Dyke/Strath Halladale	80	80
Tannach Hill	298	240
Stroupster	950	—
Carn Nam Muc	380	—

Forestry (Western Isles)

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list forestry grant applications approved in the Western Isles in the last three years.

Mr. John MacKay: The Information is as follows:

Scheme	*Area Approved for New Planting (hectares)*	*Area Approved for Restocking (hectares)*
Eishken, Lewis	47·8	—

Scheme	Area Approved for New Planting (hectares)	Area Approved for Restocking (hectares)
Gleann Gheireasdail, North Uist	524·3	—
Stornaway Trust, Lewis	7·0	—
Borve Lodge Estates, Lewis	7·2	2·3
Stornoway Trust, Lewis	—	1·9
Achmore, Lewis	1·5	—

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if the Forestry Commission proposes any new planting in the Western Isles; and if he will make a statement concerning its view of the forestry potential of that area.

Mr. John MacKay: The Forestry Commission has no plans at present to carry out new planting in the Western Isles. A range of trees will grow successfully on the islands, particularly where there is some shelter. The scale of planting in the future will depend mainly on private sector interest.

Household Statistics

Mr. Maxton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide details of the number of households in Scotland consisting of *(a)* one adult and one or more children under 16 years and *(b)* two or more adults and one or more children.

Mr. John MacKay: The 1981 census showed that the number of households in Scotland consisting of one adult and one or more children under 16 years was 40,455 and the number consisting of two or more adults and one or more children was 594,520.

The information is contained in table 17 of the census 1981 Scotland housing and household report, a copy of which is in the Library.

Dwellings

Mr. Maxton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will provide details of the numbers of dwellings in Scotland which are *(a)* rented from a local authority, *(b)* rented from the Scottish Special Housing Association, and *(c)* rented from a new town development corporation for each of the years 1978 to 1986 inclusive;

(2) if he will provide the numbers of dwellings in Scotland which are privately rented, detailing the numbers which are *(a)* rented with business, *(b)* rented by virtue of employment, *(c)* other rented unfurnished and *(d)* other rented furnished for each of the years 1978 to 1986 inclusive, indicating the percentage of all households which are living in each of these sectors;

(3) if he will detail the existing provision of *(a)* sheltered housing, *(b)* amenity housing, *(c)* sheltered wheelchair housing, *(d)* wheelchair housing, *(e)* housing for the ambulant disabled and *(f)* other specially adapted housing; and if he will give the proportions provided by (i) public authorities, (ii) housing associations and (iii) the private sector, indicating the proportions which are rented housing and which are owner-occupied;

(4) if he will estimate the numbers of vacant houses in *(a)* the private rented sector and *(b)* the privately owned sector; and if he will break these figures down according to the reasons for vacancy;

(5) if he will provide the number of new dwellings started in 1986 by *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* new towns *(c)* the Scottish Special Housing Association, *(d)* housing associations, *(e)* Government Departments and *(f)* the private sector; and if he will break down this information by district within regional sub-totals;

(6) if he will provide the percentage of sales of public sector dwellings since 1980 which have been *(a)* cottage type dwellings, *(b)* four in a block type dwellings, *(c)* low-rise flats and *(d)* high-rise flats; if he will express the sales of each type of dwellings as a percentage of the stock of each type of dwelling; and if he will provide this information for (i) local authorities, (ii) new towns and (iii) the Scottish Special Housing Association;

(7) if he will provide the percentage of sales of public sector dwellings since 1980 which have been *(a)* two-apartment dwellings, *(b)* three-apartment dwellings, *(c)* four-apartment dwellings, *(d)* five-apartment dwellings and *(e)* six or more apartment dwellings; and if he will provide this information for (i) local authorities, (ii) new towns and (iii) the Scottish Special Housing Association;

(8) if he will provide a detailed breakdown of local authority housing revenue account income for each of the years 1979-80 to 1986-87 inclusive; and if he will estimate income for 1987-88;

(9) if he will provide a detailed breakdown of local authority housing revenue account expenditure for each of the years 1979-80 to 1986-87; and if he will estimate expenditure for 1987-88;

(10) if he will give the average subsidy provided by housing support grant per local authority house for each of the years 1979-80 to 1987-88 inclusive;

(11) if he will provide the average annual rent for registered rents for 1978 and for 1986;

(12) if he will provide details of the type of short stay accommodation secured for homeless people and the percentage securing permanent accommodation for the years 1984-85 and 1985-86; and if he will provide this in a form similar to table 5 of SDD *Statistical Bulletin* HSIU number 17.

Mr. Ancram: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Personal Incomes

Sir Dudley Smith asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many persons have a gross earned income of £60,000 or more per annum in the United Kingdom; and what information he has about the numbers in other countries in the European Economic Community.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Information on gross earned income for the United Kingdom is compiled in terms of tax units (married couples counted as one unit) and after contributions to occupational pension schemes have been deducted. In 1984-85, the latest year for which information from the survey of personal incomes is available, 35,000 tax units had gross earned income of £60,000 or more. The corresponding numbers for other EC countries are not available.

Public Sector Manpower

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for the period since 1979 the

reduction or increase in manpower in *(a)* the Civil Service, *(b)* local government, *(c)* the National Health Service and *(d)* nationalised industries after allowing for privatisation both in actual numbers of persons employed and in percentage terms; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacGregor: The figures on a full-time equivalent basis are as follows (thousands):

	Mid 1979	*Mid 1986*	*Difference*	*Per cent.*
Civil Service[1]	732	594	−138	−18·8
Local authorities	2,368	[2]2,286	−82	−3·5
National Health Service	975	[3]1,016	+41	+4·2
Nationalised industries[4]	1,304	876	−428	−32·8

[1] Includes Royal Ordnance Factories in 1979 which are excluded from Civil Service numbers in 1986, but not yet privatised. Manpower numbers related to 1 April.

[2] Excludes 66,000 community programme workers.

[3] Provisional estimates.

[4] Excludes the following corporations, privatised since mid-1979: British Aerospace, National Freight Corporation, BNOC, Britoil, Associated British Ports, British Telecom, British Gas and British Airways; and London Regional Transport, which became a nationalised industry from 1984.

The figures given do not make any allowance for privatisation by way of contracting out of services or the disposal of subsidiaries by nationalised industries.

Source: Civil Service manpower statistics, and data underlying "Employment in the Public and Private Sector, 1980-86" Economic Trends, December 1986.

Civil Servants

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list all categories of people separately defined in "Public Bodies 1986" who were classified as civil servants in 1979; and if he will state *(a)* the total and *(b)* the percentage by which the Civil Service has been reduced if all those no longer called civil servants are disregarded.

Mr. John MacGregor: Three bodies listed in "Public Bodies 1986" — the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service, the Health and Safety Commission and Executive, and the Manpower Services Commission — are staffed by civil servants. This situation has not changed since 1979.

Apart from these, the categories of people separately defined in "Public Bodies 1986" who were classified as civil servants in 1979 but whose status has subsequently changed are the staff of the Victoria and Albert museum, the Science museum, the Countryside Commission, the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission, Royal Botanic Gardens and the state hospital management committee of the National Health Service Authority in Scotland.

The total reduction in the Civil Service from 1 April 1979 to 1 April 1986 is 134,800—18·5 per cent.—if we disregard the civil servants whose status has changed since 1979. Excluding the bodies listed above from the 1979 figures does not significantly affect the percentage change. The unadjusted change is 18·8 per cent.

North (Cost of Living)

Mr. Favell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information his Department has on the effect of the cost of living in the North on the prospects for an increased level of economic activity in that region.

Mr. John MacGregor: Differences in the cost of housing mean that the cost of living in the north is lower than in some other regions. If relative wage increases reflected this to a greater extent than at present, goods and services produced in the north would become more competitive. As a result, output and employment would be higher.

Charitable Donations

Mr. Lawrence asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what benefit to charities has resulted from the tax concessions in the Finance Act 1986 for employees wishing to make charitable donations.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The payroll giving scheme, which was introduced in the Finance Act 1986, starts on 6 April 1987. It has generated enormous interest. I am confident that many employers and employees will take part and that charities will benefit substantially.

NHS

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will calculate the cost per head of population of Great Britain of the National Health Service for each year since 1979 to 1986.

Mr. John MacGregor: The information requested is set out in the table.

Expenditure per capita

Year	*£*
1979-80	168
1980-81	217
1981-82	244
1982-83	267
1983-84	283
1984-85	303
1985-86	319
1986-87	345

This shows a real terms increase in per capita spending on the NHS in Great Britain under this Government of about 24 per cent.

Free Ports

Mr. Wareing asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he is satisfied with the progress of free ports in general and Liverpool free port in particular; and what changes in the administration of free ports are planned.

Mr. Brooke: The designation of six sites as free zones is an experiment to enable the free ports concept to be properly tested in the United Kingdom. Only three of the designated free ports are operating and as yet there is not sufficient evidence to make a judgment about the experiment. Liverpool, which at some two years has been open the longest, has reported a steady growth in business.

There are no changes planned in the administration of free ports, which must remain the responsibility of the designated authorities. Customs and Excise are conducting a review of procedures and I expect to receive their report before Easter.

Mortgage Interest Relief

Mr. Wilson asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will state the total cost of mortgage interest relief to tax payers in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* England and *(c)* Wales; and what is the current distribution of mortgage interest relief in Scotland by the following income bands: (i) under £5,000 pa, (ii) £5,000 to £10,000 pa, (iii) £10,000 to £15,000 pa, (iv) £15,000 to £20,000 pa, (v) £20,000 to £25,000 pa, (vi) £25,000 to £30,000 pa and (vii) £30,000 pa plus.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Following the introduction of MIRAS in April 1983, regional information on the cost of mortgage interest relief cannot be extracted from Inland Revenue records. The 1986-87 estimates by place of residence of the mortgagor, given in the table, are therefore subject to wide margins of error.

Direct revenue cost of mortgage interest tax relief[1]—1986-87

	£ million
Scotland	310
England	3,960
Wales	170
Northern Ireland	60
United Kingdom	4,500

[1] Includes the cost of relief to non-taxpayers.

I regret that estimates of the distribution of mortgage interest relief in Scotland by level of income are not available.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what basis the European Investment Bank has agreed to discuss with Eurotunnel the provision of loan facilities to the Channel tunnel project; what part he took in the decision to take part in such discussions; and what interest rates and date of commencement for repayment have been discussed.

Mr. Brooke: Under the terms of its statute, the European Investment Bank can receive applications for loans direct from undertakings in the Community. The EIB management committee examines each application, including whether the proposed loan would comply with the provisions in article 130 of the Treaty of Rome and the EIB's own statute. If the management committee is in favour of granting a loan, it submits the proposal to the EIB's board of directors, which has sole power to grant loans. In the case of Eurotunnel, no loan proposal has yet been submitted to the EIB's board of directors. Therefore, at this stage, the terms of a possible loan are a matter for discussion between Eurotunnel and the EIB staff. The United Kingdom Government have indicated to the EIB that they are content for the EIB to consider a loan application from Eurotunnel and, if appropriate, to put a loan proposal to the EIB's board of directors, on the understanding that there is no question of a United Kingdom Government guarantee of a financial or commercial nature.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will propose at the next meeting of the board of directors of the European Investment Bank that the proposed loan of £1 billion to the Channel tunnel project be not concluded; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer is a member of the board of governors of the European Investment Bank. Under the statute of the EIB, it is for the EIB's board of directors to decide whether, and on what terms, the EIB should grant a loan to Eurotunnel for the Channel tunnel project. The EIB has not so far put a loan proposal to its board of directors. If and when it does so, the proposal will be considered on its merits.

British Airports Authority

Mr. Wallace asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of the financial implications for the Exchequer of the privatisation of the British Airports Authority.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The financial implications for the Exchequer of the privatisation of BAA plc will depend on the price at which shares are sold. The price itself will be dependent on a number of factors, including market conditions at the time of the sale.

Small Businesses (Taxation)

Mr. Thurnham asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received about further reductions in tax levels for small businesses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont: My right hon. Friend receives a number of representations on this subject from time to time.

Forestry

Mr. John Mark Taylor asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received regarding the treatment for taxation of those investing in forestry and woodlands; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont: A number of individuals and interested bodies have made representations. These indicate a wide divergence of opinion on this subject.

Tax Fraud

Mr. Clelland asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many persons were *(a)* prosecuted and *(b)* convicted for offences of fraud against Her Majesty's Inland Revenue and Her Majesty's Customs and Excise in each of the years since 1979.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Government Trading Funds

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table updating the reply of 20 November 1984, columns *97-98*, on the financial performance of Government trading funds.

Mr. John MacGregor [*pursuant to his reply*, 17 February 1986, c. *544-45*]: The information requested is given in the table on an historic cost and a current cost basis for each Government trading fund.

	(a) HC results [1]£ million	(b) CC results [1]£ million	(c) Financial target Per cent. return on net assets	Over/(under) achievement Per cent.	(d) Break-even performance required [2]HC per cent.	[2]CC per cent.
Royal Ordnance Factories[3]						
1984-85	(16·2)	(31·3)	5·0	(12·9)	0·0	0·0
Royal Mint						
1984-85	5·7	4·7	12·0	(0·8)	0·6	0·5
1985-86	3·8	2·8	12·0	(6·5)	0·3	0·2
The Crown Suppliers						
1983-84	8·3	6·2	5·0	11·4	3·6	3·5
1984-85	(0·6)	(2·1)	5·0	(4·4)	4·5	4·5
1985-86	2·6	1·4	5·0	1·2	3·9	3·9
HM Stationery Office						
1984-85	4·9	0·2	5·0	7·0	11·8	11·7
1985-86	3·7	1·6	5·0	7·5	10·5	10·4

[1] Columns *(a)* and *(b)* give the surplus/(deficit) for the year after interest payable on long-term loans and extraordinary items.
[2] The entries under column *(d)* give the return required on net assets employed to meet the interest payable on long-term loans.
[3] For period 1 April 1984 to 1 January 1985. The Royal Ordnance factories were vested in Royal Ordnance plc on 2 January 1985.

Oil and Petroleum Taxes

Mr. Bermingham asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total received by petroleum revenue tax and tax on diesel fuel oil used in private and commercial vehicles in 1985-86.

Mr. Norman Lamont [*pursuant to his reply*, 20 February 1987]: Total receipts of petroleum revenue tax (including advance payments) and duty on diesel fuel oil in 1985-86 were £6,380 million and £1,336 million respectively.

EMPLOYMENT

Female Workers (Pay)

Mr. Prescott asked the Paymaster General if he will state the estimated proportion of all part-time female workers being paid less than (i) £2, (ii) £3, (iii) £3·20 and (iv) £3·40 an hour in April 1985 and April 1986; and if he will provide the same data subdivided into (i) manual and (ii) non-manual females.

Mr. Lee: The available information comes from the new earnings survey and relates to part-time female employees on adult rates whose earnings were not affected by absence:

Great Britain

	Percentage with gross hourly earnings below 200p	300p	320p	340p
April 1985				
Part-time females				
manual	44	92	94	96
non-manual	19	67	72	77
all	31	79	83	86
April 1986				
Part-time females				
manual	21	89	93	95
non-manual	8	61	67	72
all	14	74	79	83

The new earnings survey sample does not include all part-time employees whose earnings are below the national insurance threshold. Comparisons between years will be affected by changes in this threshold particularly at the lower levels of earnings shown in this table.

North-East (Job Creation)

Mr. Merchant asked the Paymaster General if he will list the job creation measures in the north-east that have been supported by the Newcastle city action team using the £1 million fund announced by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in his statement on 14 May 1986, *Official Report*, column 705.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The purpose of the fund is to stimulate job creation and enterprise in the north-east and I am pleased to say that I have approved support for a number of projects which meet that aim. They have been designed particularly to develop the infrastructure of support for small and developing business enterprise, to introduce products in the areas worst affected by shipbuilding redundancies and to provide some projects with region-wide application. The funding by the city action team was designed to provide comparatively small sums of money which were necessary to lever and to bring together other sources of support from the public and private sectors for the project. Without the grants from the CAT fund these schemes would not have gone ahead. The projects include:

(1) "Design Works" — A project sponsored by the Burton Group plc involving the conversion of a derelict warehouse into a centre of excellence for all types of design including studios, work spaces, offices and exhibition facilities, providing design consultancy and services; it will provide employment and training opportunities for people in the north-east and establish a significant capability for small companies—a grant of £300,000.

(2) North East Media Development Council — an innovative project to establish a regional media training centre specialising in all aspects of film and video work and giving the necessary accreditation for graduating trainees to obtain employment in the industry—a grant of £50,000.

(3) Tyne River Boat Project sponsored by the Association of Marine and Related Charities to build vessels for franchised operation to carry passengers on River Tyne cruises for leisure and educational purposes—a grant of £80,000.

(4) West Newcastle Enterprise Centre to provide business advice and workshop facilities, primarily to assist the unemployed in start-up-businesses — a grant of £30,000.

(5) Product Database — a project sponsored by Newcastle technology centre to establish a database facility for small companies within the region to provide information on new products and to assist companies in adapting their production policies to maintain and increase competitiveness — a grant of £15,000.

(6) Preliminary work by Durham University Business School to establish the basis on which a procurement service for small firms in the region can be established, based on public sector purchasing — a grant of £11,750.

(7) Business Information System On Line (BISON), a project sponsored by the Local Enterprise Agency Project North East to provide a range of computerised guidance tests, marketing data and other information for new entrepreneurs—a grant of £3,500.

(8) Northern Youth Venture Fund, sponsored by the Local Enterprise Agency Project North East and attracting funds from the private sector. To provide low interest loans to youth based businesses — a grant of £60,000.

(9) St. Thomas Street Stables Workshops, conversion of former stables in central Newcastle into managed workshops and office units which provide tenants with centralised services and marketing and financial advice through the Tyne and Wear Enterprise Trust — a grant of £10,000.

(10) Newcastle Marketing Advice Centre — a grant of £2,000 to assist with the promotion of this centre set up by the city action team to provide marketing information and advice to small businesses and £10,000 towards the cost of networking this service to Sunderland.

(11) Innovative Factory for New Technology (INFANT) — a project in Sunderland sponsored by MARI Avanced Electronics Ltd. to establish a factory unit providing training and work experience, particularly in microelectronics—a grant of £197,500.

(12) Centre for Hi-Tech Activity in North Tyneside (CHANT), a project also sponsored by MARI Advanced Micro Electronics Ltd. to establish a centre for training and business development for new small enterprises in the high technology sector—a grant of £80,000.

These projects will make a significant contribution to tackling directly the need for jobs in the north-east and also to providing a foundation for future enterprise development in the region. In many cases the grants complement support from the urban programme, some have DTI support, others combine other Government schemes such as YTS and the community programme and some include significant private sector contributions.

Major projects are proposed for Cleveland but at this stage the other public and private sector contributions have to be confirmed.

Mr. Holt asked the Paymaster General how many people in total were employed in the furniture industry in each of the years 1986, 1981, 1976, 1971, 1966 and 1961; what percentage were *(a)* male and *(b)* female; and how many apprentices there were in each of these years.

Mr. Lee: Separate statistics for the furniture industry are not available for the period specified and the series is broken by the introduction of the 1,980 standard industrial classification which reclassifies certain activities. The available information is as follows:

Employees in Employment in the Timber and Furniture Industry in Great Britain

	Standard Industrial Classification 1968 Order 17 (Timber, furniture, etc)			*Standard Industrial Classification 1980 Class 46 (Timber and wooden furniture)*		
	All employees	*Percentage of males*	*Percentage of females*	*All employees*	*Percentage of males*	*Percentage of females*
June 1961	280,000	80	20	n/a	n/a	n/a
June 1966	283,000	81	19	n/a	n/a	n/a
June 1971	264,000	81	19	n/a	n/a	n/a
June 1976	259,000	81	19	n/a	n/a	n/a
June 1981	220,000	80	20	n/a	n/a	n/a
Sept 1981	216,000	80	20	213,000	80	20
June 1986	n/a	n/a	n/a	206,000	81	19

n/a Not available.

Within the above figures, separate statistics for the furniture industry are available from 1981 as follows:

Employees in Employment in the Furniture Industry in Great Britain Standard Industrial Classification 1980 Activity Heading 4671 (Wooden and upholstered furniture)

	All employees	*Percentage of males*	*Percentage of females*
September 1981	87,000	79	21
June 1986	82,000	78	22

The estimate for wooden and upholstered furniture are subject to considerable potential estimation error due to the relatively small number of employees in the industry. The Department's statistics do not include separate figures for apprentices in the furniture industry.

Disabled People

Mr. Wareing asked the Paymaster General what expenditure has been incurred by his Department since November 1983 in enforcing the statutory obligations of employers to fulfill the 3 per cent. quota of disabled people in their work force.

Mr. Lee: Precise information is not available in the form requested. The administration and enforcement of the provisions of the quota scheme are an integral part of the Manpower Services Commission's employment services for people with disabilities which are provided through jobcentres and the Disablement Advisory Service. However, the Manpower Services Commission estimates expenditure on administration and enforcement of the scheme to be between £1 million and £2 million each year.

Departmental Computers

Dr. Hampson asked the Paymaster General what his Department has spent on *(a)* computer hardware and *(b)* computer software for each year since 1984; and what is the projected expenditure for 1987.

Mr. Lee: For the financial years 1984-85, 1985-86, 1986-87 and 1987-88 Department of Employment expenditure on computer hardware and computer software is as follows:

£ million

	Hardware	*Software*
1984-85	5·77	0·59
1985-86	8·57	1·22
1986-87	10·58	1·12
1987-88	13·01	1·48

Dr. Hampson asked the Paymaster General to which firms his Department has awarded contracts for computer hardware for each year since 1984; and what was the value of each contract.

Mr. Lee: For reasons of commercial confidentiality it is not possible to answer this question in the detail requested. However, since 1984 24 firms have been awarded contracts by my Department for orders in excess of £10,000.

EC Social Fund Projects (Liverpool)

Mr. Parry asked the Paymaster General if he will list in the *Official Report* projects funded by the EEC social fund in Liverpool in each of the past five years and the amount of funding in each case.

Mr. Lee: The only information readily available on successful European social fund applications in Liverpool relates to the wider metropolitan county of Merseyside, and is restricted to the years 1984 onwards. Details for the last three years for which information is available are given in the table.

The figures given relate to the amounts allocated by the European Commission to the individual applications. For a variety of reasons, the amounts finally paid out will in some cases have been lower and some projects may not have taken place.

1984

Applicant	*ESF Aid Agreed £*
Alvis Ltd.	38,916·00
Brothers of Charity	45,294·00
Case Tractors	25,761·00
CDS Training Ltd.	77,435·00
CDS Training Ltd.	10,170·00
CDS Training Ltd.	46,500·00
City of Bradford M.C.	187,900·00
Greenbank Project	6,214·00
Industrial Experience Projects	3,705·00
Industrial Experience Projects	29,835·00
Kelco Ltd., Wirral	12,890·00
Liverpool City Council	112,232·00
Liverpool City Council	85,543·00
Liverpool City Council	66,521·00
Liverpool City Council	126,437·00
Liverpool City Council	200,392·00
Liverpool City Council	226,842·00
Liverpool City Council	85,543·00
Liverpool Society for M.H.C.	3,274·00
Merseyside Cablevision Ltd.	30,125·00
Merseyside County Council	13,077·00
Merseyside County Council	13,000·00
Merseyside County Council	18,252·00
Merseyside County Council	48,200·00
Merseyside County Council	33,750·00
Merseyside County Council	16,725·00
Merseyside Education Training	69,105·00
Merseyside Passenger Transport	142,974·00
National Association of Youth Clubs	318,410·00
Neo Industries Ltd.	57,050·00
New Enterprise Workshops Toxteth	30,420·00
North Everton Technology Centre	64,665·00
North Liverpool Music Centre	16,110·00
Parents Apprenticeship A.O.	23,035·00
Sefton Community Resource Action	366,667·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	90,550·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	1,772·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	38,950·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	17,646·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	54,898·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	5,684·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	3,206·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	9,979·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	9,297·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	4,486·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	20,947·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	25,548·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	69,975·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	133,414·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	174,234·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	20,190·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	57,401·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	30,126·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	21,174·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	103,218·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	15,914·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	26,423·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	76,810·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	12,864·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	26,054·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	49,689·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	9,672·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	8,074·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	7,309·00
Wirral M.B.C.	9,235·00
Wirral M.B.C.	19,115·00
Wirral M.B.C.	54,348·00
Wirral M.B.C.	8,775·00
Wirral M.B.C.	49,915·00
Wirral M.B.C.	9,933·00
Women's Technology Training Ltd.	22,871·00

1985

Applicant	*ESF Aid Agreed (£)*
Brothers of Charity	30,913·00
Brothers of Charity	191,147·00
CDS Training	30,670·00
CDS Training	72,630·00
Croxteth Commun. Tech. Training	82,198·00
Employment Resource Group	65,500·00
Greater Manchester Council	66,751·00
Greenbank Project	97,503·00
Greenbank Project	270,814·00
Imperial Chemical Industries	100,099·00
Industrial Experience Projects	102,835·00
Industrial Experience Projects	2,780·00
Industrial Experience Projects	2,913·00
J. Bibby Edible Oils Ltd.	233,449·00
Keyes UK	15,188·00
Knowsley MBC	44,698·00
Knowsley MBC	50,801·00
Knowsley MBC	25,701·00
Knowsley MBC	14,563·00
Knowsley MBC	8,740·00
Knowsley MBC	12,052·00
Liverpool Action Group	24,120·00

Applicant	ESF Aid Agreed (£)
Liverpool Appropriate Tech. Group	91,849·00
Liverpool City Council	429,896·00
Liverpool City Council	297,427·00
Liverpool City Council	400,964·00
Liverpool City Council	31,477·00
Liverpool City Council	20,293·00
Liverpool City Council	86,127·00
Liverpool City Council	150,423·00
Liverpool City Council	248,221·00
Liverpool City Council	59,112·00
Liverpool Elfrida Rathbone Association	37,346·00
Liverpool Society for Mentally Handicapped	6,871·00
Mastel Systems	27,900·00
Mersey Regional Health Authority	20,875·00
Merseyside CC	201,590·00
Merseyside CC	80,000·00
Merseyside CC	13,386·00
Merseyside CC	17,893·00
Merseyside CC	75,000·00
Merseyside CC	48,549·00
Merseyside Educational Training Enterprise	28,000·00
Merseyside Educational Training Enterprise	228,763·00
Merseyside Educational Training Enterprise	239,725·00
Merseyside Educational Training Enterprise	46,335·00
Merseyside Passsenger Transport Executive	26,975·00
Neo Industries Ltd.	72,788·00
New Enterprise Workshops Toxteth	84,188·00
North Everton Technology Centre	66,442·00
North Liverpool Music Centre	85,378·00
Parents Apprenticeship Action	12,789·00
Rural Preservation Association	84,047·00
Sefton Community Residents Action Group	9,883·00
St. Helens MBC	20,318·00
St. Helens MBC	54,402·00
St. Helens MBC	143,698·00
St. Helens MBC	4,408·00
St. Helens MBC	9,928·00
St. Helens MBC	19,013·00
St. Helens MBC	35,886·00
St. Helens MBC	48,635·00
St. Helens MBC	16,015·00
St. Helens MBC	19,587·00
St. Helens MBC	10,348·00
St. Helens MBC	8,440·00
St. Helens MBC	4,075·00
St. Helens MBC	18,528·00
St. Helens MBC	3,229·00
St. Helens MBC	1,604·00
St. Helens MBC	9,495·00
St. Helens MBC	8,431·00
St. Helens MBC	26,223·00
St. Helens MBC	164,436·00
St. Helens MBC	19,341·00
St. Helens MBC	108,527·00
St. Helens MBC	8,541·00
St. Helens MBC	87,045·00
St. Helens MBC	18,528·00
St. Helens MBC	7,441·00
St. Helens MBC	2,843·00
St. Helens MBC	9,788·00
St. Helens MBC	392·00
St. Helens MBC	7,389·00
St. Helens MBC	66,899·00
St. Helens MBC	108,886·00
St. Helens MBC	7,389·00
Wirral MBC	16,986·00
Wirral MBC	221,824·00
Wirral MBC	46,082·00
Wirral MBC	35,115·00
Wirral MBC	36,798·00
Wirral MBC	48,338·00
Wirral MBC	48,338·00
Wirral MBC	16,310·00
Wirral MBC	45,863·00
Wirral MBC	17,293·00
Wirral MBC	157,488·00
Wirral MBC	12,482·00
Wirral MBC	18,042·00
Wirral MBC	18,618·00
Wirral MBC	18,878·00
Wirral MBC	91,433·00
Wirral MBC	49,854·00
Wirral MBC	19,152·00
Wirral MBC	29,759·00
Womens Technology Training Ltd.	142,457·00

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Applicant	ESF aid agreed £
Acorn Venture Association	27,591·00
Automotive Products plc.	22,037·00
British Shipbuilders	333,079·00
British Shipbuilders	129,572·00
Brothers of Charity	277,602·00
Brothers of Charity	28,021·00
CDS Training for Enterprise	30,000·00
CDS Training for Enterprise	17,115·00
CDS Training for Enterprise	19,667·00
CDS Training for Enterprise	15,000·00
CDS Training for Enterprise	12,381·00
Counter Image	16,323·00
Employment Resource Group Ltd.	68,300·00
Greenbank Project	111,902·00
Ind. Experience Projects Ltd.	31,262·00
Ind. Experience Projects Ltd.	114,889·00
Keyes U.K. Limited	7,631·00
Knowsley Community Training Co-op	36,792·00
Knowsley Community Training Co-op	50,250·00
Knowsley M.B.C.	54,921·00
Knowsley M.B.C.	6,711·00
Knowsley M.B.C.	29,351·00
Knowsley M.B.C.	249,740·00
Knowsley M.B.C.	59,250·00
Landlife	39,978·00
Liverpool Appropriate Technical Ltd.	98,414·00
Liverpool Education Authority	419,808·00
Liverpool Education Authority	196,902·00
Liverpool Education Authority	228,260·00
Liverpool Education Authority	185,267·00
Liverpool Education Authority	139,459·00
Liverpool Education Authority	157,845·00
Liverpool Education Authority	147,198·00
Liverpool Elfrida Rathbone Association	66,379·00
Liverpool Society for Mencap	12,286·00
Liverpool Society for Mencap	24,572·00
Merseyside County Council	30,161·00
Merseyside Education Training and Enterprise	80,180·00
Merseyside Education Training and Enterprise	54,553·00
Merseyside Education Training and Enterprise	53,250·00
Merseyside Education Training and Enterprise	60,189·00
Merseyside Education Training and Enterprise	60,265·00
Merseyside Education Training and Enterprise	70,110·00
Merseyside Education Training and Enterprise Ltd.	18,950·00
Merseyside Education Training and Enterprise Ltd.	18,950·00
Merseyside Enterprise Board	15,739·00
Merseyside Parks Training Centre	24,369·00
North Everton Technology Centre	83,155·00
North Liverpool Music Centre	97,395·00
Neo Industries Limited	34,368·00
Neo Industries Limited	74,981·00
Parents Apprenticeship Action	92,425·00
Plessey Major Systems Ltd.	129,306·00
Plessey Major Systems Ltd.	82,110·00
Sefton Community Resource Action	89,125·00

Applicant	ESF aid agreed £
Sefton Disabled Group	50,550·00
Sefton M.B.C.	14,477·00
South Sefton Health Authority	12,473·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	30,582·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	30,459·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	29,580·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	166,753·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	8,780·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	8,727·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	2,081·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	8,335·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	4,356·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	137,205·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	20,947·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	10,660·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	8,804·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	3,626·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	4,197·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	17,522·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	90,628·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	17,592·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	20,339·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	184,225·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	145,690·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	7,784·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	23,551·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	6,616·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	4,965·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	39,611·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	10,046·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	8,883·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	90,972·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	21,122·00
St. Helens M.B.C.	4,532·00
Wirral Borough Council	325,979·00
Wirral Borough Council	205,785·00
Wirral Borough Council	81,252·00
Wirral Borough Council	89,186·00
Wirral Borough Council	44,069·00
Wirral Borough Council	62,546·00
Wirral Borough Council	30,906·00
Wirral M.B.C.	20,643·00
Wirral M.B.C.	25,148·00
Wirral M.B.C.	46,122·00
Wirral M.B.C.	39,915·00
Wirral M.B.C.	18,633·00
Womens Technology Training Ltd.	151,266·00

Unemployment

Mr. Mason asked the Paymaster General what is the average rate of unemployment in each of the intermediate areas and development areas, giving the figures for male and female unemployment.

Mr. Lee: The following information is in the Library. The tables show the numbers of unemployed claimants at 8 January 1987, expressed as a percentage of employees in employment plus the unemployed, in the travel-to-work areas of Great Britain which have assisted area status.

A rate is not calculated for the Manchester assisted area since it is only part of the travel-to-work area.

Development Areas

Travel-to-work area	Male	Female
Falmouth	26·2	17·4
Helston	28·4	24·6
Newquay	32·2	23·6
Penzance and St. Ives	29·5	17·9
Redruth and Camborne	25·0	17·8
Corby	21·1	13·8
Rotherham and Mexborough	26·4	16·2
Scunthorpe	20·2	13·9
Whitby	31·8	14·9
Liverpool	26·0	12·3
Widnes and Runcorn	22·3	13·0
Wigan and St. Helens	22·5	13·6
Wirral and Chester	22·4	11·6
Workington	18·4	14·8
Bishop Auckland	24·3	13·8
Hartlepool	29·5	13·6
Middlesbrough	28·3	13·0
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	23·2	11·4
South Tyneside	32·7	16·0
Stockton-on-Tees	22·7	12·6
Sunderland	27·2	13·5
Aberdare	27·3	12·7
Blaenau Gwent and Abergavenny	24·0	13·3
Cardigan	26·0	26·5
Holyhead	25·6	19·4
Lampeter and Aberaeron	26·4	22·3
Merthyr and Rhymney	23·1	13·0
Neath and Port Talbot	15·5	11·2
Pontypridd and Rhondda	21·4	10·5
Shotton, Flint and Rhyl	21·2	14·9
South Pembrokeshire	24·8	23·2
Wrexham	21·0	13·1
Arbroath	23·2	18·8
Bathgate	26·7	15·3
Cumnock and Sanquhar	36·7	17·0
Dumbarton	21·9	17·0
Dundee	20·9	11·4
Glasgow	23·0	11·1
Greenock	26·4	14·3
Irvine	31·2	19·0
Kilmarnock	23·3	12·4
Lanarkshire	27·9	15·0

Intermediate Areas

Travel-to-work area	Male	Female
Bodmin and Liskeard	22·2	16·3
Bude	18·2	18·9
Cinderford and Ross-on-Wye	15·3	16·6
Plymouth	16·9	12·6
Birmingham	18·9	11·6
Coventry and Hinckley	16·8	12·1
Dudley and Sandwell	18·7	13·1
Kidderminster	16·3	13·2
Telford and Bridgnorth	22·1	14·9
Walsall	20·2	12·6
Wolverhampton	21·3	13·3
Gainsborough	20·5	13·0
Barnsley	25·3	13·7
Bradford	18·5	10·2
Doncaster	22·8	15·9
Grimsby	19·4	11·1
Hull	21·0	11·8
Sheffield	19·4	11·8
Accrington and Rossendale	16·1	10·7
Blackburn	18·2	10·2
Bolton and Bury	19·5	11·5
Oldham	17·5	10·5
Rochdale	20·2	12·4
Darlington	16·7	10·9
Durham	17·4	9·2
Morpeth and Ashington	23·6	12·0
Bangor and Caernarfon	22·1	13·0
Bridgend	20·3	11·0
Cardiff	18·2	8·6
Fishguard	22·5	23·1
Haverfordwest	23·2	11·9
Llanelli	19·2	16·2
Newport	18·6	11·3
Pontypool and Cwmbran	17·7	12·1
Porthmadoc and Flestiniog	20·6	17·1
Pwllheli	27·2	17·1
Swansea	19·3	9·3

Travel-to-work area	Male	Female
Alloa	22·2	14·7
Ayr	19·3	10·2
Balmoch	22·9	16·7
Campbeltown	24·2	14·0
Dunfermline	20·1	14·3
Dunoon and Bute	24·7	16·5
Falkirk	19·7	12·9
Forres	28·3	26·1
Girvan	31·5	19·5
Invergordon and Dingwall	22·4	21·4
Kirkcaldy	22·5	12·5
Lochaber	24·9	21·5
Newton Stewart	24·1	20·4
Skye and Wester Ross	26·7	24·9
Stewartry	15·0	13·8
Stranraer	19·5	16·9
Sutherland	26·7	20·6
Western Isles	32·6	13·5
Wick	27·1	9·0

Mr. Mason asked the Paymaster General what is the number of unemployed per vacancy in each of the intermediate and development areas in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Lee: The following information is available in the Library. The table shows the number of unemployed claimants on 8 January 1987 in each travel-to-work area which has intermediate or development area status, together with the jobcentres and careers offices which cover areas most nearly corresponding to the travel-to-work areas, and the numbers of unfilled vacancies at jobcentres on 9 January 1987 and at careers offices on 8 January 1987. Figures for vacancies at jobcentres and careers offices cannot be added together because some vacancies are notified to both offices. Because of the differences in the areas covered by the unemployment and vacancy figures, accurate ratios of unemployed to vacancies cannot be calculated.

Travel-to-work area	Unemployed claimants	Jobcentres	Vacancies	Careers Offices	Vacancies
Development Areas					
Falmouth	2,322	Falmouth	148	Falmouth	4
Helston	1,666	Helston	63	Helston	8
Newquay	2,847	Newquay	133	Newquay	0
Penzance and St. Ives	4,216	Penzance St. Ives	204	Penwith area	0
Redruth and Camborne	4,749	Camborne Hayle Redruth	322	Camborne	4
Corby	4,213	Corby	325	Corby	19
Rotherham and Mexborough	23,655	Dinnington Goldthorpe Maltby Mexborough Rotherham	336	Rotherham	7
Scunthorpe	9,233	Barton on Humber Scunthorpe Brigg	398	Scunthorpe	11
Whitby	1,529	Whitby	28		
Liverpool	102,926	Allerton Belle Vale Bootle Crosby Everton Garston Kirkby Liverpool (Lance St) Liverpool (Lord St) Williamson Sq Old Swan Norris Green Ormskirk Prescot Huyton Halewood Skelmersdale Southport Toxteth Walton Vale	2,470	Bootle Crosby Halewood Kirkby Liverpool Ormskirk Huyton Prescot West Lancs Southport	38
Widnes and Runcorn	11,295	Runcorn Widnes	307	Halton (Runcorn) Halton (Widnes)	10

Travel-to-work area	Unemployed claimants	Jobcentres	Vacancies	Careers Offices	Vacancies
Wigan and St. Helens	34,984	Ashton in Makerfield Atherton Hindley Goldborne Leigh Newton-le-willows St. Helens Wigan	1,122	Leigh Newton-le-willows St. Helens Wigan	9
Wirral and Chester	38,478	Bebington Upton Birkenhead Chester Ellesmere Port Hoylake Neston Wallasey	1,343	Bebington Birkenhead Chester Ellesmere Port Wallasey Moreton	32
Workington	4,336	Aspatria Cockermouth Maryport Workington	178	Workington	3
Bishop Auckland	8,529	Bishop Auckland Shildon Crook Newton Aycliffe	466	Bishop Auckland Crook Newton Aycliffe	5
Hartlepool	9,944	Hartlepool	223	Hartlepool	5
Middlesbrough	29,248	Eston Guisborough Loftus Middlesbrough Redcar Saltburn	726	Eston Guisborough Middlesbrough Redcar	17
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	65,651	Blaydon on Tyne Consett Cramlington Felling Gateshead Newburn Nelson Street Plummer House Newcastle North Shields Prudhoe Lanchester Stanley Shields Road Wallsend West Moor Whitley Bay	3,910	Blaydon on Tyne Consett Gateshead Newcastle-upon-Tyne North Shields Stanley Wallsend	83
South Tyneside	13,721	East Boldon Jarrow and Hebburn South Shields	123	Hebburn South Shields	32
Stockton-on-Tees	14,587	Billingham Stockton Thornaby Yarm	512	Billingham Stockton-on-Tees	8
Sunderland	37,171	Birtley Chester-le-Street Houghton-le-Spring Peterlee Seaham Southwick Sunderland Washington	1,377	Chester-le-Street Houghton-le-Spring Easington Washington Sunderland	34
Aberdare	3,950	Aberdare Mountain Ash	118	Aberdare	4

Travel-to-work area	Unemployed claimants	Jobcentres	Vacancies	Careers Offices	Vacancies
Blaenau Gwent and Abergavenny	6,927	Abergavenny Abertillery Brynmawr Ebbw Vale Tredegar	379	Abertillery	0
Cardigan	1,684	Cardigan Llandysul	73		
Holyhead	4,046	Amlwch Holyhead Llangefni	95	Holyhead	0
Lampeter and Aberaeron	1,193	Lampeter	29		
Merthyr and Rhymney	10,104	Bargoed Blackwood Merthyr Tydfil Newbridge Pontlottyn Treharris Ystrad Mynach	391	Blackwood Merthyr Tydfil	1
Neath and Port Talbot	7,066	Cymmer Neath Port Talbot Pyle Resolven	524	Neath[1] Port Talbot[1]	0
Pontypridd and Rhondda	10,841	Ferndale Llantrisant Pontypridd Tonypandy Porth Tonyrefail Treorchy	586	Pontypridd Tonypandy	0
Shotton, Flint and Rhyl	12,790	Flint Holywell Mold Buckley Shotton	767	Flint Mold Rhyl Shotton	17
South Pembrokeshire	3,370	Pembroke Dock Tenby	51	Pembroke	1
Wrexham	8,062	Cefnmawr Llangollen Rhosllanerchrugog Wrexham	368	Wrexham Acrefair	3
Arbroath	2,815	Arbroath	99	Arbroath	0
Bathgate	10,441	Bathgate Broxburn Livingston West Calder	470	Bathgate Livingston	6
Cumnock and Sanquhar	4,864	Cumnock Sanquhar	195	Cumnock	0
Dumbarton	5,824	Alexandria Dumbarton Helensburgh	300	Alexandria Dumbarton	1
Dundee	16,395	Dundee	419	Dundee	6

Travel-to-work area	*Unemployed claimants*	*Jobcentres*	*Vacancies*	*Careers Offices*	*Vacancies*
Glasgow	116,602	Barrhead Glasgow Central Glasgow City Trongate Cambuslang Clydebank Cumbernauld East Kilbride Easterhouse Govan Kinning Park Hillington Johnstone Kilsyth Kirkintilloch Maryhill Paisley Linwood Parkhead Glasgow West Renfrew Rutherglen Shawlands Springburn	3,465	Barrhead Eastwood Glasgow City Cambuslang Clydebank Cumbernauld East Kilbride Govan Johnstone Kirkintilloch Paisley Central Parkhead Partick Renfrew Glasgow, S/side Springburn	27
Greenock	10,364	Greenock Greenock Dalrymple St. Port Glasgow	227	Greenock Port Glasgow	2
Irvine	12,457	Irvine Kilbirnie Kilwinning Largs Saltcoats	698	Irvine Ardrossan	2
Kilmarnock	5,823	Kilmarnock Newmilns	36	Kilmarnock	0
Lanarkshire	35,089	Airdrie Bellshill Blantyre Carluke Coatbridge Hamilton Lanark Larkhall Lesmahagow Motherwell Shotts Uddington Wishaw	965	Bellshill Coatbridge Hamilton Lanark Larkhall Motherwell Wishaw	15
Intermediate Areas					
Bodmin and Liskeard	3,872	Bodmin Camelford Liskeard Looe Wadebridge	228	Bodmin Liskeard	1
Bude	1,061	Bude	40		
Cinderford and Ross-on-Wye	4,149	Cinderford Coleford Lydney Ross-on-Wye	132	Cinderford Ross-on-Wye	18
Plymouth	18,644	Devonport Plymouth Plympton Saltash Tavistock	880	Plymouth	15

Travel-to-work area	Unemployed claimants	Jobcentres	Vacancies	Careers Offices	Vacancies
Birmingham	120,599	Aldridge Aston Birmingham Bromsgrove Chelmsley Wood Erdington Handsworth Kings Heath Lichfield Northfield Redditch Selly Oak Small Heath Solihull Sparkhill Sutton Coldfield Tamworth Washwood Heath	5,640	Aldridge Aston Perry Bar Birmingham Bromsgrove Chelmsley Wood Handsworth Lichfield Redditch Harborne Selly Oak Hall Green Yardley Solihull Sparkbrook Sutton Coldfield Tamworth Stetchford	590
Coventry and Hinckley	36,308	Bedworth Coventry Nuneaton Hinckley	1,732	Bedworth Coventry Atherstone Nuneaton Hinckley	51
Dudley and Sandwell	45,401	Cradley Heath Dudley Sedgley Halesowen Kingswinford Oldsbury Smethwick Stourbridge Tipton Darlaston Wednesday West Bromwich	1,669	Cradley Heath Dudley Oldbury Smethwick Tipton West Bromwich	46
Kidderminster	5,487	Kidderminster Stourport	277	Kidderminster Stourport	13
Telford and Bridgnorth	11,795	Bridgnorth Madeley Oakengate Telford Wellington	548	Bridgnorth Madeley Telford	22
Walsall	25,997	Brownhills Burntwood Cannock Walsall Willenhall	710	Brownhills Cannock Walsall Willenhall	26
Wolverhampton	25,293	Bilston Wednesfield Wolverhampton	440	Wolverhampton Wolverhampton (Fringe)	54
Gainsborough	2,175	Gainsborough	57	Gainsborough	1
Barnsley	16,221	Barnsley Royston Hoyland Wombwell	336	Barnsley	7
Bradford	30,858	Bing'ey Bradford Shipley Spen Valley Bramley Pudsey	1,462	Bradford	98
Doncaster	21,121	Askern Doncaster Thorne	369	Doncaster	17

Travel-to-work area	Unemployed claimants	Jobcentres	Vacancies	Careers Offices	Vacancies
Grimsby	12,836	Grimsby Immingham	287	Grimsby	19
Hull	31,393	Beverley Hessle Hull Bransholme	796	Beverley Hull Hull (East Riding)	11
Sheffield	47,488	Dronfield Chapeltown Firth Park Sheffield Ind. Sheffield Woodhouse	783	Sheffield	38
Accrington and Rossendale	6,214	Accrington Bacup Great Harwood Haslingden Rawtenstall	555	Hyndburn Rossendale	18
Blackburn	9,648	Blackburn Darwen	874	Blackburn Darwen	34
Bolton and Bury	28,134	Bolton Bury Ramsbottom Farnworth Horwich Radcliffe Westhoughton Worsley	1,457	Bolton Bury	35
Manchester[2]	66,000	Beswick Levenshulme Manchester Middleton Moss side Newton Heath Prestwich Salford Swinton Ashton-Under-Lyne Denton Droylsden Hyde Stalybridge	3,450	Openshaw Longsight Manchester Middleton Moss Side North Manchester Salford Ashton-Under-Lyne Hyde	105
Oldham	11,976	Failsworth Oldham Royton Shaw	448	Oldham	13
Rochdale	10,481	Heywood Littleborough Rochdale	463	Heywood Rochdale	15
Darlington	6,980	Barnard Castle Darlington	362	Darlington	15
Durham	8,951	Durham Spennymoor Wingate	513	Durham Spennymoor	10
Morpeth and Ashington	8,970	Ashington Bedlington Blyth Morpeth	352	Ashington Blyth	6
Bangor and Caernarfon	5,098	Bangor Bethesda Beaumaris Caernarfon Penygroes	327	Bangor Caernarfon	0

Travel-to-work area	Unemployed claimants	Jobcentres	Vacancies	Careers Offices	Vacancies
Bridgend	8,873	Bridgend Llantwit Major Maesteg Porthcawl	345	Bridgend	46
Cardiff	28,322	Barry Caerphilly Cardiff Penarth	1,354	Barry Caerphilly Cardiff	90
Fishguard	741	Fishguard	2		
Haverfordwest	3,912	Haverfordwest Milford Haven	172	Haverfordwest	5
Llanelli	5,920	Amanford Garnant Kidwelly Burry Port Llanelli Tumble	722	Ammanford Llanelli	2
Newport	12,854	Chepstow Caldicote Newport Risca	492	Newport Cross Keys	23
Pontypool and Cwmbran	5,869	Blaenavon Cwmbran Pontypool	403	Pontypool Usk	0
Porthmadoc and Ffestiniog	1,192	Blaenaue-Ffistiniog Porthmadoc	38		
Pwllheli	1,273	Pwllheli	66	Pwllheli	0
Swansea	16,729	Gorseinon Morriston Pontardawe Swansea Swansea Grove House Ystradgynlais	928	Gorseinon Morriston Swansea District[1]	3
Alloa	3,712	Alloa	94	Alloa	3
Ayr	7,421	Ayr Dalmellington Troon	364	Ayr	1
Badenoch[3]	751	Inverness Nairn	334	Inverness	5
Campbeltown	860	Campbeltown	11	Campbeltown	2
Dunfermline	9,003	Cowdenbeath Dunfermline	227	Cowdenbeath Dunfermline	7
Dunoon and Bute	1,636	Dunoon Lochgilphead Rothesay	86	Dunoon	1
Falkirk	11,551	Bo'ness Linlithgow Denny Falkirk Grangemouth	326	Falkirk Grangemouth	3
Forres	816	Forres	25		
Girvan	980	Girvan	29		
Invergordon and Dingwall	3,240	Dingwall Invergordon	247	Dingwall	1

Travel-to-work area	Unemployed claimants	Jobcentres	Vacancies	Careers Offices	Vacancies
Kirkcaldy	11,994	Glenrothes Burntisland Kirkcaldy Leven	458	Glenrothes Kirkcaldy Leven	8
Lochaber	1,868	Fort William	62	Fort William	4
Newton Stewart	761	Newton Stewart	9		
Skye and Wester Ross	1,235	Portree	52	Portree	2
Stewartry	1,106	Castle Douglas	19	Castle Douglas	1
Stranraer	1,551	Stranraer	15	Newton Stewart Stranraer	0
Sutherland[4]	952	Thurso Wick	88	Thurso Wick	0
Western Isles	2,388	Stornoway	55	Stornoway	3
Wick[4]	864				

[1] Neath and Port Talbot careers office figures are included in Swansea District careers office.
[2] Manchester assisted area does not cover the entire Manchester travel-to-work area. Figures are given for the assisted part only.
[3] Inverness and Nairn Jobcentres also cover the Inverness travel-to-work area.
[4] The Thurso and Wick Jobcentres cover the Sutherland, Thurso, and Wick travel-to-work areas.

Mr. Janner asked the Paymaster General by how many, and by what percentage, the number of jobless people in Leicestershire changed during the latest month for which figures are available; and by how many and what percentage vacancies in the county of Leicestershire and the city of Leicester rose or fell during the same period.

Mr. Lee: The following information is in the Library. Between 11 December 1986 and 8 January 1987 the number of unemployed claimants in the county of Leicestershire rose by 996, or 2·6 per cent. Between 5 December 1986 and 9 January 1987 unfilled vacancies excluding community programme vacancies fell by 114, or 4·7 per cent., at jobcentres in the county of Leicestershire, and fell by 122, or 10·8 per cent., in the Leicester jobcentre area, which closely corresponds to city of Leicester local authority district. These changes are affected by seasonal factors.

Job Training Scheme

Ms. Clare Short asked the Paymaster General if he will specify exactly how the funding for the job training scheme has been assembled from within the departmental budget.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I will reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Community Programme

Ms. Clare Short asked the Paymaster General if he will give full details of current cutbacks in the community programme by region and type of scheme.

Mr. Lee: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) on Thursday 19 February. Places are allocated between schemes at local level in the light of both national priorities set out in planning guidance for 1987-88 and priorities determined locally by area manpower boards, which will pay particular attention to improving the quality of opportunity to long-term unemployed people.

Ms. Clare Short asked the Paymaster General if he will provide full details of the proposed cuts in community programme places in Kent.

Mr. Lee: On 30 January 1987, the latest date for which statistics are available, community programme schemes in Kent had 3,412 filled places, some 300 more than their formal 1986-87 allocation of 3,104. For 1987-88 it is proposed that the average filled place allocation over the year should be 2,800. This will be subject to discussion in the context of planning generally with the local area manpower board.

Skillcentre (Irvine)

Mr. Lambie asked the Paymaster General when the proposed new skillcentre in Irvine will be given the go-ahead; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: I will reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Restart Scheme

Mr. Fisher asked the Paymaster General what is the latest estimate of the cost of the advertising campaign for the restart scheme *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in Stoke on Trent.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 February]: A wide range of Manpower Services Commission schemes have been advertised on television in connection with the restart programme at a total estimated cost of £11·2 million. This advertising expenditure represents less than 1 per cent. of the total expenditure on the schemes. I have no means of knowing what proportion of this expenditure relates to Stoke-on-Trent.

The purpose of this expenditure is to prepare unemployed people for the invitation to a restart interview and to introduce them to the wide range of opportunities

that the programme offers. This helps the take-up of the programme and improves the motivation and expectations of those who take part in it.

Mr. Fisher asked the Paymaster General (1) what estimates he has of the proportion of advertising for the restart scheme in relation to *(a)* each employer who makes a positive commitment to take part in the scheme and *(b)* each employee participating in the scheme;

(2) how many employers have made a positive commitment to take part in the restart scheme.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 February]: Under the restart programme long-term unemployed people are invited to counselling interviews at jobcentres at which the discussion focusses on their individual needs and the best way for them to get into employment or self employment. Employers are not therefore directly involved in the restart programme and the beneficiaries of restart interviews are long-term unemployed people, not employees.

ENVIRONMENT

Private Rented Housing

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the deadline for consultations following the statement on private rented housing on 5 February, *Official Report*, column 1157.

Mr. John Patten: 31 March 1987.

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about the midnight deadline referred to in the statement on private rented housing on 5 February, *Official Report*, column 1157.

Mr. John Patten: None.

Derelict Land

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether scrap values of items on demolition sites are taken into account when considering applications for derelict land grants.

Mr. John Patten: Income from scrap has the effect of reducing the net loss incurred in reclamation, thereby reducing the amount of derelict land grant payable.

London City Airport (Dockland)

Mr. Colvin asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will publish the inspectors' report on the public inquiry into the proposal to fly the BAe 146 super-quiet jet airliner out of the London city airport in dockland.

Mr. Waldegrave: There has been no planning application, which could lead to a public inquiry, to vary the planning permission for STOLport in a way which would enable BAe146 aircraft to be used.

Departmental Computers

Dr. Hampson asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what his Department has spent on *(a)* computer hardware and *(b)* computer software for each year since 1984; and what is the projected expenditure for 1987.

Mr. Ridley: In 1985-86, expenditure on hardware was £5·02 million and on software £0·65 million. For 1986-87, estimated expenditure on hardware will be £6·42 million and on software £0·86 million. Expenditure proposals for 1987-88 have not yet been finalised.

School Crossing Attendants

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidelines are issued by his Department to local authorities for payment of school crossing attendants.

Mr. Chope: No such guidelines have been issued.

House Sales (Public Corporations)

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will introduce legislation to prevent houses being resold at a profit within three years of original sale by public corporations.

Mr. Tracey: Where houses are bought under the right to buy at a discount the purchaser is required to pay back discount on selling again within three years. Voluntary sales by local authorities, housing associations and new town development corporations are normally subject to similar rules. Where other public bodies sell houses at a discount the terms of sale are properly a matter for them to determine.

Local Authorities (Construction Contracts)

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to introduce legislation to prevent the imposition of non commercial conditions by local authorities in contracts with construction companies and other suppliers.

Dr. Boyson: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 18 February, at column 916. While we have reluctantly had to postpone the legislation planned for this Session, it is our firm intention to introduce appropriate legislation at the first available opportunity.

Rate Support Grant

Mr. Shore asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what, in constant prices, was the value of the rate support grant payment to the London borough of Tower Hamlets in 1986-87 and for each preceding year to 1978-79; what is the proposed payment of 1987-88 showing separately for each relevant year the payments received by the London Borough of Tower Hamlets in respect of services transferred from the Greater London council after abolition and information available to him on expenditure in Tower Hamlets by the Greater London council on such services.

Mr. Chope: I will answer this question shortly.

Mr. Shore asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what, in constant prices, was the payment to the London Borough of Tower Hamlets through the housing investment programme, showing Greater London council housing investment, and Tower Hamlets housing investment separately in 1986-87 and in each preceding year to 1978-79; and what is his housing investment programme for 1987-88.

Mr. Tracey: The table gives the housing investment programme allocations made to Tower Hamlets borough council since 1978-79, together with the total capital expenditure the council has incurred on housing:

	£ million (1985/86 prices)	
	HIP allocation	*Expenditure*
1978-79	27·220	21·459
1979-80	22·009	16·576
1980-81	17·123	20·083
1981-82	6·586	11·268
1982-83	12.176	7.720
1983-84	13·264	10·895
1984-85	13·050	12·000
1985-86	11·644	12·011
1986-87	15·950	[1]20·591

[1] Estimate.

Prior to 1986-87 the GLC was free to use its resources throughout London and figures for its investment in individual boroughs are not available. The HIP allocation made to Tower Hamlets for 1986-87 took account of the resources which would otherwise have gone to the GLC.

The HIP allocation made to Tower Hamlets for 1987-88 was £14·997 million. The council can augment this, as in previous years, by making use of its capital receipts.

Mr. Hicknet asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration he gave in deciding the rate support grant for Scunthorpe borough council to the level of that council's expenditure on recreation compared to other similar authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: An authority's grant entitlement is determined by the relationship of its overall spending to its overall grant-related expenditure assessment, broadly its need to spend. Specific consideration is not therefore given to individual items of expenditure. On the basis of the Secretary of State's firm intentions announced on 13 January, the recreation component of Scunthorpe's GREA is £1·156 million or £18·17p per head which is the 34th highest of all shire districts.

Mr. Hicknet asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on why Scunthorpe borough council is under penalty under the latest rate support grant settlement; by how much its expenditure would have to be reduced to avoid penalties; and what would be the change in domestic and non-domestic rates of such a reduction.

Mr. Chope: Like most authorities, Scunthorpe gains grant as it reduces its expenditure and loses grant as it increases it. The rate at which grant is gained or lost is greater above the GRE threshold. Scunthorpe would have to reduce its spending by £1·7 million to get below the GRE threshold and reduce its rate of grant loss. The consequences for both domestic and non-domestic rates of such a reduction could be 23p.

Carsington Reservoir

Mr. McLoughlin asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has received any representations from any organisation or body requesting that there should be a public inquiry into the future of Carsington reservoir following the publication of the Coxon report.

Mr. John Patten: I will answer this question shortly.

London Residuary Body

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will break down the money to be returned to London boroughs by the London residuary body detailing the sum to be paid to each borough; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: Firm figures will not be available until the GLC's final accounts have been audited and certified. However, the tables show the latest estimates which we have from the London residuary body of revenue balances, capital receipts and associated spending power which willl be distributed to London boroughs, the common council and the Temples.

Of the estimated £129 million revenue balances available for distribution, £89 million is being paid out in this financial year in monthly instalments. The remaining £40 million is to be distributed in 1987-88. LRB estimate that a further £40 million may be available in 1988-89. It is, however, too early to say whether this amount will be distributed, as it may be required to finance other expenditure.

Table A Distribution of Estimated GLC Revenue Balances

	Distributed in 1986-87	*To be distributed in 1987-88*
Inner London		
City of London	68,871	28,938
Inner Temple	1,449	615
Middle Temple	1,317	591
Camden	2,335,644	1,066,273
Greenwich	2,845,455	1,277,872
Hackney	2,475,282	1,108,238
Hammersmith & Fulham	1,985,232	891,910
Islington	2,176,246	992,390
Kensington and Chelsea	1,791,983	813,299
Lambeth	3,216,945	1,439,232
Lewisham	3,057,546	1,373,624
Southwark	2,840,185	1,276,099
Tower Hamlets	1,904,874	869,449
Wandsworth	3,402,689	1,529,664
Westminster	2,397,559	1,058,589
Total Inner London	30,500,877	13,726,783
Outer London		
Barking & Dagenham	1,968,106	878,315
Barnet	3,928,308	1,780,273
Bexley	2,877,071	1,291,467
Brent	3,357,900	1,506,612
Bromley	3,930,943	1,760,768
Croydon	4,200,998	1,885,482
Ealing	3,803,161	1,728,260
Enfield	3,468,557	1,566,310
Haringey	2,635,998	1,165,571
Harrow	2,693,123	1,192,168
Havering	3,157,664	1,409,679
Hillingdon	3,058,864	1,373,033
Hounslow	2,605,699	1,156,114
Kingston upon Thames	1,766,553	791,430
Merton	2,160,438	972,294
Newham	2,758,510	1,232,952
Redbridge	2,963,775	1,347,617
Richmond upon Thames	2,115,648	954,562
Sutton	2,234,209	1,002,438
Waltham Forest	2,833,598	1,277,872
Total Outer London	58,499,123	26,273,217
Total All Boroughs	89,000,000	40,000,000

Distribution of capital receipts is subject to the Local Government Reorganisation (Capital Money) (Greater

London) Order 1987 (SI 1987/118) which will come into effect on 27 February 1987. This provides for the transfer of the cash and spending power. Table B shows the estimated spending power entitlement for the city and boroughs.

Table B—Distribution of Estimated Spending Power

	Inherited from GLC transferred in 1986-87 £000s	*LRB receipts arising and transferred in 1986-87 £000s*	*LRB receipts arising and to be transferred in 1987-88 £000s*
Inner London			
City of London	285	80	132
Camden	9,680	5,295	7,560
Greenwich	11,793	3,618	5,986
Hackney	10,258	5,760	8,097
Hammersmith and Fulham	8,228	3,123	4,918
Islington	9,019	5,285	7,284
Kensington and Chelsea	7,425	2,609	4,295
Lambeth	13,332	6,600	9,914
Lewisham	12,672	4,548	7,318
Southwark	11,771	5,881	8,824
Tower Hamlets	7,894	3,186	4,972
Wandsworth	14,102	3,832	6,669
Westminster	9,936	2,945	4,931
Total Inner London	126,395	52,762	80,900
Outer London			
Barking and Dagenham	8,157	1,150	2,781
Barnet	16,280	2,072	4,925
Bexley	11,924	1,504	3,516
Brent	13,916	4,566	7,140
Bromley	16,291	2,042	4,843
Croydon	17,410	2,392	5,305
Ealing	15,762	3,093	5,966
Enfield	14,375	1,946	4,421
Haringey	10,925	5,008	6,985
Harrow	10,996	1,545	3,375
Havering	13,086	1,615	3,905
Hillingdon	12,677	1,958	4,112
Hounslow	10,799	2,186	3,970
Kingston upon Thames	7,321	823	2,042
Merton	8,954	1,309	2,968
Newham	11,432	4,288	6,299
Redbridge	12,366	1,652	3,737
Richmond upon Thames	8,768	1,271	2,727
Sutton	9,259	1,079	2,676
Waltham Forest	11,743	2,139	4,283
Total Outer London	242,441	43,638	85,976
Total all Boroughs	368,836	96,400	166,876

Table C shows the estimated cash to be distributed to those authorities. No surplus cash receipts exist from 1985-86 and earlier years.

Table C Distribution of Estimated Capital Receipts Cash

Inner London	*1986-87 £000s*	*1987-88 £000s*
City of London	27	87
Camden	2,002	4,821
Greenwich	1,241	3,904
Hackney	2,184	5,157
Hammersmith & Fulham	1,119	3,176
Islington	2,014	4,638
Kensington & Chelsea	921	2,781
Lambeth	2,464	6,328
Lewisham	1,612	4,735
Southwark	2,197	5,634
Tower Hamlets	1,154	3,205
Wandsworth	1,274	4,371
Westminster	1,001	3,217
Total Inner London	19,210	52,054
Outer London		
Barking & Dagenham	286	1,871
Barnet	476	3,359
Bexley	343	2,402
Brent	1,589	4,653
Bromley	462	3,305
Croydon	582	3,612
Ealing	920	3,983
Enfield	470	3,008
Haringey	1,850	4,491
Harrow	383	2,296
Havering	361	2,663
Hillingdon	516	2,781
Hounslow	659	2,652
Kingston upon Thames	167	1,403
Merton	334	2,004
Newham	1,532	4,086
Redbridge	395	2,548
Richmond upon Thames	322	1,854
Sutton	228	1,833
Waltham Forest	615	2,866
Total Outer London	12,490	57,670
Total all Boroughs	31,700	109,724

On the basis of these figures, by the end of 1987-88 London boroughs will have received the benefit of some £240 million cash and £632 million additional spending power as a direct result of abolition of the GLC.

Rented Housing

Mr. Freeson asked the Secretary of State for the Environment under what specific legislative powers his hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Construction was acting when he announced to the House on 5 February, *Official Report*, columns 1156-7, that guarantees and indemnities and the transfer of land and property by local authorities to housing associations and other persons in connection with the acquisition, construction, conversion, rehabilitation, improvement, maintenance and management of accommodation for letting or licensing after midnight that day would be declared unlawful and void; and by whom such transactions would be so declared.

Mr. John Patten: My statement to the House on 5 February made it clear that the relevant legislation would be included in the Local Government Bill. The Bill was introduced on 18 February.

Mr. Winnick asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his policy on the continuation of the Rent Acts as they apply to the privately rented housing sector.

Mr. John Patten: The Government have no plans to amend the Rent Acts in this Parliament.

Government Car Service

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the cost in each year since 1979 to date of the Government car service; and how many Ministers are currently eligible for a chauffeured car.

Mr. Chope: Departmental records for the period 1979 to 1982 are no longer available.

The cost of providing the Government car service to Ministers was as follows:

	£ thousand
1982-83	1,595
1983-84	1,745
1984-85	1,844
1985-86	2,125
1986-87[1]	1,726

[1]To 31 December 1986.

All Ministers are eligible for a chauffeuured car and the Government car service currently provides chauffer driven services to 80 Ministers.

Waterways (Maintenance)

Mr. Wallace asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has of the maintenance backlog on commercial and on leisure waterways and of how much capital investment is required to clear this backlog.

Mr. John Patten: The present extent of the backlog and the capital investment required to clear it is under consideration by the board as part of its corporate planning process.

Right to Buy

Mr. Hickmet asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people in *(a)* Scunthorpe and *(b)* Glanford have bought their council house under the right to buy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tracey: The numbers of dwellings reported as sold under the right to buy are: Scunthorpe, 1,736 to June 1986; Glanford, 714 to September 1986.

Radiation

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Yeovil on 16 February, *Official Report*, column *415*, concerning free measurements of radon levels in houses, what areas of Somerset are considered areas where radon concentrations might be at or above the action level; what funds are available to cover the cost of any such free measurements in Somerset and elsewhere; what number of free measurements can be provided from the funds presently available; if any criteria other than geographical location will be used in deciding whether to provide a free measurement service to residents of Somerset; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: I am advised by the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB) that, on the basis of the results of its preliminary national survey, the only area of Somerset which is currently considered to be an area where radon concentrations might be at or above the action level for existing houses is the eastern part of the geographical area of Sedgemoor in the area of Mendip district council. My Department will pay the cost of measurements by the NRPB of houses in this area. Adequate funds will be made available to ensure that free measurements can be carried out in all areas where radon concentrations might be above or near the action level. In deciding whether or not free measurement of a particular property would be justified the NRPB will consider previous survey results on the locality and geological similarities with other parts of the country known to have elevated radon concentrations. Information on the physical characteristics of the particular dwelling will also be taken into account.

Warrington and Runcorn Development Corporation (Housing)

Mr. Hoyle asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what instructions have been given to Warrington and Runcorn development corporation in relation to the disposal of its housing stock, with particular reference to debt and future repairs liability.

Mr. John Patten: No such instructions have been given since a direction was issued in March 1985 under section 43 of the New Towns Act 1981 requiring consultations with the Warrington borough council on a housing transfer scheme. The Department will be responding to the outcome of those consultations as soon as possible.

Agricultural Land

Mr. Alex Carlile asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultations there were between his Department and outside bodies prior to the issue of the draft circular on development involving agricultural land; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: Consistently with the normal practice, the draft circular on development involving agricultural land has been issued for the specific purpose of enabling outside bodies to comment before the Government reach final conclusions on the matter.

Housing Statistics

Mr. Maxton asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide the number of dwellings in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Scotland; and if he will detail in percentage terms the number of dwellings in each country which are (i) owner-occupied, (ii) public sector rented, (iii) rented from housing associations, and (iv) privately rented.

Mr. Tracey: The latest provisional estimates are as follows:

Tenure of dwelling stock: end of December 1986 (provisional)

	All dwellings Thousands	*Percentage of all dwellings*			
		Owner occupied	*Rented from local authorities or new town corporations*	*Rented from housing associations*	*Rented from private owners and other tenures*
England	18,886	64·9	24·3	2·7	8·0
Wales	1,126	67·3	22·9	1·8	8·0
Scotland	2,060	41·8	49·6	2·2	6·3

Note: For statistical purposes the stock estimates are expressed to the nearest thousand, but they should not be regarded as accurate to the last digit.

Croft and Birchwood

Mr. Hoyle asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to make an announcement on the division of Croft and Birchwood into two separate parishes.

Mr. Chope: My right hon. Friend has not yet received proposals from the Local Government Boundary Commission.

Nuclear Waste

Sir Trevor Skeet asked the Secretary of State for the Environment where depleted uranium is currently being stored.

Mr. Goodlad: I have been asked to reply.

Depleted uranium resulting from the reprocessing of magnox fuel and the operation of enrichment plants is stored by British Nuclear Fuels plc at its Sellafield, Springfields, Capenhurst and Chapelcross sites. Relatively small amounts are held by the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority for research and development purposes. Other uses, for small quantities of depleted uranium, were listed in my reply to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) on 21 October 1985, at column 21.

Construction Work (Scotland)

Mr. O'Neill asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the value of any construction work undertaken either by the Ministry of Defence or the Property Services Agency on behalf of the Ministry of Defence in Scotland in 1984, 1985 and 1986; and what is the projected expenditure for 1987.

Mr. Chope [*pursuant to his reply*, 20 February 1987]: Construction expenditure in Scotland by MOD direct is I understand not more than £2 million per annum. Expenditure by the Property Services Agency, on MOD's behalf, on new works including the modernisation of married quarters and maintenance is as follows:

£ million

	1984-85	*1985-86*	*[1]1986-87*	*[2]1987-88*
New works	80·499	80·785	133·139	166·823
Maintenance	28·953	31·138	30·902	28·318
Totals	109·452	111·923	164·041	195·141

[1] Forecast.
[2] Provisional.

District Works Office, Westminster

Mr. Straw asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the full cost of the use of consultants in the District Works Office, Westminster; how many consultants have been employed; and what is the comparable cost of using Property Services Agency staff.

Mr. Chope [*pursuant to his reply*, 18 February 1987]: Five firms of quantity surveying consultants are now employed measuring term contract works in support of Westminster District Works Office at a total cost of £32,000 in a full year. There is little difference between the cost of providing these quantity surveying services in-house and by consultants.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Prisoners (Scheduled Offences)

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons imprisoned for scheduled offences have since been released.

Mr. Scott: The information is not available in the form requested. However, from 1 January 1979 until 2 February 1987, 5,667 persons have been imprisoned subsequent to conviction for scheduled offences in Northern Ireland. Of these 867 are still serving their sentences.

Security Forces (Offences)

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a list of those cases where members of security forces have been charged with offences causing *(a)* the death of or *(b)* injury to civilians for each year since 1969, indicating the branch of the service involved Royal Ulster Constabulary, Ulster Defence Regiment, Army, Marines and so on, the charge originally brought, the charge for which each person was tried, the verdict and, where appropriate, where the sentence was served.

Mr. Scott: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Residential Homes and Hospitals (Hygiene)

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what guidelines or requirements Her Majesty's Government have notified to health boards in Northern Ireland regarding hygiene and the use of disinfectant for cleaning in residential homes and hospitals;

(2) how many residential homes in Northern Ireland do not currently use disinfectants in the cleaning of floors, toilets, commodes, walls or fittings;

(3) what are the cost savings to health boards in Northern Ireland of using washing-up liquid rather than disinfectants for hygiene maintenance in residential homes;

(4) what reports have been made by Government health inspectors regarding the use of washing-up liquid rather than disinfectants for hygiene maintenance in residential homes or hospitals;

(5) how many hospitals in Northern Ireland have cut back on the use of disinfectant for hygiene maintenance; and what further savings are envisaged.

Mr. Viggers: The Department of Health and Social Services discourages the indiscriminate use of disinfectants for cleaning in hospitals and residential homes. It will shortly be issuing formal guidance which provides for their use to be specifically prescribed by health and social services boards' control of infection officers. This guidance will mirror recent guidance by the Department of Health and Social Security to the National Health Service. I understand that there has already been some reduction in use of disinfectants in favour of neutral detergents, as a matter of professional practice rather than as a cost-saving measure. The cost effects of this revision in practice have not been quantified. Information about the use of disinfectants in individual hospitals and residential homes is not available centrally. District council environmental health officers have not issued any reports regarding the use of washing-up liquid rather than disinfectant for hygiene maintenance in hospitals ~~or residential homes~~.

Incomes

Mr. Archer asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what was the total number of people and the proportion of the population of Northern Ireland in 1979 *(a)* with incomes below supplementary benefit level, *(b)* on supplementary benefit, and *(c)* on incomes of up to 140 per cent. of supplementary benefit level, broken down by family type and economic status;

(2) what was the total number of people and the proportion of the population of Northern Ireland in 1983 *(a)* with incomes below supplementary benefit level, *(b)* on supplementary benefit, and *(c)* on incomes of up to 140 per cent. of supplementary benefit level, according to the 1983 "Family Expenditure Survey", and broken down by family type and economic status;

(3) what was the total number of people and the proportion of the population of Northern Ireland in 1981 *(a)* with incomes below supplementary benefit level, *(b)* on supplementary benefit, and *(c)* on incomes of up to 140 per cent. of supplementary benefit level, broken down by family type and economic status.

Mr. Viggers: Information in the form requested is not readily available and could be compiled only at disproportionate cost.

Drainage and Flood Relief

Mr. Archer asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list expenditure on each capital and revenue arterial land drainage and flood alleviation scheme in Northern Ireland for each year since 1975, indicating what proportion of the work was undertaken by outside contractors as opposed to the Department of Agriculture's direct labour organisation.

Mr. Viggers: Information is not available in the form requested and disproportionate costs would be incurred in compiling it. However, the proportion of expenditure on schemes undertaken by contractors as opposed to the Department of Agriculture's direct labour organisation over the period 1975-76 to 1985-86 is as follows:

	Per cent.
1975-76	nil
1976-77	10
1977-78	8
1978-79	12
1979-80	17
1980-81	23
1981-82	28
1982-83	34
1983-84	39
1984-85	42
1985-86	49

Mr. Archer asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the current estimated total cost is of the Blackwater arterial drainage scheme; if he will list the sources from which the cost will be met; and if he will list for each of the phases of the Blackwater arterial drainage scheme the contract number, location, estimated cost and, where available, the final cost.

Mr. Viggers: The total estimated gross cost of the Blackwater scheme in Northern Ireland is £20·1 million, towards which contributions will be made from EC, Irish Republic and Northern Ireland funds. No final costs are available.

Northern Ireland works relate to the following contracts:

Contract and Contract works location		*Estimated cost (£ million)*
A	Main Channel Benburb-Caledon	2·8
B	Main and Minor Border Channels: Annaghroe Bridge-Derrymeen Bridge, Aughnacloy	3·0
E	Minor channels and tributaries associated with Benburb-Caledon reach	0·4
E1	Minor Channels, Benburb-Caledon	0·25
H	Caledon Bridge—replacement including services	1·25
J	Cor Bridge replacement	0·25
B1	Caledon Estate	[1]
C	River Cor	[1]
D	Favour Royal—end Blackwater Extension	'kdÿÞÆp"w0·4
D1	Derrymeen Bridge—Ballygowan Bridge, Clogher	[1]
F	Ballygawley Water and Extension	[1]
Work carried out by Department of Agriculture Direct Labour		
Oona and Tynan catchments		2·5

[1] Not given for commercial reasons.

Mr. Archer asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what submissions he made to the European Council in its review of directive 79/197 as required under article 5.2 of the directive; and what plans he has for future cross-border arterial drainage projects in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland now that directive 79/197 has expired.

Mr. Viggers: A joint United Kingdom/Republic of Ireland submission was lodged with the European Commission in July 1986 requesting an extension of the directive 79/197 and an increase in aid available under it. I have no plans for further rural cross-border arterial drainage projects.

Mr. Archer asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the arterial land drainage schemes which were included in the joint programme submitted with the Republic of Ireland to the European Commission under Article 2.1 of directive 79/197 on a programme to promote drainage in catchment areas, including land on both sides of the border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland; and if he will detail for each scheme the number of hectares of agricultural land whose drainage would be improved as a result of such schemes, and the estimated cost.

Mr. Viggers: Rivers Blackwater and Finn/Lacky catchments. Some 3,200 hectares of agricultural land in Northern Ireland will benefit from the Blackwater scheme and possibly 1,400 hectares from the Finn/Lacky scheme at a gross cost of £20·1 million for the former. Until the design work is completed it is not possible to give a firm estimate of the cost of the Finn/Lacky but a preliminary figure is £5·5 million.

Terrorism (Convention)

Mr. Stanbrook asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has anything to add to the statement on 12 February, *Official Report*, column *446*, regarding the ratification by the Irish Republic of the European convention for the suppression of terrorism.

Mr. Tom King: I shall write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Rape

Ms. Richardson asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many men have been prosecuted for rape in each of the last five years in Northern Ireland; how many men have been convicted in each of these years; of these, how many have not been sent to prison; how many have been sentenced to terms of imprisonment of less than three years, between three and five years, between five and 10 years, and over 10 years, respectively; and what orders were made in respect of those convicted but not sent to prison.

Mr. Scott: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Personal Social Services (Costs)

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish figures for 1985-86, showing the costs of the personal social services in each of the main United Kingdom regions, and distinguishing between the main categories of expenditure, including administration.

Mr. Newton: Figures for gross current expenditure for 1984-5, the latest year for which complete figures are available, are shown in the table. The information requested is not available for 1985-86 for England as returns have not yet been received from all authorities. Scotland and Northern Ireland have a different method of collecting data which prevents seperate identification of data on administration costs.

Gross Current Expenditure on PSS in Major United Kingdom Regions 1984-5 (£ million)

	Residential (Children)	*Residential (Other)*	*Domiciliary Support*	*Day Services and Miscellaneous*	*Fieldwork*[1]	*Total*	*Administration Costs (Included in other categories)*
South Eastern	127·40	381·10	201·40	204·40	188.50	1,102·90	148·10
South Western	19·10	74·10	37·10	28·40	34·30	193·00	22·70
East Anglian	6·60	32·40	14·30	11·60	11·60	76·40	9·40
West Midlands	27·60	90·50	51·20	41·10	38·30	248·70	26·70
East Midlands	19·50	64·50	43·20	31·60	33·00	191·70	22·30
North Western	47·80	141·10	70·00	71·20	53·80	383·80	45·40
Yorkshire and Humberside	28·60	103·00	58·20	42·10	38·20	269·90	30·00
Northern	23·30	64·30	35·80	25·90	29·70	179·00	19·80
Total England	299·90	951·00	511·20	456·30	427·40	2,645·40	324·40
Wales	11·90	56·80	30·70	22·60	21·90	143·90	18·80
Scotland	28·30	93·30	70·10	53·70	[2]76·20	321·30	[3]
Northern Ireland	4·70	26·60	17·80	29·10	16·10	94·30	[3]

[1] Including research and development for England and Wales.
[2] Figures for Scotland include total costs of casework and administration.
[3] Administration costs not separately available.

Ambulance Service

Mr. Wheeler asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give, for the most recent 12-month period, the cost of the London ambulance service, the number of persons employed, and the division of these services between emergency and passenger transport; what is the source of the funding; and what is the average cost per passenger or incident of each journey.

Mr. Newton: The London Ambulance Service budget for 1986-87 is £41,800,000.

The whole-time equivalent establishment for both emergency and non-emergency staff is 2,268, comprising:

	Number
(a) Staff on emergency transport	1,508
(b) Staff on non-emergency transport	760

This does not include overtime.

The source of funding is the four Thames regional health authorities, which contribute in the following proportions:

	Per cent.
South West Thames	17·528
North West Thames	28·908
South East Thames	21·180
North East Thames	32·384

With effect from 1 April 1987 this will change to direct funding of the South West Thames regional health authority (the managing authority) by the Department.

The average cost per patient carried (based on 1985-86 costs and patient volumes) was £14·69.

NHS (Expenditure)

Mr. Galley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the total expenditure in the four Thames regional health authorities in 1978-79 and in the latest financial year for which figures are available; and whether he will express the figures both at current prices and at April 1978 prices.

Mr. Newton: The information requested is shown in the table. The figures are based on total gross revenue expenditure for the Thames regions and boards of governors/special health authorities for the London postgraduate teaching hospitals, as figures for the individual Thames regions are distorted by the 1982 boundary changes.

Year	*Gross revenue expenditure*[1] *(£ million)*	
	Cash	*1978-79 prices*[2]
1978-79	1,573·0	1,573·0
1985-86	3,233·6	1,714·2

[1] Based on health authorities' summarised accounts.
[2] Revalued using the gross domestic product deflator.

Doctors

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many National Health Service doctors have been permitted to practise for the first time in the London borough of Lambeth in the last two years.

Mr. Newton: Since 1 January 1985 in the London borough of Lambeth 10 vocationally trained practitioners have entered general medical practice for the first time to provide general medical services, and a further 10 general medical practitioners have taken up posts there, having previously worked elsewhere.

Mr. Amess asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many doctors there are in Basildon; and what is the average number of patients for each doctor.

Mr. Newton: I regret that this information is not available centrally.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Knox asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the size of the in-patient waiting list at National Health Service hospitals at the most recent date for which figures are available; and how this compares with the figures for May 1979.

Mr. Newton: I am sorry that I cannot give my hon. Friend information in precisely the form requested. At 31 March 1986, the latest date for which figures are available centrally, there were a total of 673,107 patients on the in-patient waiting list for admission to National Health Service hospitals in England compared with 752,422 on 31 March 1979, a reduction of 10·5 per cent.

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the present number of people waiting for hospital treatment in the Wandsworth health authority and the number that have been waiting for more than six months, more than one year and more than two years.

Mr. Newton: For the latest information available centrally, I refer the hon. Member to "Hospital In-Patient Waiting List at 31 March 1986, National, Regional and District Summaries", a copy of which is in the Library. For more recent and more detailed information the hon. Member may wish to write to the chairman of the Wandsworth district health authority, who may be able to provide the information that he seeks.

Mr. Canavan asked the Secretary of State for Social Services for each district health authority in England and Wales, what was the length of out-patient hospital waiting lists.

Mr. Newton: I am sorry that I cannot give the hon. Member the information that he seeks. No information is held centrally on numbers awaiting out-patient appointments.

Tobacco

Mr. MacKenzie asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many hospital beds were taken up by patients suffering from diseases normally associated with tobacco smoking in the last calendar year for which figures are available.

Mrs. Currie: The available information for the main diseases associated with smoking is given in the table. Smoking is a major, but not the sole, cause of illness from these diseases; in particular, ischaemic heart disease has a number of other important contributory factors.

Estimated average daily number of beds occupied by patients with selected main diagnoses. NHS hospitals in England 1984

Main diagnosis	*ICD*[1] *code*	*Estimated average number of beds occupied daily*
Malignant neoplasm		
Trachea, bronchus and lung	162	1,700
Lip, oral cavity and pharynx	140-149	265
Oesophagus	150	316
Larynx	161	156
Diseases of the circulatory system		
Ischaemic heart disease	410-414	5,830
Chronic pulmonary heart disease	416	130
Aortic aneurysm	441	167
Diseases of the respiratory system		
Bronchitis and emphysema	490-492	1,080
Chronic airways obstruction, not elsewhere classified	496	1,180

[1] International Classification of Diseases 9th revision.

Mr. MacKenzie asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many deaths were recorded from diseases normally associated with tobacco smoking in the last calendar year for which figures are available.

Mrs. Currie: It is not possible to be precise. Most deaths associated with cigarette smoking arise from three diseases: lung cancer, chronic bronchitis and "heart attacks" due to obstruction of the arteries of the heart. However, the proportion of deaths attributable to smoking from each of these diseases varies. Furthermore, smoking is also implicated in certain other conditions where no estimate of the numbers of the deaths caused by smoking is available — for example, obstruction of the arteries of the lower limbs.

It is estimated that at least 90 per cent. of deaths from cancers of the lung, lip, oesophagus and larynx, and 90 per cent. of deaths from chronic bronchitis, obstructive lung disease, chronic pulmonary heart disease and aortic aneurysm are attributable to smoking. The total number of deaths from these conditions involved is given in the table.

England and Wales—1985

ICD [1] code		*Number*
162	Malignant neoplasm of trachea, bronchus and lung	35,792
140-149	Malignant neoplasm of lip, oral cavity and pharynx	1,697
150	Malignant neoplasm of oesophagus	4,570
161	Malignant neoplasm of larynx	835
416	Chronic pulmonary heart disease	781
441	Aortic aneurysm	7,656
490-492, 496	Bronchitis and emphysema, chronic airways obstruction, not elsewhere classified	28,118

In 1983, the Royal College of Physicians in its report "Health or Smoking" estimated that perhaps 20 per cent. of deaths due to obstruction of the arteries of the heart were related to smoking. The medical term for this condition is "ischaemic heart disease"', but it is commonly often referred to as "coronary heart disease". The total number of deaths from this condition for England and Wales is as follows, but the proportion directly attributable to smoking is less certain as this is only one of a number of causes that give rise to obstruction of the arteries of the heart.

England and Wales—1985

ICD [1] code		*Number*
410-414	Ischaemic heart disease	163,104

[1] International Classification of Diseases 9th revision.

Mr. MacKenzie asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many working days were lost in England, Scotland and Wales by people suffering from diseases normally associated with tobacco smoking during the last calendar year for which figures are available.

Mrs. Currie: Information in the form requested is not available. The table shows days of certified incapacity for sickness and invalidity benefit for the main diseases associated with smoking. The statistics exclude periods of incapacity covered by statutory sick pay (in 1984-85 normally a maximum of eight weeks in a tax year) and working days lost by certain groups of workers who do not claim these benefits. They do include days of incapacity for which invalidity benefit was claimed by men aged 65-69 and women aged 60-64. Persons in these age groups accounted for some 15-20 per cent. of the total days of incapacity shown in the table.

Days of certified incapacity due to sickness and invalidity in the period 2 April 1984 to 30 March 1985: Great Britain

Causes	*ICD[1] code*	*Million days*
Malignant neoplasm		
Trachea, bronchus and lung	162	0·3
Lip, oral cavity and pharynx	140-149	0·1
Oesophagus	150	[2]
Larynx	161	0·2
Diseases of the circulatory system		
Ischaemic heart disease	410-414	35·3
Chronic pulmonary heart disease	416	0·2
Aortic aneurysm	441	0·2
Diseases of the respiratory system		
Bronchitis and emphysema	490-492	19·0
Chronic airways obstruction, not elsewhere classified	496	3·3

[1] International Classification of Diseases 9th revision.
[2] Less than 100,000 days.

Equagesic

Mr. David Atkinson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received calling for the inclusion of the drug Equagesic on the limited list of drugs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: We have received a number of letters and other representations about the drug Equagesic. The Advisory Committee on National Health Service Drugs has considered representations from the manufacturers of Equagesic and we have accepted its advice that there is no clinical need for this combination product to be available for National Health Service prescription.

NHS (Trade Unions)

Mr. Canavan asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what subjects he discussed at his last meeting with trade union representatives of employees in the National Health Service.

Mr. Newton: When my predecessor met the staff side of the General Whitley Council on 16 September 1985, the following subjects were discussed:

Implementation of the NHS management inquiry report.
The structure and role of the NHS management board.
Privatisation/contracting out.
Funding of pay settlements.
Code of practice issued by the Commission for Racial Equality.

NHS (Staff)

Mr. Dubs asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the numbers of staff employed by the National Health Service in England expressed as whole-time equivalents as well as actual full-time and part-time numbers.

Mr. Newton: The information requested is shown in the table.

NHS directly employed staff as at 30 September 1985[1] England

Whole time equivalent[2]	Numbers[2]	
	Full-time	Part-time
812,800	605,900	368,000

Source: DHSS Annual Censuses of NHS Medical and Non-Medical Manpower.

[1] Includes hospital practitioners and part-time medical/dental officers (clinical assistants). There are 377 (numbers) and 60·7 (whole-time equivalent) medical and dental locums whom it is not possible to separately identify as working full time or part time. These staff have been excluded. Agency nursing and midwifery staff are included.

[2] Figures are independently rounded to nearest one hundred.

Abortions

Ms. Richardson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what requirements and assurances his Department has sought since 1974 from clinics performing abortions after 20 weeks; and whether any clinics have lost their licenses through not complying with these requirements.

Mr. Newton: In the private sector, all places approved for abortion are required to give assurances in respect of:
Financial and business arrangements
Advertising
Facilities and staffing, including medical and nursing cover
Maintenance of patient records and medical notes including number of operations
Patient admission/discharge
Arrangements for blood supply, including emergency cover
Estimation of gestational age
Disposal of foetal material

Places specially approved to carry out terminations at 20 weeks and over gestation are required to give additional assurances concerning the estimation of gestational age by ultrasound scan, the maintenance of a separate register, the availability of resuscitation equipment and arrangements for the immediate transfer to a nearby hospital special care baby unit in the event of a live birth.

No clinics approved to carry out terminations at 20 weeks and over gestation have had their approval revoked through non-compliance with these requirements.

Ms. Richardson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the number and percentages of abortions performed to residents and non-residents at 20 to 23 weeks gestation and 24 weeks and over gestation for the years 1984 and 1985; on what grounds these were performed; what ages the women were; how many were performed in the National Health Service; and how many were performed in approved places.

Mr. Newton: The information is given in the tables.

Notifications of legal abortions to resident women—numbers: age (i) gestation weeks, (ii) grounds, (iii) category of premises, England and Wales 1984

Gestation weeks / Grounds	All ages	Under 15	15	16-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45 and over	Unknown
NHS											
20-23											
All grounds	453	12	15	71	104	98	44	77	30	1	1
1. (with any other)	6	—	—	2	1	—	1	2	—	—	—
2. (alone)	146	12	15	52	30	12	13	7	4	1	—
3. (with or without 2)	16	—	—	1	4	2	2	4	3	—	—
4. (alone)	261	—	—	14	62	78	25	63	18	—	1
4. (with any other except 1, excluding 4 alone)	21	—	—	2	6	5	2	1	5	—	—
5.	1	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
6.	2	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	—	—
24 and over											
All grounds	62	1	2	8	19	16	8	6	2	—	—
1. (with any other)	3	—	—	1	—	—	2	—	—	—	—
2. (alone)	8	1	1	2	4	—	—	—	—	—	—
3. (with or without 2)	1	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
4. (alone)	45	—	—	4	15	14	5	5	2	—	—
4. (with any other except 1, excluding 4 alone)	2	—	1	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
5.	2	—	—	—	—	2	—	—	—	—	—
6.	1	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Non-NHS											
20-23											
All grounds	1,319	33	73	546	394	131	65	47	25	4	1
1. (with any other)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
2. (alone)	1,233	33	72	537	366	115	50	38	18	3	1
3. (with or without 2)	83	—	1	9	27	16	14	8	7	1	—
4. (alone)	3	—	—	—	1	—	1	1	—	—	—
4. (with any other except 1, excluding 4 alone)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
5.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
6.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
24 and over											
All grounds	198	9	12	85	60	16	5	5	6	—	—
1. (with any other)	1	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
2. (alone)	192	8	12	83	58	16	5	4	6	—	—
3. (with or without 2)	4	1	—	—	2	—	—	1	—	—	—
4. (alone)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
4. (with any other except 1, excluding 4 alone)	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Gestation weeks / Grounds	All ages	Under 15	15	16-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45 and over	Unknown
5.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
6.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Notifications of legal abortions to non-resident women—numbers: age (i) gestation weeks, (ii) grounds, (iii) category of premises, England and Wales 1984

Gestation weeks / Grounds	All ages	Under 15	15	16-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45 and over	Unknown
NHS											
20-23											
All grounds	6	—	—	1	—	2	1	1	—	1	—
1 (with any other)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
2 (alone)	3	—	—	1	—	1	—	1	—	—	—
3 (with or without 2)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
4 (alone)	3	—	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	1	—
4 (with any other except 1, excluding 4 alone)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
24 and over											
All grounds	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1 (with any other)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
2 (alone)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
3 (with or without 2)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
4 (alone)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
4 (with any other except 1, excluding 4 alone)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Non-NHS											
20-23											
All grounds	2,024	35	61	598	696	336	143	88	51	14	2
1 (with any other)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
2 (alone)	1,977	35	61	597	691	321	134	78	44	14	2
3 (with or without 2)	38	—	—	—	3	14	8	8	5	—	—
4 (alone)	3	—	—	—	—	1	1	—	1	—	—
4 (with any other except 1, exluding 4 alone)	6	—	—	1	2	—	—	2	1	—	—
5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
24 and over											
All grounds	272	10	10	96	89	30	18	12	6	1	—
1 (with any other)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
2 (alone)	269	10	10	96	88	30	17	11	6	1	—
3 (with or without 2)	2	—	—	—	1	—	—	1	—	—	—
4 (alone)	1	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
4 (with any other except 1, excluding 4 alone)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Notifications of legal abortions to resident women—numbers: age (i) gestation weeks, (ii) grounds, (iii) category of premises, England and Wales 1985

Gestation weeks / Grounds	All ages	Under 15	15	16-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45 and over	Unknown
NHS											
20-23											
All grounds	443	6	14	77	111	90	46	70	25	4	—
1. (with any other)	8	—	—	—	2	2	2	2	—	—	—
2. (alone)	138	6	13	51	36	12	12	5	2	1	—
3. (with or without 2)	12	—	—	—	8	1	2	1	—	—	—
4. (alone)	263	—	1	24	58	71	28	60	18	3	—
4. (with any other except 1, excluding 4 alone)	21	—	—	2	7	3	2	2	5	—	—
5.	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
6.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
24 and over											
All grounds	53	—	1	6	15	16	9	4	1	1	—
1. (with any other)	5	—	—	1	1	2	—	1	—	—	—

Gestation weeks Grounds	All ages	Under 15	15	16-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45 and over	Unknown
2. (alone)	8	—	1	2	2	2	—	1	—	—	—
3. (with or without 2)	1	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
4. (alone)	34	—	—	3	11	9	7	2	1	1	—
4. (with any other except 1, excluding 4 alone)	5	—	—	—	1	3	1	—	—	—	—
5.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
6.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Non-NHS											
20-23											
All grounds	1,489	33	80	612	466	160	66	44	24	3	1
1. (with any other)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
2. (alone)	1,406	33	80	605	435	130	58	41	21	2	1
3. (with or without 2)	76	—	—	6	27	29	8	3	3	—	—
4. (alone)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
4. (with any other except 1, excluding 4 alone)	5	—	—	—	4	—	—	—	—	1	—
5.	1	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
6.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
24 and over											
All grounds	131	6	7	64	42	5	4	2	1	—	—
1. (with any other)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
2. (alone)	128	6	7	64	41	4	3	2	1	—	—
3. (with or without 2)	3	—	—	—	1	1	1	—	—	—	—
4. (alone)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
4. (with any other except 1, excluding 4 alone)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
5.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
6.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Notifications of legal abortions to non-resident women—numbers: age (i) gestation weeks, (ii) grounds, (iii) category of premises, England and Wales 1985

Gestation weeks Grounds	All ages	Under 15	15	16-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45 and over	Unknown
NHS											
20-23											
All grounds	2	—	—	—	1	—	—	1	—	—	—
1. (with any other)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
2. (alone)	1	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
3. (with or without 2)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
4. (alone)	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
4. (with any other except 1, excluding 4 alone)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
5.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
6.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
24 and over											
All grounds	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1. (with any other)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
2. (alone)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
3. (with or without 2)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
4. (alone)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
4. (with any other except 1, excluding 4 alone)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
5.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
6.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Non-NHS											
20-23											
All grounds	2,004	37	74	552	672	313	190	108	51	7	—
1. (with any other)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
2. (alone)	1,962	37	74	549	663	306	179	103	44	7	—
3. (with or without 2)	32	—	—	3	7	5	7	4	6	—	—
4. (alone)	2	—	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	—
4. (with any other except 1, excluding 4 alone)	8	—	—	—	2	1	3	1	1	—	—
5.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
6.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
24 and over											
All grounds	310	4	16	102	91	47	29	13	7	1	—
1. (with any other)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
2. (alone)	306	4	16	102	89	47	28	12	7	1	—
3. (with or without 2)	3	—	—	—	1	—	1	1	—	—	—
4. (alone)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Gestation weeks Grounds	All ages	Under 15	15	16-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45 and over	Unknown
4. (with any other except 1, excluding 4 alone)	1	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
5.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
6.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Grounds as listed in Schedule 2 of the Abortion Regulations 1968.

Mr. Merchant asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give a breakdown by regional health authority of all those centres which are currently licensed for the performing of abortions; and in each of those centres, how many abortions were performed *(a)* in total, *(b)* from 0 to 19 weeks gestation, *(c)* from 21 to 20 weeks gestation, *(d)* from 22 to 23 weeks gestation and *(e)* 24 or more weeks gestation, in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Newton: The private nursing homes approved to carry out abortions in each regional health authority are a in England are as follows. For reasons of confidentiality, information is not released about the numbers of abortions performed at each specific centre.

PLACES APPROVED UNDER SECTION 1(3) OF THE ABORTION ACT 1967—BY REGIONAL HEALTH AUTHORITY

Region and Approved Places

Northern

Cleveland Nuffield Hospital
Junction Road
Norton
Stockton-on-Tees

Newcastle Nuffield Hospital
Osborn Avenue
Jesmond
Newcastle-upon-Tyne

Yorkshire

Belvedere Nursing Home
Belvedere Road
Scarborough

Duchy House Nuffield
Queen's Road
Harrogate

Fallodon Private Nursing Home
4 Allerton Park
Leeds

Fulford Grange Hospital
Micklefield Lane
Rawdon
Leeds

Hull Nuffield Hospital
Westbourne Avenue
Hull

Yorkshire Clinic
Bradford Road
Bingley
West Yorkshire

Trent

Beechwood Private Clinic
Norton Church Road
Norton
Sheffield

Bromhead Nursing Home
Nettleham Road
Lincoln

Danum Lodge Nursing Home
123 Thorne Road
Doncaster

Leicester Nuffield Hospital
Scraptoft Lane
Leicester

Park Hospital
Sherwood Lodge Drive
Arnold
Nottingham

Parkfield Private Hospital
Parkfield Road
Rotherham
South Yorkshire

St. Wilfred's Nursing Home
51 Bawtry Road
Bessacarr
Doncaster

East Anglian

BUPA Hospital
Old Watton Road
Colney
Norwich

Evelyn Hospital
Trumpington Road
Cambridge

Fitzwilliam Hospital
Milton Way
South Bretton
Peterborough

Ipswich Surgical Home
57 Fonnerean Road
Ipswich
Suffolk

North West Thames

BUPA Hospital
Heathbourne Road
Bushey
Watford
Herts

Chatsworth Clinic
76-78 Park Road
New Barnet
Herts

Garden Hospital
46-50 Sunney Gardens Road
Hendon
London NW4

Park View Clinic
87 Mattock Lane
Ealing
London W5

Royal Masonic Hospital
Ravenscourt Park

London W6 0TN

North East Thames

Fairfield Nursing Home
68 Russell Road
Buckhurst Hill
Essex

Marie Stopes Nursing Home
10 Manstone Road
London NW2

Portland Hospital
209 Great Portland Street
London W1N 6AH

Wellesley Hospital
Eastern Avenue
Southend-on-Sea

South East Thames

Alexandra Hospital
Impton Lane
Walderslade
Kent

Avenue Clinic
14 New Church Road
Hove
Sussex

Blackheath Hospital
40-42 Lee Terrace
London SE3

Leigham Private Clinic
76 Leigham Court Road
London SW16

Raleigh Nursing Home
1A Raleigh Gardens
Brixton Hill
London SW2

Victoria House Nursing Home
Victoria Street
Rochester
Kent

Wistons Nursing Home
138 Dyke Road
Brighton

South West Thames

Clare Park Clinic
Clare Park
Crondall Lane
Crondall
Farnham
Surrey

New Victoria Hospital
184 Coombe Lane West
Kingston Upon Thames
Surrey

Rosslyn Nursing Home
15-17 Rosslyn Road
East Twickenham
Middlesex

West Sussex Clinic
48 Shelley Road
Worthing

Woking Nuffield Hospital
Shores Road
Woking

Wessex

Bath Clinic
Claverton Down Road
Coombe Down
Bath

Chalybeate Hospital
Chalybeate Close
Tremona Road
Southampton
Hants

Dean Park Nursing Home
23-25 Ophir Road
Bournemouth
Dorset

Hampshire Clinic
Basing Road
Basingstoke
Hants

New Hall Hospital
Bodenham
Salisbury
Wiltshire

Sarum Road Private Nursing Home
Sarum Road
Winchester
Hants.

Wessex Nuffield Hospital
Winchester Road
Chandlers Ford
Eastleigh
Hants.

Winterbourne Hospital
Herrington Road
Dorchester
Dorset

Oxford

Ackland Nuffield Hospital
Banbury Road
Oxford

Foscote Private Hospital
Foscote Road
Banbury

HRH Princess Christian's Hospital
12 Clarence Road
Windsor
Berks.

Thames Valley Nuffield Hospital
Wrexham Street
Slough

South Western

Chesterfield Nuffield Hospital
Clifton Hill
Bristol

Cotswold Nuffield Hospital
Talbot Road
Cheltenham
Gloucestershire

Duchy Hospital
Penventinnie Lane
Treliske
Truro

Exeter Nuffield Hospital
Wonford Road
Exeter

Plymouth Nuffield Hospital
Derriford Road
Derriford
Plymouth

Somerset Nuffield Hospital
Staplegrove Elm
Taunton
Somerset

West Midlands
Blackdown Nursing Home
Old Milverton Lane
Blackdown
Leamington Spa

Calthorpe Nursing Home
4 Arthur Road
Edgbaston
Birmingham

Robert Nursing Home
162 Station Road
Kings Norton
Birmingham

Salop Nuffield Hospital
Longden Road
Shrewsbury
SY3 9DP

South Bank Hospital
139 Bath Road
Worcester
WR5 3AG

Wye Valley Nuffield Hospital
Venus Lane
Hereford

Mersey
BUPA Murrayfield Hospital
Holmwood Drive
Thingwall
Wirral
Merseyside

Merseyside Nursing Home
32 Parkfield Road
Liverpool

North Western
Alexandra Hospital
Mill Lane
Cheadle
Cheshire

Highfield Private Hospital
Manchester Road
Rochdale

South Manchester Private Clinic
136 Chester Road
Hazel Grove
Stockport

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will give a breakdown of total abortions in the last five years for which figures are available of abortions upon *(a)* resident and *(b)* non-resident women in England and Wales, stating how many of those abortions on such women were performed at nought to 19 weeks gestation, 20 weeks, 21 weeks, 22 weeks, 23 weeks, 24 weeks, 25 weeks, 26 weeks, 27 weeks, 28 weeks, or more, stating in each case (i) the age of the mother, (ii) the marital status of the mother, (iii) the category of premises, (iv) the number of children previously liveborn to the mother, (v) the abortion technique used and (vi) whether the abortion was an NHS abortion carried out in a non-NHS centre under agency arrangements;

(2) if he will give a breakdown of the different grounds for which abortions were peformed in England and Wales in each of the last five years for which figures are available on *(a)* resident and *(b)* non-resident women, stating how many of those abortions on such women were performed at nought to 19 weeks gestation, 20 weeks, 21 weeks, 22 weeks, 23 weeks, 24 weeks, 25 weeks, 26 weeks, 27 weeks and 28 weeks or more, stating in each case (i) the age of the mother, (ii) the marital status of the mother, (iii) the category of premises, (iv) the number of children previously liveborn to the mother, (v) the abortion technique used and (vi) whether the abortion was a National Health Service abortion carried out in a non-National Health Service centre under agency arrangements.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 9 February 1987, c. *153*]: The exact information requested by my hon. Friend would require tables showing about 34 million separate figures on some 80,000 pages. Copies of five tables giving the information in a more condensed form have been placed in the Library. Figures for 1986 relate to notifications for the March, June and September quarters received up to the end of November 1986.

AIDS

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for Social Services which London hospitals are able to treat people seeking hospital treatment for AIDS.

Mr. Newton: We would expect all general hospitals to be able to treat such patients, and specialist hospitals to be able to so for those conditions associated with AIDS with which they deal.

Mr. Arnold asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what arrangements he is making within the North West region for the appropriate treatment of AIDS cases in maternity wards.

Mr. Newton: Such arrangements are a matter for health authorities to determine.

Mr. Dickens asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what guidance his Department has issued in connection with the anti-AIDS campaign about the multiple use of needles for blood testing in schools.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what information his Department has received in the context of the anti-AIDS campaign about the relative safety of the gun method and the use of disposable needles for injections; what guidance he has issued on this matter; and what representations he has received about the use of the gun method.

Mr. Newton: I shall let my hon. Friends have replies as soon as possible.

Committee of Public Accounts (Recommendations)

Mr. Campbell-Savours asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will list those recommendations of the Committee of Public Accounts since 1983 affecting his Department which have been implemented.

Mr. Fowler: I refer the hon. Member to the Treasury minutes published in response to the relevant reports of the Committee. The Treasury minutes are contained in:

1983-84
Cmnd. 9178
Cmnd. 9226
Cmnd. 9325
Cmnd. 9368

1984-85
Cmnd. 9530
Cmnd. 9546
Cmnd. 9587
Cmnd. 9638
Cmnd. 9696
Cmnd. 9743

1985-86
Cmnd. 9808
Cmnd. 9859
Cmnd. 9917

The Committee, on which the hon. Member serves, monitors Departmental progress with accepted recommendations.

Hepatitis

Mr. Soley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether hepatitis A and B are notifiable diseases.

Mrs. Currie: Infective jaundice is notifiable under the Public Health (Infectious Diseases) Regulations 1968. Two of its causes are hepatitis A and hepatitis B.

Maternity Payments

Mr. Ron Lewis asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in Carlisle claimed the maternity grant in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: Information on the number of claimants to maternity grant is not available in the precise form requested.

The Carlisle constituency is covered by the Department's office at Carlisle, although its boundaries are not conterminous with the constituency. The number of claims received for maternity grant in the Carlisle local office during the calendar year 1986 was 1,462.

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in Lambeth claimed the maternity grant in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: Information is not available in the form requested, but in the 12 months ending 31 December 1986 the following number of claims to maternity grant were made at the Department's offices which cover the borough of Lambeth, although the boundaries are not conterminous:

	Number
Southwark	925
Kennington Park	731
Brixton	1,375
Balham[1]	—
Peckham	1,958
Crystal Palace	459
Streatham	755
Battersea[1]	—

[1] Claims for these offices are dealt with at Broadstairs out-station. A total of 5,258 claims were dealt with at that office but this total includes claims proper to other offices.

Mr. Flannery asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in Sheffield, Hillsborough claimed the maternity grant in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: Information on the number of claimants to maternity grant is not available in the precise form requested.

The Sheffield, Hillsborough constituency is covered by the Department's offices at Sheffield, North-East and Sheffield, North-West, although their boundaries are not conterminous with the constituency. The numbers of claims received for maternity grant in each of the two local offices during the calendar year 1986 were as follows:

	Number
Sheffield, North-East	1,579
Sheffield, North-West	1,933

Mr. Flannery asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in Sheffield, Hillsborough received maternity allowance in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: Information is not available in the form requested, but in the 12 months ending April 1986, the latest year for which figures are available, 790 claims to maternity allowance were made at Sheffield, North-East and 1,142 claims at Sheffield, North-West, the Department's offices which cover the constituency, although the boundaries are not conterminous.

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in Lambeth received maternity allowance in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: Information is not available in the form requested, but in the 12 months ending April 1986, the latest year for which figures are available, the following number of claims to maternity allowance were made at the Department's offices which cover the borough of Lambeth although the boundaries are not conterminous:

	Number
Southwark	1,115
Kennington Park	410
Brixton	1,727
Balham	[1]
Peckham	1,431
Crystal Palace	1,301
Streatham	1,325
Battersea	[1]

[1] Claims for these offices are dealt with at Broadstairs out-station. A total of 2,999 claims were dealt with at that office but this total includes claims proper to other offices.

Mr. Jim Callaghan asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in Heywood and Middleton received maternity allowance in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: Information is not available in the form requested, but in the 12 months ending April 1986, the latest year for which figures are available, 935 claims to maternity allowance were made at Middleton, the Department's office which covers the constituency, although the boundaries are not conterminous.

Mr. Jim Callaghan asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in Heywood and Middleton claimed the maternity grant in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: Information on the number of claimants to maternity grant is not available in the precise form requested.

The Heywood and Middleton constituency is covered by the Department's office at Middleton. The number of claims received for maternity grant in the Middleton local office during the calendar year 1986 was 1,138.

Ms. Richardson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in Harlow claimed the maternity grant in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: Information on the number of claimants to maternity grant is not available in the precise form requested.

The Harlow constituency is covered by the Department's office at Harlow, although its boundaries are not conterminous with the constituency. The number of claims received for maternity grant in the Harlow local office during the calendar year 1986 was 1,466.

Ms. Richardson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in Harlow received maternity allowance in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: Information is not available in the form requested, but in the 12 months ending April 1986, the latest year for which figures are available, 1,011 claims to maternity allowance were made at Harlow, the Department's office which covers the constituency, although the boundaries are not conterminous.

Mr. Ron Lewis asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in Carlisle received maternity allowance in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: Information is not available in the form requested, but in the 12 months ending April 1986, the latest year for which figures are available, 1,042 claims to maternity allowance were made at Carlisle, the Department's office which covers the constituency, although the boundaries are not conterminous.

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in Copeland received maternity allowance in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: Information is not available in the form requested, but in the 12 months ending April 1986, the latest year for which figures are available, 1,605 claims to maternity allowance were made at Barrow-in-Furness and 565 claims at Whitehaven, the Department's offices which cover the constituency, although the boundaries are not conterminous.

Mr. Forrester asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in Stoke-on-Trent, North, constituency received maternity allowance in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: Information is not available in the form requested, but in the 12 months ending April 1986, the latest year for which figures are available, 1,640 claims to maternity allowance were made at Stoke, North, the Department's office which covers the constituency, although the boundaries are not conterminous.

Mr. Forrester asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in the Stoke-on-Trent, North constituency claimed the maternity grant in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: Information on the number of claimants to maternity grant is not available in the precise form requested.

The Stoke on Trent, North constituency is covered by the Department's office at Stoke, North, although its boundaries are not conterminous with the constituency. The number of claims received for maternity grant in Stoke, North local office during the calendar year 1986 was 2,605.

Private Medicine

Sir Dudley Smith asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will introduce legislation to require that those receiving private treatment in National Health Service hospitals are required to produce their private insurance cover details or lodge the necessary funds with the hospital before private treatment starts.

Mrs. Currie: Existing instructions to health authorities are that before admitting a private patient hospitals should always be satisfied of his ability to pay. They should seek deposits equivalent to the full estimated cost of the hospital charges which will be payable, except where there are good grounds for believing that no difficulty will arise over payment, for example when evidence of adequate insurance cover is produced. The Handbook on the Management of Private Practice in Health Service Hospitals, issued in March 1986 to all Health Authorities which are required to implement it, makes the position quite clear.

We have no plans to introduce legislation.

Sir Dudley Smith asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what percentage of people who owe money to the National Health Service through defaulting on payment for private treatment in National Health Service hospitals are foreigners.

Mrs. Currie: The information requested is not available. Health authorities are not required to keep records distinguishing the country of origin of private patients treated in Health Service hospitals.

National Kidney Research Fund

Mr. Watts asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will make a grant to the national kidney research fund in the 1987-88 financial year.

Mrs. Currie: Grants to help with the administration costs of national voluntary organisations which are registered charities or companies limited by guarantee, and which assist in furthering the Department's policy objectives in the field of health care, can be made under section 64 of the Health Service and Public Health Act 1968. The research activities of voluntary bodies are not funded under the section 64 scheme.

No application for a section 64 grant in 1987-88 has been received from the National Kidney Research Fund.

State Pensions

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the future funding of state pensions.

Mr. Major: State retirement pensions will continue to be funded principally through national insurance contributions by employers and employees. We took steps in the Social Security Act 1986 to modify the future costs of the state earnings-related pension in order to ensure that it would be possible to fund increasing pensions for growing numbers of pensioners.

Social Fund

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what estimate he has made of the change in expenditure by his Department from the introduction of the social fund in Brighton; how many payments he estimates will be made from this fund; and what is the estimated average amount.

Mr. Major: Decisions on the total size of the social fund and on allocations to different parts of the country will be taken nearer to the time of its full introduction in April 1988.

Consultants

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list, by district, the numbers of consultants employed in the National Health Service as *(a)* whole-time, *(b)* maximum part-time and *(c)* part-time.

Mr. Newton: Information on employment of National Health Service consultants by district is not available centrally for all districts. Numbers of consultant contracts held by regional health authorities, district health authorities designated for teaching purposes, and special health authorities for the London postgraduate teaching hospitals are set out in the table. Some consultants may hold contracts with more than one authority.

Number of NHS consultants employed by RHAs and DHAs designated for teaching purposes in England and the London Postgraduate Teaching Hospitals at 30 September 1986

	Whole-time	Max part-time	Other part-time
Northern RHA	537	161	26
Newcastle RHA	164	43	34
Yorkshire RHA	371	306	15
Leeds Western HA	55	22	45
Leeds Eastern HA	76	30	3
Trent RHA	375	213	20
Leicestershire HA	92	77	5
Nottingham HA	94	71	15
Sheffield HA	130	50	8
East Anglian RHA	265	171	26
Cambridge HA	67	47	11
NW Thames RHA	329	264	110
Paddington/North Kensington HA	23	25	40
Riverside HA	51	56	73
NE Thames RHA	339	294	101
Hampstead HA	36	37	43
Bloomsbury HA	47	85	102
City & Hackney HA	38	44	47
Tower Hamlets HA	18	30	40
SE Thames RHA	341	350	44
West Lambeth HA	37	30	46
Camberwell HA	21	43	25
Lewisham/North Southwark HA	76	42	58
SW Thames RHA	290	341	74
Wandsworth HA	40	48	59
Wessex RHA	301	241	33
Southampton/SW Hampshire HA	78	48	6
Oxford RHA	221	217	29
Oxfordshire HA	93	66	10
South Western RHA	354	256	49
Bristol & Weston HA	67	52	12
West Midlands RHA	672	471	55
Cental Birmingham HA	95	59	9
Mersey RHA	299	178	24
Liverpool HA	125	49	30
North Western RHA	498	326	42
Central Manchester Health Authority	57	51	13
South Manchester Health Authority	82	62	12
Salford Health Authority	64	42	10
SHAs for the London Postgraduate Teaching Hospitals			
Hammersmith and Queen Charlotte's	30	10	19
Hospitals for Sick Children	19	20	28
National Hospital for Nervous Diseases	11	19	16
Moorfields Eye Hospital	3	14	26
Bethlem and Maudsley Hospitals	19	7	11
National Heart and Chest Hospitals	21	29	16
Royal Marsden Hospital	12	15	16
Eastman Dental Hospital	10	2	7

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what is the number of consultant orthopaedic surgeons per head of population in each regional health authority;

(2) what is the number of consultant dermatologists per head of population for each regional health authority.

Mr. Newton: The information requested is in the table.

Number of whole-time equivalent of consultants in the specialties of traumatic and orthopaedic surgery and dermatology per 100,000 population at 30 September 1986: analysis by region within England

	WTE per 100,000 population	
	Traumatic and orthopaedic surgery	Dermatology
England[1]	1·36	0·42
Northern	1·48	0·40
Yorkshire	1·39	0·41
Trent	1·23	0·35
East Anglian	1·57	0·35
North West Thames	1·16	0·35
North East Thames	1·52	0·50
South East Thames	1·31	0·70
South West Thames	1·16	0·41
Wessex	1·10	0·35
Oxford	1·35	0·47
South Western	1·24	0·47
West Midlands	1·53	0·38
Mersey	1·33	0·34
North Western	1·61	0·33

[1] Including special health authorities for the London postgraduate teaching hospitals.

Children (Abuse)

Mr. Dickens asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps he proposes to take to reduce the backlog of cases of children who have suffered sexual or other forms of abuse and who are waiting for psychiatric treatment at Great Ormond Street hospital; what is the current backlog; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: Very urgent cases of children who have suffered abuse for whom psychiatric counselling is sought from the hospital for sick children are seen immediately; less urgent cases within four or at the most six weeks. The hospital's Department of psychological medicine advises that it is currently keeping up with referrals, which are running at four to five per week.

Since this programme started in September 1981, 630 cases have been referred and 250 patients were treated last year. The Department is funding a special project to develop this service further over the next three years.

Several other clinics in London and elsewhere provide psychiatric counselling for the victims of child abuse.

Radiation (Cancer)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) pursuant to his answer of 16 February, regarding cancer incidence, if he will give for the 0-24 year age group *(a)* the number of deaths from cancer and *(b)* the registration of cancer of (i) chronic myeloid leukaemia, (ii) acute myeloid leukaemia, (iii) chronic and acute myeloid leukaemia, (iv) acute lymphatic leukaemia and (v) (i) to (iv) inclusive giving in each case the number of deaths from cancers which have occurred and which were expected and the ratio between occurrence and expected rate for each of the 14 nuclear installations from the dates given in his answer, save for Winfrith, which should be given from January 1968, Bradwell from July 1962, Berkeley from June 1962 and Oldbury from December 1967, Hinckley A from March 1965, Hinckley B from September 1976, Trawsfynydd from March 1965, Dungeness A from October 1965, Sizewell A from March 1966 and Wylfa from November 1967 giving, for each station, the data for each of the four distance zones separately and for the four distance zones aggregated indicating the distance of each zone, and aggregated zone, from the installation;

(2) if he will give the number and expected rate of leukaemia deaths in the 0 to 24 years age group in the area of *(a)* Trawsfynydd, *(b)* Sizewell and *(c)* Dungeness nuclear plants 1963 to 1980 inclusive;

(3) pursuant to his answer of 16 February, *Official Report*, column 506, regarding cancer incidence, if he will give *(a)* the number of deaths and *(b)* the registration of cancers for (i) all leukaemias, (ii) all lymphatic leukaemias and (iii) all lymphatic malignancies for the three age groups, 14 nuclear installations, giving the rates for the four distance zones separately and amalgamated from 1959, or the date the plant started to operate, whichever is the later to 1980 showing in each case the expected rate.

Mr. Newton: The exact information requested can be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, I refer the hon. Member to table 3 of the report "Cancer Incidence and Mortality in the vicinity of Nuclear Installations, England and Wales, 1959-80", proof copies of which are in the Library.

The more detailed information requested will be obtainable from the microfiche which will become available on or after the publication of the report.

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services, pursuant to his answer of 16 February regarding cancer incidence, if he will list the 25 groups and 16 sites of malignancy cited.

Mr. Newton: I refer the hon. Member to section 4.6 of chapter 4 (page 73) and to the table on page 84 of the report "Cancer Incidence and Mortality in the vicinity of Nuclear Installations, England and Wales, 1959-80", proof copies of which have been placed in the Library.

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services, pursuant to his answer of 16 February regarding incidence, if the Office of Population, Censuses and Surveys' report has studied the cancer incidence and deaths occurring within 12½ kilometres of each nuclear installation.

Mr. Newton: Yes. The report "Cancer Incidence and Mortality in the vicinity of Nuclear Installations, England and Wales, 1959-80" has studied cancer incidence and deaths occurring among those living in pre-1974 local authority areas (LAAs) where at least two thirds of the population live within eight miles (12·87 kilometres) of 15 nuclear installations. The report also includes data for LAAs where at least one third of the population live within 10 miles (16·09 kilometres) of the installations.

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish in the *Official Report* the full cost of the statistical study on cancer incidence and mortality in the vicinity of nuclear installations in England and Wales from 1959 to 1980, carried out by the Office of Population, Censuses and Surveys.

Mr. Newton: The cost of the statistical study on cancer incidence and mortality in the vicinity of nuclear installations in England and Wales from 1959 to 1980 carried out by the Medical Research Council, the Imperial Cancer Research Fund, and the Office of Population, Censuses and Surveys is about £300,000 excluding overheads (such as accommodation).

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish in the *Official Report* details of areas of the highest incidence of those forms of cancer which have been correlated with atomic radiation; and whether any of these areas are in the vicinity of nuclear power stations.

Mr. Newton: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to him by my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr. Whitney) on 15 April 1986 at columns *371-72*. This presented limited data on the distribution of myeloid leukaemia in the United Kingdom in 1984.

There are a number of detailed studies currently in progress into the incidence of cancer in the United Kingdom. As my predecessor stated on 12 December 1985 at column *767* the results of these will be considered by the committee on the medical aspects of radiation in the environment as they become available. Photocopies of the first rough proof from the printer of the OPCS report "Cancer Incidence and Mortality in the vicinity of Nuclear Installations, England and Wales 1959-1980" were placed in the Library on 18 February 1987.

Mr. R. J. Knight

Mr. Nellist asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) on what date his formal inquiry into the case of Mr. R. J. Knight will now be heard;

(2) what are the reasons for the delay in considering the application of Mr. R. J. Knight of Coventry for a formal ruling that he was in employed earner's employment at the time of his accident; and if he has sent an apology to the constituent of the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East.

Mr. Lyell: The oral inquiry into Mr. Knight's case was originally scheduled for 14 January but had to be postponed because adverse weather conditions prevented the attendance of one of the witnesses. Mr. Knight has been informed that the hearing will now be held on 18 March. I much regret the delay.

Mr. Nellist asked the Secretary of State for Social Services why the letter from the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East of 7 November 1986 concerning the case of Mr. R. J. Knight took 14 weeks to answer.

Mr. Lyell: I am sorry for the delay. I had hoped to write to the hon. Member in December but the letter was delayed over Christmas and then had to be amended. The inquiry, the result of which I then intended to await, was postponed on account of bad weather. My letter was then reamended.

Industrial Deafness

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has any plans to change the criteria by which industrial deafness is determined; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Major: The Industrial Injuries Advisory Council is keeping the occupational deafness scheme under continuous review and a report is expected later this year. We will give careful consideration to its recommendations.

Drug Testing

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has received the report of the medicines commission on the testing of drugs in healthy volunteers; and whether he will publish its findings and give an indication of his intentions on it.

Mr. Newton: The report has been received and we are making arrangements for it to be published. In considering our conclusions, we are taking account also of the Royal College of Physicians report "Research on Healthy Volunteers".

Meningitis

Mr. Simon Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many individuals have developed meningitis in the United Kingdom during the current year; and how these figures compare to those for the same period in 1986.

Mrs. Currie: In the six weeks to 13 February 1987 the communicable disease surveillance centre was notified of 215 isolations of meningococcal meningitis in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. In the same period, 13 isolations in Scotland were notified to the communicable disease surveillance unit in Glasgow. The comparable figures for 1986 were 109 and 17 respectively.

Mr. Simon Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what initiatives he has already taken and intends to take to combat the rising incidence of meningitis, especially in Stonehouse, Gloucestershire.

Mrs. Currie: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Family Income Supplement

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the latest estimate of the number claiming family income supplement.

Mr. Major: At May 1986, the latest date for which information is available, there were 202,000 families receiving family income supplement.

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many family income supplement claimants are currently paying *(a)* income tax and *(b)* national insurance contributions.

Mr. Major: At April 1986 there were a total of 200,000 families in receipt of family income supplement and of those 138,000 were paying income tax and 188,000 were paying national insurance contributions.

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will state the percentage of family income supplement claimants paying *(a)* tax and national insurance and *(b)* national insurance only.

Mr. Major: At April 1986 there were a total of 200,000 families in receipt of family income supplement and of those 69 per cent. were paying both tax and national insurance contributions and 25 per cent. were paying national insurance contributions only.

Benefits

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the number of unemployed claimants drawing *(a)* unemployment benefit, *(b)* unemployment benefit and supplementary benefit and *(c)* supplementary benefit only in 1957, 1979 and the latest available date.

Mr. Lyell: The available information is given in the table.

	Unemployment benefit only	*Unemployment benefit and national assistance/[1] supplementary benefit*	*National assistance/ supplementary benefit*
November 1957	[2]153,000	[2]35,000	46,000
November 1979	387,000	80,000	472,000
May 1986	732,000	194,000	1,684,000

[1] Supplementary benefit replaced national assistance in 1966.
[2] Estimates.

Kidney Organ Donor Cards

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many kidney organ donor cards have been issued by his Department during the past 12 months; and how many of the cards have been taken up by members of the public.

Mrs. Currie: More than 6 million multi-organ donor cards were issued by the Department in 1986. The driver and vehicle licensing centre (DVLC) at Swansea distributed a further 3½ million by enclosing a card with each driving licence sent out.

It is impossible to estimate precisely how many of these cards have been signed and are now being carried by people willing to donate their organs. However, a survey carried out on behalf of the British Kidney Patient Association in January 1987 suggested that about 29 per cent. of the adult population possessed a donor card; this represents about 12½ million people in Great Britain.

Fraud

Mr. Clelland asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many persons were *(a)* prosecuted and *(b)* convicted for offences of fraud against his Department in each of the years since 1979.

Mr. Lyell: The information requested is as follows:

	(a) Prosecuted	*(b) Convicted*
1979-80	22,247	21,797
1980-81	24,441	23,871
1981-82	19,713	18,952
1982-83	15,507	14,867
1983-84	10,398	9,479
1984-85	10,394	9,807
1985-86	9,765	9,349

Loan Sanction Allocation (Sheffield)

Mr. Michie asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he received a letter from the Sheffield city council, family and community services committee relating to the social services loan sanction allocation for 1987-88; what response he has sent; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: No such letter has been received.

18 Union Lane, Oulton

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for Social Services why the East Anglian regional health authority has withdrawn from sale No. 18 Union Lane, Oulton, Lowestoft, after receiving and accepting an offer of £27,950.

Mrs. Currie: This is essentially a local matter and the hon. Member may wish to raise it with the chairman of the Great Yarmouth and Waveney district health authority.

Catholic Social Services Central Administration

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to be able to reply to a letter dated 9 December 1986 from the Catholic Social Services Central Administration.

Mrs. Currie: I wrote to the hon. Member on 19 February.

Skoal Bandits

Mr. Michael Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to be able to make an announcement about an agreement with the manufacturers of Skoal Bandits about health warnings on containers.

Mrs. Currie: This is still under consideration and an announcement will be made as soon as possible.

Fluoridation

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) why he will not place a copy of the draft circular on fluoridation of water supplies in the Library;

(2) when the comments of regional general managers must be received on the draft circular giving guidance on the fluoridation of water supplies.

Mrs. Currie: Regional general managers have been asked to submit their comments on the draft circular by 31 March 1987. It would not seem necessary to place such a draft document in the Library but I am writing to the hon. Member enclosing a copy.

Special Health Authority

Mr. Michael Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the annual salary of the chairman and two vice chairmen of the special health authority.

Mr. Newton: Only the chairman of the special health authority will be entitled to remuneration, currently £10,749 per annum.

Mr. Michael Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will place in the Library a copy of the job description for the position of director of the special health authority.

Mr. Newton: The advertisement for the post including a job description was published on 19 and 22 February in leading national newspapers. A cutting has also been placed in the Library.

NHS (Expenditure)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what has been the percentage annual increase since 1972 in National Health Service expenditure deflated by movements in National Health Service pay and prices after taking account of (i) demographic change and the increased health service demands from the growing number of elderly people, and (ii) the higher annual cost of medical technology rising faster than inflation.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 January 1987, c. *119*]: Information in the form requested is available only in respect of gross current expenditure on the hospital and community health services and is as follows:

	HCHS gross current expenditure changes after NHS pay and prices (per cent.)	*Increase in demographic demand (per cent.)*
1972-73	4·6	0·0
1973-74	3·6	−0·1
1974-75	[1]4·2	0·0
1975-76	1·7	0·0
1976-77	0·3	0·2
1977-78	3·0	0·3
1978-79	[2]2·5	0·9
1979-80	−0·6	1·2
1980-81	3·0	0·9
1981-82	2·0	0·3
1982-83	0·8	0·5
1983-84	0·0	0·5
1984-85	−0·1	0·6
1985-86	0·2	1·3

[1] NHS reorganisation in 1974 incorporated community health services with the hospital service.

[2] Figures from 1978-79 are on a slightly different accounting basis and exclude Family Practitioner Committee administration costs.

The costs of medical technology are not separately identified but any increase above general inflation is partially reflected in the HCHS prices index. Increases in activity arising from the introduction of new techniques are estimated to have absorbed resources in the past of 0·5 per cent. a year.

Estimates of increased demand on services from demographic change and medical progress are expressed in expenditure terms but this does not imply that increased spending is the only way in which increased demand can be met. Health authorities' cost improvement programmes and improvements in efficiency have contributed significantly to meeting these demands in recent years.

Mr. Canavan asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will state, for each regional health authority, the allowance made for demographic factors and technical and service developments in determining *(a)* the total current expenditure and *(b)* the total capital expenditure for each year from 1979 to date.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 4 February 1987, c. *696*]: Information is not available in the form requested. Although demographic factors are significant in determining each regional health authority's target share of available resources, their effect on allocations for any particular year is not and cannot be separately identified. Similarly, the cost of technical and service developments is not separately identified in allocations. It is for authorities to decide how to meet these pressures and those arising from demographic change from the total resources available to them; these resources include both cash allocations and savings from cost improvement programmes.

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give the total cash released through the competitive tendering process by each health authority, giving category of services and total, for each year from 1979 to the latest available date for England.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 4 February 1987, c. *701*]: Information is not available in the form requested.

Competitive tendering for domestic, catering and laundry services in England had, by 30 September 1986, generated annual savings of some £73 million. I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) on 25 November 1986 at columns *214-20* which gave a breakdown of that total by district health authority. No matching service breakdown is readily available, but the table following gives the latest available service-by-service analysis for each regional health authority.

Annual Savings.
Quarter Ending 30 September 1986

Region	*Domestic £'000*	*Catering £'000*	*Laundry £'000*	*Total £'000*
Northern	3,184	893	248	4,325
Yorkshire	4,913	634	285	5,832
Trent	3,877	1,132	263	5,272
East Anglian	3,594	90	159	3,843
N W Thames	7,104	823	533	8,460
N E Thames	6,402	324	1,133	7,859
S E Thames	3,275	638	281	4,194
S W Thames	5,345	358	847	6,550
Wessex	2,958	477	393	3,828
Oxford	2,112	43	63	2,218
S Western	2,260	775	541	3,576
W Midlands	4,749	1,616	556	6,921
Mersey	3,344	1,364	187	4,895
N Western	2,386	623	613	3,622
SHAs for the London Postgraduate Teaching Hospitals	1,166	95	89	1,350
Total	56,669	9,885	6,191	72,745

Pharmaceuticals

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will update the information given on 13 January 1986, *Official Report*, c. *501-2*, on prescription charges and the cost of pharmaceuticals by giving figures for subsequent years up to the most recent available date.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 January 1987, c. *428*]: The information requested, in respect of the family practitioner services in England, is set out in the table:

	1985		1986[1]		Financial year[1]
	Jul-Sept	Oct-Dec	Jan-Mar	Apr-June	1985-86
Prescription dispensed (millions)	82·09	87·94	85·26	86·06	341·41
Presciptions exempt from charges (percentage)[3]	81·07	81·83	81·43	82·13	81·12
Costs:					
(i) Payments by patients (excluding pre-payment certificates) (£ million)	30·68	31·34	31·35	33·48	115·67
(ii) Payments from public funds (£ million)	377·31	403·23	392·69	407·21	1,540·21
(iii) Total costs (£ million)	410·82	437·57	429·11	443·74	1,669·42
(iv) Average gross cost per prescription (£)	5·00	4·98	5·03	5·16	4·89
Pre-payment certificates					
Number					
4 monthly (thousands)	54·54	56·62	64·40	55·57	222·69
12 monthly (thousands)	72·98	78·09	142·90	74·80	365·60
Revenue					
(£ million)	2·83	3·00	5·07	3·05	13·54

[1] Figures are not yet available for the third quarter of 1986.
[2] To allow for the time lag in payments, the statistical data has been adjusted to make it compatible with the annual financial information.
[3] Derived from prescriptions dispensed by pharmacists, including pre-payment certificates.

Public Bodies (Appointments)

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list all the public bodies for which he is responsible on which the consideration of the appointment or co-option of a person with knowledge of disability is a statutory requirement; if he will name the persons so appointed or co-opted on each body; and if he will indicate which of those persons is a person with a disability.

Mr. Major [*pursuant to his reply*, 21 January 1987 c. *613-14*]: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is responsible for one body where the appointment of a person with knowledge of disability is a statutory requirement. That body is the Social Security Advisory Committee which contains at least one such person.

In addition, my right hon. Friend has responsibility for the Central Advisory Committee on War Pensions, together with the local war pensions committees, of which there are 81. The central committee is required to contain at least one disabled war pensioner; the local committees contain at least four representatives of disabled ex-service men.

I regret that the need for personal confidentiality prevents me from naming the persons who fulfil the above statutory requirements.

Severe Weather Payments

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services why Tottenham Department of Health and Social Security office has refused to accept a bulk claim for severe weather payments for the week 12 to 18 January inclusive from the Broadwater Farm neighbourhood office on behalf of pensioners over 65 years and families with children under the age of two years on supplementary benefit living within the London borough of Haringey; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Major [*pursuant to his reply*, 26 January 1987 c. *89*]: Supplementary benefit claims, including single payment claims, are normally accepted from a third party only where it has been confirmed both that the claimant is unable to act on his own behalf and that the third party is able to act for him.

A bulk claim would not enable all potential beneficiaries to be correctly identified, nor would it contain all the necessary information to establish entitlement.

The Department's Tottenham local office could not, therefore, accept a bulk claim for exceptionally cold weather payments on behalf of residents of the London borough of Haringey. Instead, the office agreed to accept a list of names and addresses of potential claimants and to send each of them an invitation to claim.

The office received the list on 2 February 1987 and invitations to claim were issued on 10 February 1987.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many applications in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* Britain for severe weather payment have come from persons not on supplementary benefit; and what proportion of these are now being processed with a view to checking entitlement to supplementary benefit.

Mr. Major [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 February 1987, c. *341*]: Information on the number of exceptionally cold weather claims received from people not on supplementary benefit is not available.

People who fail to qualify for a cold weather payment because they are not in receipt of benefit are given a full explanation of why payment has been refused, with advice on how to go about claiming supplementary benefit.

Benefits

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people in the Leeds metropolitan district council area have been in receipt of *(a)* supplementary benefit, *(b)* invalidity benefit and *(c)* housing benefit for each of the last five years.

Mr. Major [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 February 1987, c. *210*]: The information is as follows:

Number of beneficiaries (thousands)

	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
Supplementary benefit	66	68	69	69	[1]
Invalidity benefit[2]	[1]	14	14	13	13
Housing benefit[3]	46	51	101	98	99

[1] Figures not available.
[2] Separate figures for invalidity benefit are not available. Figures supplied include sickness benefit cases, and for 1983 and 1984 also

include non-contributory invalidity benefit cases. The figures are based on management returns from the five social security offices in Leeds which between them cover most of the Leeds Metropolitan District Council area but which are not exactly conterminous with it.

[1] Figures for 1982 and 1983 do not include cases which received help through supplementary benefit before housing benefit was fully implemented in April 1983.

DEFENCE

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any plans to visit south east Asia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Younger: I plan to visit Thailand, Brunei, Malaysia and Singapore in late March and early April. The purpose of my visit is to review high level defence contacts and to discuss matters of mutual interest.

Missile Systems

Mr. Campbell-Savours asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the level of expenditure to 31 March 1986 at present prices for the Polaris rocket motor system.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is £277 million at 1986-87 prices, and £1 = $1·50.

DROPS

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what weight was given in 1982 to the combination of ground pressure and power to weight ratio as a factor in deciding vehicle mobility for the demountable rack off-loading pick-up system vehicles; what were the relative *(a)* ground pressure and *(b)* power-to-weight ratio of (i) the Boughton demountable rack off-loading pick-up system MMLC truck and (ii) the Scammell MMLC DROPS selected for trials in 1983; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will list the key performance requirements for DROPS trucks in 1982; what were the relative performances in respect of turning circles as between the Boughton's MMLC DROPS truck and the Scammell MMLC; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what weight was given in 1982 to stability and tilt angle as a factor in deciding vehicle mobility; what were the relative stability tilt angles of *(a)* Boughton's MMLC DROPS truck and *(b)* the Scammell MMLC DROPS; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The assessments made of the competitive equipment proposals and designs offered by firms in the 1982-83 DROPS competition covered the full desired envelope of technical performance and characteristics as set out in the statement of requirements issued to the industry. I regret I cannot provide comparative details of particular commercial proposals and designs offered to the Ministry in confidence.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment was made by the DROPS team of experts appraising competing DROPS proposals in 1983 as to the feasibility of the stated requirement to carry an 8 ft high ISO container within the 4 m legal limit in FRG; if the requirement was disregarded or deleted; if Boughton's existing DROPS vehicle met this requirement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton A secondary ability to carry an 8 ft high ISO container was seen as a desirable feature in the 1982 DROPS statement of requirement and all competitors' proposals were assessed against it as well as other, more essential features. In the event no proposals at that time (including Boughtons) were able to meet this requirement fully within the height constraints of the German regulations. The requirement still stands as a desirable feature for the medium mobility vehicle and is being addressed as part of the ongoing DROPS procurement programme.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all the equipment in the Army inventory which is between the heights of 7 ft 9 in and 8 ft 6 in and under a weight of 15 tonnes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hamilton: This information is not readily available.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what was the nature of his Department's briefing of the United States Army in 1983 and the first half of 1984 on the flat flatrack; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what assessment was made in Boughton's DROPS proposal in 1982 of the suitability of the flat flatrack for operation in rough terrain; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he will list all official briefings on DROPS given by his Department to the United States Army in 1982; which United States branches, officials or individuals were so briefed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I cannot add to my answers of 16 December 1986 [*Official Report*, c. *501* and *503*.]

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) why, at the DROPS presentation given by his Department on 27 October 1986, it was claimed by his Department that the Multilift mk 4 system now selected was always his Department's preferred choice for DROPS and that the Multilift mk 2 system which picked up a flat flatrack was not the preferred choice of his experts in 1983; and if he will make a statement;

(2) why, at the presentation given by his Department on 27 October 1986, it was claimed that the United States Army had rejected Boughton's DROPS system and returned Boughton's equipment to them, and that this was a vindication of his Department's choice of other systems; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My noble Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement will write to my right hon. Friend.

NATO

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Defence when next he expects to attend the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation Council of Ministers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stanley: My right hon. Friend expects to attend the regular ministerial meetings of the Nuclear Planning Group and of the Defence Planning Committee later this spring.

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the value of the British financial contribution to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation infrastructure programme, at constant prices, in each year since 1975.

Mr. Stanley: The value of the United Kingdom financial contribution to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation infrastructure programme since 1979-80, at average 1986-87 prices (to the nearest £ million) is as follows:

	£ million
1979-80	33
1980-81	51
1981-82	51
1982-83	62
1983-84	67
1984-85	63
1985-86	64
1986-87	76

Figures for the earlier years are not readily available.

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the value of North Atlantic Treaty Organisation infrastructure programme financial contributions to the construction of facilities designed solely or principally for use by British forces, at constant prices, in each year since 1975.

Mr. Stanley: The value of North Atlantic Treaty Organisation infrastructure programme financial contributions to the construction of facilities designed solely or principally for use by United Kingdom forces since 1979-80, at average 1986-87 prices (to the nearest £ million) is as follows:

	£ millions
1979-80	16
1980-81	19
1981-82	56
1982-83	70
1983-84	66
1984-85	81
1985-86	65
1986-87	69

Figures for the earlier years are not readily available.

Trident

Mr. Campbell-Savours asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the cost of the VHF communication system to the Trident submarine programme.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: VHF communications form a very small part of the Trident submarine's tactical weapon system which itself accounts for 21 per cent. of the overall Trident project estimate. There are no shore-based VHF communications provided specifically for Trident.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 15 January, *Official Report*, column *81*, to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North, how much has already been spent on Trident at 1986-87 prices.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: £970 million.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer on 5 February to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North, *Official Report*, column *803*, how much was spent on the Trident programme from the beginning of financial year 1986-87 *(a)* until the end of December 1986 and *(b)* until the end of January 1987.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Actual expenditure figures for the project as a whole are not available beyond November 1986. The estimated expenditure from April 1986 to December 1986 and January 1987 is some £210 million and £260 million respectively.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 15 January, *Official Report*, column *90*, to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North, how much has been contractually committed to Trident at 1986-87 prices.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Some £2,830 million is estimated to have been committed at 1986-87 prices.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the Trident programme to be completed; and if he will break down the expenditure either spent or predicted to be spent according to five-year terms ending in financial years 1984-85, 1989-90, 1994-95 and 1999-2000.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the then Minister of State for Defence Procurement to the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) on 21 June 1985.—[*Official Report*, c. *247*].

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will estimate the level of Trident spending in each year up to 1985-86 using 1986-87 prices and the exchange rates involved in the payments in question.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I will answer shortly.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of the funds contractually committed to Trident, but not yet spent, are committed to contractors in the United States of America.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Some £370 million has been committed to, but not yet spent with, United States contractors.

Skynet

Mr. Campbell-Savours asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is the purpose of the Skynet 4B satellite system;

(2) what is the purpose of the Skynet 4C satellite system.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: They are both military communications satellites.

Expenditure (Scotland)

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will state the estimated percentage share of procurement expenditure on equipment purchased from Scotland in the 1986-87 financial year.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Estimates of regional procurement expenditure are only available for completed financial years. In 1985-86 6 per cent. of defence equipment procurement expenditure was spent in Scotland. This figure is for direct payments to main contractors and does not take account of payments made to subcontractors in Scotland. Expenditure on international collaborative projects is also excluded from this figure.

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will state the percentage share of the total defence expenditure spent in Scotland during each of the past four financial years.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Total defence expenditure is not accounted for regionally.

United States Forces in Britain

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the functions of the Royal Air Force station commanders at United States bases in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Stanley: I will answer shortly.

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those military installations used by United States forces in the United Kingdom at which there is no Royal Air Force station commander.

Mr. Stanley: I will answer shortly.

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make a statement on forthcoming changes in the types, numbers, units and bases of United States Air Force aircraft deployed in Britain;

(2) if there are any plans to base United States Air Force F-15E aircraft in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Stanley: Future deployment plans are generally classified. Where firm deployment plans can be released without prejudice to security the USAF does so, and has announced the replacement of its KC-135 tanker fleet with the re-engined KC-135R and its intention to withdraw the RF-4C aircraft currently based at RAF Alconbury.

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for Defence what was the purpose of the trials conducted by aircraft of the United States Air Force 4450th test group from Royal Air Force Woodbridge in November 1984 and May 1986.

Mr. Stanley: Both deployments were part of a continuing series which provide experience of flying in Europe for US-based air crews.

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total cost to his Department of purchasing additional land in Britain for use by United States forces in each year since 1982.

Mr. Freeman: Under long-standing arrangements, surplus MOD land is made available without charge to United States forces stationed in the United Kingdom. The MOD occasionally purchases additional land for use by United States forces to meet specific operational needs. Records are not maintained in a form which would enable the cost of these limited acquisitions to be identified separately except at disproportionate cost. All MOD surplus land made available to United States forces and additional land purchased for their use remains in MOD ownership.

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what has been the annual cost to the Exchequer of providing land and property management, building design and maintenance, security and other services to United States military installations in Britain in each year since 1982;

(2) what has been the annual income to the Exchequer from United States Government repayments in respect of British Government provision of land and property management, building design and maintenance, security and other services to United States military installations in the United Kingdom in each year since 1982.

Mr. Freeman: The main services provided to the United States forces stationed in this country on a repayment basis, with details of costs and receipts at current prices for the years requested, are as follows:

£ million

	1982-83	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*[5]1986-87*
A. PSA services					
New construction and maintenance[1]	77·4	95·7	103·9	117·7	152·9
New construction funded by NATO[2]	18·1	20·4	8·0	6·7	22·4
Host nation support[3]	n.a.	0·7	4·1	4·0	6·1
PSA administrative expenditure[4]					
Costs	14·7	17·8	23·8	29·0	32·0
Receipts	4·7	7·0	6·0	7·8	21·5
B. MOD services					
MOD civilians employed at United States bases[1] (including MOD police)					
Costs	14·5	18·0	22·5	26·0	
Rents for married quarters					
Costs	1·5	1·7	2·1	2·6	
Receipts[6]	1·5	1·3	1·2	1·4	

[1] These costs are recovered in full.
[2] These costs are recovered from NATO infrastructure funds.
[3] These are costs incurred by the United Kingdom in pursuance of its obligations under the Status of Forces Agreement for which no recovery is made.
[4] These costs reflect expenses incurred by PSA in design of buildings, letting contracts, supervising work in progress and consultancy fees. The under-recovery reflects reduced charges raised by agreement with the United States authorities for defence and foreign policy reasons.
[5] Figures for 1986-87 are forecasts throughout.
[6] The under-recovery reflects reduced charges raised since 1 October 1983 in recognition of the importance of continuing United States/United Kingdom cooperation in the common defence effort.

For the provision of land to the United States forces stationed in this country I refer to my further written answer of today's date.

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the value of United States military construction projects in Britain, at constant prices, in each year since 1975.

Mr. Freeman: The value of new construction undertaken for the United States forces stationed in the United Kingdom at constant 1986-87 prices was as follows:

	£ million
1977-78	81·8
1978-79	70·5
1979-80	62·6
1980-81	61·6
1981-82	49·4
1982-83	69·6
1983-84	85·8
1984-85	71·4
1985-86	72·1
1986-87	112·3

Notes:
1. Figures prior to 1977-78 are not available.
2. The figure for 1986-87 is a forecast.

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for Defence if there is any agreement between Her Majesty's Government and the United States authorities about the standards to which facilities at United States bases are constructed in terms of their suitability for use by United Kingdom armed forces.

Mr. Freeman: No such specific agreement exists but all construction work undertaken for the United States in this country has to comply with United Kingdom building regulations, standards and codes of practice.

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for Defence if the role of the United States Air Force RF-4C Phantom aircraft stationed at Royal Air Force Alconbury includes a nuclear strike task.

Mr. Stanley: No.

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) whether the existing understanding between the United Kingdom and the United States of America governing the use by the United States of its bases in the United Kingdom in an emergency applies equally to United States forces under national command and United States forces under North Atlantic Treaty Organisation command;

(2) whether the existing understanding between the United Kingdom and the United States of America governing the use by the United States of its bases in the United Kingdom in an emergency applies equally to conventional and nuclear weapons;

(3) whether the arrangements for implementing the existing understanding between the United Kingdom and the United States of America governing the use by the United States of its bases in the United Kingdom in an emergency are the same for conventional as for nuclear weapons.

Mr. Stanley: I will answer shortly.

Ministry Property

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the property owned, or leased, by his Department in *(a)* the East Midlands and *(b)* East Anglia.

Mr. Freeman: The following are the main locations owned or leased by the Ministry of Defence in Warwickshire, Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Cambridgeshire, Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex:

Warwickshire
Bramcote — Army barracks
Kineton — Army depot
Kingsbury — Army ranges
Long Marston — Army camp and stores depot
Wedgnock — Army ranges

Leicestershire
Asfordby — Army ranges
Cottesmore — RAF station
Lougborough — Army barracks
Melton Mowbray — Army depot
North Luffenham — RAF station
Old Dalby — Army workshops
Wymeswold — Army training area

Northamptonshire
Chelveston — RAF station
Croughton — RAF station
Greatworth — RAF station
Northampton — Army barracks
Wittering (part) — RAF station
Yardley Chase — Army training area

Cambridgeshire
Alconbury — RAF station[1]
Bassingbourn — Army training area and barracks
Brampton — RAF HQ command
Cambridge — Army rifle range
Ely — RAF hospital
Grafham — RAF rifle range
Molesworth — RAF station[1]
Oakington — Army training area and barracks
Upwood — RAF station[1]
Waterbeach — Army barracks and RE airfield construction unit
Wittering (part) — RAF station
Wyton — RAF station

Norfolk
Coltishall — RAF station
Feltwell — RAF station[1]
Marham — RAF station
Neatishead — RAF station
Sculthorpe — RAF station[1]
Stanford — Army camp and training area
Swaffham — RAF firing range
Swanton Morley — RAF station
Thetford — Army rifle range
Watton — RAF station
West Raynham — RAF station

Suffolk
Barnham — Army camp and training area
Bawdsey — RAF station
Bentwaters — RAF station[1]
Hadleigh — Army supply and armament depot
Honington — RAF station
Lakenheath — RAF station[1]
Mildenhall — RAF station[1]
Orfordness — Former radio station
Stradishall — Army/RAF station
Wattisham — RAF station
Woodbridge — RAF station[1]

Essex
Colchester — Army barracks, camp, hospital and ranges

Debden	— Army barracks and training area
Fingringhoe	— Army ranges, camp and training area
Shoeburyness	— Army barracks, camp and training area, R and D establishments.
Wethersfield	— RAF station[1]

[1] RAF airfield made available for use by the United States forces.

ABM Treaty

Mr. Mason asked the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has regarding the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics deployed anti-satellite system; what is its capability; whether it is a technical breach of the anti-ballistic missile treaty; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stanley: The Soviet Union has the world's only deployed anti-satellite (ASAT) sytem, an orbital interceptor of limited capability. Although operational since the early 1970s, the system has been tested on various occasions, not always successfully, and not since 1982. The actual interpretation of the ABM treaty is for the two signatories of that treaty.

Trackway

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when he expects to complete the investigation by his licensing branch into the allegation that unauthorised production or marketing of trackway is being undertaken by the Singapore Government in breach of a British patent held by Laird (Anglesey) Limited; when the allegation first came to his notice and by what means; and if he will make a statement;

(2) further to his answer to the hon. Member for Ynys Môn of 17 February, *Official Report*, column *525*, when the allegation of unauthorised production of trackway was first brought to Her Majesty's Government's attention; and by what means.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The allegation was first made by Mr. V. O'Connor, managing director of Laird Anglesey Limited in June 1984 with further evidence in February 1985 and raised serious and complicated issues both of proof and enforceability. It is not a question of a patent held by Laird Anglesey Limited but of Crown copyright. My officials are currently in correspondence with the Singapore MOD.

Maritime Strategy

Mr. O'Neill asked the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the extent to which his overall maritime strategy conforms with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation Concept of Maritime Operations, COMAROPS.

Mr. Stanley: Our overall planning for maritime operations takes full account of the concepts developed by the NATO military authorities.

European Fighter Aircraft

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will provide a percentage breakdown of the amount of work to be allocated to the countries participating in the European fighter aircraft project.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: For the development phase it has been agreed that work will be shared as follows:

	Per cent.
United Kingdom	33
Germany	33
Italy	21
Spain	13

For production, workshares will be based on the number of aircraft each nation has declared as its offtake at the start of the production phase.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he estimates that any of the equipment for the European fighter aircraft will be subject to United States extra-territoriality restriction.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We do not accept the validity of claims that United Kingdom defence equipment might be subject to the exra-territorial jurisdiction of another country.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) whether United States companies will be permitted to bid for contracts to provide avionics for the European fighter aircraft;

(2) whether West German subsidiaries of United States companies will be permitted to bid for contracts to provide inertial navigational systems for the European fighter aircraft.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The involvement of companies from nations not participating in the European fighter aircraft is in principle permissible. In order to maximise the involvement of the participating nations, however, such companies would be encouraged to acquire a partner (or partners) from within these nations.

Officers (Age)

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is the average age of a major general in the British Army;

(2) what is the average age of a brigadier in the British Army;

(3) what is the average age of a lieutenant colonel in the British Army;

(4) what is the average age of a colonel in the British Army;

(5) what is the average age of a major in the British Army;

(6) what is the average age of a lieutenant general in the British Army;

(7) what is the average age of a general in the British Army.

Mr. Freeman: The average ages by rank from major upwards of officers in the British Army at 31 December 1986 were as shown in the table:

Rank	*Average age*
Major	41
Lieutenant colonel	45
Colonel	49
Brigadier	50
Major general	52
Lieutenant general	54
General	57

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether age is taken into account when assessing an officer's suitability for promotion.

Mr. Freeman: Age is one of the factors which may be taken into account in determining whether an individual should be promoted.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the ability of officers over the age of 50 years to direct operations above unit level in a conventional war on the central front.

Mr. Freeman: Assessments of all officers' abilities are made annually in confidential reports.

Challenger Tank

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence what assessments have been made of the ability of the Challenger tank to withstand fire from current Warsaw Pact artillery.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Challenger's abilities against potential threats posed by all Warsaw Pact or other weapons have been most fully assessed and are held under constant review.

Recruitment

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of Regular Army recruits leave in their first year.

Mr. Freeman: We expect some 25 per cent. of Regular Army recruits to leave in their first year.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether ex-Army personnel are able to re-join their former regiment should they so desire.

Mr. Freeman: This is possible in certain circumstances. Each application is judged on its merits, taking into account the individual's previous record, conduct, qualifications, age and current suitable vacancies.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of Territorial Army Volunteer Reserve recruits leave during their first year.

Mr. Freeman: During the 12-month period ending 31 March 1986, the latest date for which figures are available, 31 per cent. of recruits to the Territorial Army left during their first year of service.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether ex-service men are able to re-join the armed forces should they so desire.

Mr. Freeman: Ex-service men may apply to re-enter the armed forces. Such applications are considered in the light of the individual's previous record, conduct, qualifications, age, current suitable vacancies and in competition with other applicants for entry.

Welfare

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has any plans to improve the arrangements for consulting service personnel and their families on welfare matters.

Mr. Freeman: I shall answer shortly.

Territorial Army

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he intends to improve the bounties paid to Territorial Army Volunteer Reserve personnel.

Mr. Freeman: Bounties for the Territorial Army, along with the other reserve forces, are considered as part of the annual review of armed forces pay and allowances carried out by the independent armed forces pay review body.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many officers in the Territorial Army Volunteer Reserve have no full-time employment;

(2) how many non-commissioned service men in the Territorial Army Volunteer Reserve have no full-time employment.

Mr. Freeman: We do not maintain records of the employment status of members of the Territorial Army.

Soviet Strategy

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence which fronts Her Majesty's Government consider the most likely route for a Soviet attack.

Mr. Stanley: The Soviet Union deploys numerous forces throughout Europe and has a capability for an attack in any region. Any assessment of Soviet intentions must remain classified.

Senior Officers (Secondment)

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he intends to conduct a review of the number of senior Army officers seconded to work in his Department.

Mr. Freeman: Senior Army officers working in the Ministry of Defence do so against authorised posts, and as such secondment does not apply. These posts have however been subjected to various reviews in recent years, and all senior Army officer posts are subject, over a period of time, to assessment by staff inspectors in the normal course of their duties.

Artillery Units

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) which air defence artillery units are available for out-of-area operation;

(2) what field artillery is currently available for use by the United Kingdom Netherlands amphibious force in northern Norway;

(3) what air defence artillery is currently available for the United Kingdom Netherlands amphibious force in northern Norway;

(4) which field artillery units would be available for out-of-area operations.

Mr. Stanley: The ground forces that we would be most likely to use in operations outside the NATO area are 5 Airborne Brigade and 3 Commando Brigade. The latter is also the main component of the UK/NL landing force, which has northern Norway as one of its deployment options.

Each brigade has a field regiment equipped with 105 mm light guns, and a Javelin-equipped close air defence troop; 5 Airborne Brigade also has a Rapier-equipped area air defence battery.

Depending on the deployment option and other circumstances, the land forces might be able to call on air defence cover from the assets of a naval amphibious group, or from allied land-based aircraft. Additionally, as

I announced in the House on 1 July 1986, at column 916, financial provision has been made in our forward plans for a Rapier battery for the United Kingdom/Netherlands landing force, although this does not yet represent a firm commitment.

War (Military Requirements)

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many field artillery units would be retained in the United Kingdom in the event of war on the central front;

(2) what assessment he has made of the number of armoured reconnaissance and engineer units that would need to be retained in the United Kingdom in the event of war on the central front;

(3) what assessment he has made of the number of Regular Army personnel that would need to be retained in the United Kingdom in the event of war on the central front.

Mr. Stanley: This information is classified.

Norway

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the Soviet helicopter threat to northern Norway.

Mr. Stanley: The Warsaw Pact has a substantial superiority over NATO in numbers of attack helicopters. The detailed threat assessments for particular parts of the NATO area are classified.

Pilots

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what information he has as to which North Atlantic Treaty Organisation member states recruit women to train as pilots for transport aircraft;

(2) what information he has as to the ratio of pilots currently engaged in flying duties to aircraft in the air forces of all the European members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation;

(3) what information he has as to the ratio of pilots engaged in flying duties to aircraft in the United States Air Force;

(4) what information he has as to which North Atlantic Treaty Organisation member states train women to fly combat aircraft;

(5) what information he has as to which North Atlantic Treaty Organisation member states recruit women to train as helicopter pilots.

Mr. Freeman: Information relating to the armed forces of other countries is a matter for the Governments of those countries.

Chiefs of Air Staff (Meeting)

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the meetings of the Chiefs of Air Staff of Italy, West Germany and the United Kingdom in Rome on 13 February.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Chiefs of Air Staff of Italy, the Federal Republic of Germany and the United Kingdom met in Rome on 13 February to review the progress of the Tornado programme. It was a routine meeting, one of a series held over the years. The chiefs expressed satisfaction with achievements to date and discussed the question of future development to enable Tornado to maintain its capability in the longer term.

AWACS

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the threat to AWACS aircraft from Soviet anti-radiation missiles.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The threat to AWACS aircraft from all sources has of course been considered. It would not be in the national interest to reveal details.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Michael Brown asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the disposal of low, intermediate and high level nuclear waste arising from the dismantling of redundant nuclear submarines.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A number of studies are under way aimed at providing options for the dismantling of redundant submarines and the disposal of low, intermediate and high level waste arising therefrom.

Community Charge (Scotland)

Mr. Home Robertson asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he proposes to reimburse forces personnel serving in Scotland for any costs incurred under the proposed community charge; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The implications of the proposed community charge for Service personnel in Scotland are currently under consideration by my Department. I will write to the hon. Member as soon as we have reached a conclusion.

Royal Navy (Drugs)

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many drug offences have been recorded on board Royal Navy vessels in the last 18 months for which figures are available.

Mr. Freeman [*pursuant to his reply*, 13 February 1987, *Official Report*, c. *367*]: In the last period for which figures are available—calendar year 1985—the number of RN/RM personnel convicted of drugs offences which took place on board Her Majestys ships was seven.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 24 February 1987

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Magistrates (Lancashire)

Mr. Pike asked the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many new magistrates were appointed to each bench in Lancashire in 1986.

Mr. Tebbit: The following number of appointments were made to each bench in Lancashire last year:

	Number
Blackpool	8
Lancaster	4
South Ribble	10
Ribble Valley	4
Blackburn	5
Chorley	5
Ormskirk	5
Preston	5
Burnley	4
Wyre	7
Pendle	6
Darwen	2
Church	3
Fylde	4
Accrington	1
Rossendale	5
	78

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Scottish Universities

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the total number of new undergraduates admitted to Scottish universities for the present academic year; and how many of them came from Scotland, England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, respectively.

Mr. Walden: In 1986 there were 10,748 home acceptances to Scottish universities through the Universities Central Council on Admissions. Of these, 8,307 were domiciled in Scotland, 2,302 in England, 61 in Wales and 348 in Northern Ireland.

Students (Parental Assistance)

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish a table showing *(a)* the level of parental contribution to student grants each year since 1978, and *(b)* the number of covenants made by parents in favour of students over 18 years; and (i) the costs of tax relief on such covenants and (ii) administrative costs in connection with covenants.

Mr. Walden: *(a)* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 17 February at column *567*.

(b) I understand that covenants made in favour of students cannot be separately identified, but that the number of covenants made by parents in favour of people aged over 18 years is currently estimated to be 250,000. The annual cost of tax relief on these covenants is estimated at approximately £100 million. The administrative costs of these covenants cannot be separately identified. Information is not available in respect of earlier years.

Queen's Croft Special School, Lichfield

Mr. Heddle asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has received any representations regarding the future of Queen's Croft special school, Lichfield.

Mr. Dunn: No such representations have been received other than those made by two of my hon. Friend's constituents, which were forwarded under cover of his letters of 4 November and 10 December 1986.

Swann Report

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what progress has been made in the last year towards implementation of the recommendations of the Swann report relating to ethnically based statistics on school pupils and school teachers; when he expects to announce decisions; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: As my right hon. Friend announced on 25 July 1986 at column *527*, he has accepted the main recommendations of the Working Group on the collection of educational statistics on an ethnic basis, and in addition he proposed that information should be aggregated centrally by his Department. A draft of the circular implementing the arrangements is in preparation and will be issued for consultation.

My right hon. Friend expects to receive shortly the report of the working group on the collection of ethnically-based statistics on school-teachers, which was established in January 1986. He will then announce his response to this report.

Research Projects

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will place in the Library copies of the findings of research projects commissioned by his Department by *(a)* the National Foundation for Educational Research, *(b)* Manchester University/ Huddersfield Polytechnic and *(c)* University of London Institute of Education, concerning implementation of the Education Act 1981.

Mr. Dunn: I have requested from each of the contractors an additional copy of their report. On receipt, these will be placed in the Library.

Literacy

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) when he received the report of the working group of the Manpower Services Commission on illiteracy among long-term unemployed people; and if he will make a statement;

(2) whether he will arrange discussions with *(a)* the adult literacy and basic skills unit, *(b)* the National Federation of Voluntary Literacy Schemes and *(c)*

representatives of local education authorities, in considering what steps to take in relation to the report of the Manpower Services Commission working group on illiteracy among long-term unemployed people; if he will publish a discussion document; when he expects to announce decisions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Walden: A copy of the report of the working group was forwarded to my right hon. Friend by the chairman of the Manpower Services Commission on 11 February 1987. Consideration of the report is for my right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State for Employment.

My Department and the adult literacy and basic skills unit which it funds will co-operate in this consideration as necessary. The management committee of the adult literacy and basic skills unit includes representatives of the National Federation of Voluntary Literacy Schemes and of local education authorities.

University Grants Committee

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will place in the Library copies of the consultants' report mentioned in the introduction of the Review of the University Grants Committee (Cmnd. 81).

Mr. Walden: I have arranged for copies to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Genetic Handicap (Research)

Mr. Galley asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) whether the Medical Research Council has now been informed of or is involved in any current or proposed research project into genetic handicap which necessitates or would necessitate the use of the human embryo;

(2) if he is aware of any publicly funded current or proposed research project into genetic handicap which involves or would involve the use of the human embryo;

(3) if he has been notified of any privately funded current or proposed research project into genetic handicap which involves or would involve the use of the human embryo.

Mr. Walden [*pursuant to his reply*, 23 February 1987]: I understand that the Medical Research Council has been informed by the Voluntary Licensing Authority for Human In Vitro Fertilisation and Embryology, which is jointly funded by the MRC and the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, that they have at their January meeting approved a project into genetic handicap which necessitates the use of the human embryo. I am not aware of any approach for public funding of this work.

PRIME MINISTER

A330/A340 Airbus

Q42. **Sir David Price** asked the Prime Minister what plans Her Majesty's Government have to support British Aerospace's participation in the A330/A340 Airbus project by assisting with launch aid.

The Prime Minister: We shall reach a decision on British Aerospace's application for launch aid in respect of its participation in the Airbus A330 and A340 programme as soon as possible.

Satellites (Orbital Slots)

Q53. **Mr. Dalyell** asked the Prime Minister if Her Majesty's Government will make it their practice, when filing orbital slots with the International Telecommunications Union, to place details of the proposed satellite in the Library.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given to the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on 18 February at column *688*.

Engagements

Mr. Pike asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 24 February.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 24 February.

Mr. Greenway asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 24 February.

Mr. Leigh asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 24 February.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 24 February.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others and addressed the Conference of the Institute of Directors. In addition to my duties in this House I shall be having further meetings later today. This evening I hope to have an audience of Her Majesty The Queen.

School Meals

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams asked the Prime Minister what was the estimated cost for the United Kingdom as a whole in 1985-86 of school meals provided free of charge, for *(a)* pupils and *(b)* staff.

The Prime Minister: The estimated cost of school meals provided free of charge in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland is as follows:

	£ million
To pupils	57
To adults	7

It was not practicable to hold a school meals census in October 1985 in England in view of the disruption to the service caused by the teachers' dispute. The Department therefore does not have the information to calculate the proportions of school meals expenditure attributable to free meals for pupils and staff.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Greenwich Mean Time and British Summer Time

Mr. Maclennan asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received about the continued operation of Greenwich mean time and British summer time; what proposals have been made for closer alignment of seasonal time changes among member states of the European Community; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: In the past 12 months, we have received three representations in favour of the current system of summer time and 42 in favour of other methods. Member states did not accept the European Commission's proposal in 1984 for harmony of dates to be achieved by a compromise date of mid-October for the end of summer time; but it is likely that the Commission will again seek to bring member states into harmony when the present agreement expires at the end of 1988.

Merseyside Police Committee

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his recent meeting with the deputation from the Merseyside police committee.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I met a delegation from the Merseyside police authority on 10 February to discuss the authority's finances for 1987-88. The delegation explained why the authority considered itself disadvantaged compared with other police joint authorities by the formula provided in the Local Government Finance Bill for determining maximum precepts. I explained that in the Government's view the maximum precept derived from the formula would allow the authority broadly to maintain its present level of service in 1987-88 and that we were therefore unable to agree that the Bill should be amended.

Prison Officers' Hostel (Culcheth)

Mr. Hoyle asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how long the single prison officers' hostel at Culcheth has been empty; what the plans are for its future; how many rooms there are, and of what type; and what is the value of the property.

Mr. Mellor: I shall reply as soon as possible.

Immigration Policy

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he plans any changes to the immigration policy and procedures in the light of the report of the United Kingdom Immigration Advisory Service for 1985-86, a copy of which has been sent to him; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: In reply to a question by my hon. Friend the Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind) I yesterday announced that the Government are urgently considering measures to prevent people arriving here without the necessary documents. Otherwise I have nothing to add to my right hon. and learned Friend's reply to the hon. Member's question on 5 February at column 777.

Concessionary Television Licences

Mr. Winnick asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he is likely to reach a decision on whether he intends to appeal against the decision of the High Court on 23 January concerning concessionary television licences for certain tenants.

Mr. Mellor: No appeal will be made against the judgment. Applications for concessionary licences will of course continue to need careful scrutiny to ensure that they satisfy in full the conditions of eligibility set out in the Wireless Telegraphy (Broadcast Licence Charges and Exemption) Regulations 1984.

Birmingham Pub Bombings

Mr. Clay asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will consider offering immunity from prosecution to police officers who offer evidence to the inquiry being conducted by the Devon and Cornwall police regarding the treatment in custody of the six men convicted of the Birmingham pub bombings.

Mr. Mellor: Any question of immunity from prosecution would be a matter for the Director of Public Prosecutions in consultation as necessary with the Attorney-General.

Mr. Clay asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many officers from the Devon and Cornwall police are involved in the investigation of allegations concerning the six men convicted of the Birmingham pub bombings; and in what capacities they are involved.

Mr. Mellor: The conduct of the investigation is a matter for the chief constable of the Devon and Cornwall constabulary. We understand from the chief constable that about 25 officers are involved in the investigation, though not necessarily full-time.

Mr. Clay asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library a copy of the report of the inquiry conducted by Chief Constable Davis Owen into the injuries inflicted on the six men convicted of the Birmingham pub bombings during their first three days in custody.

Mr. Mellor: No. It is not the practice to publish the reports of police investigations.

ENERGY

Severn Barrage

Mr. Stern asked the Secretary of State for Energy what assumption is being made in all of the studies into the proposed Severn barrage as to the future status of the estuarial and ports statutory rights, and as to the effects on ports and the ships using them.

Mr. David Hunt: No assumptions have been made in the further Severn Barrage studies on the impact on ports and shipping. This issue will be a matter for close consultation with the relevant authorities during the course of the studies. The consultation document giving details of the studies to be undertaken was published on 16 February and is being distributed to all interested parties for comment by the end of March. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Power Stations

Mr. Barron asked the Secretary of State for Energy what representations he has received from the local authorities of Bassetlaw district and Nottinghamshire county council in relation to the application for a coal-fired power station at West Burton; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: The only application for a new power station before my right hon. Friend at present is that for the Sizewell PWR. During the last year, the hon. Members for Newark (Mr. Alexander) and for Bassetlaw (Mr.

Ashton) have referred letters to my right hon. Friend that they had received from the chief executive of Bassetlaw district council about a further coal-fired power station at West Burton. No representations have been received from Nottinghamshire county council.

Mr. Evennett asked the Secretary of State for Energy what proportion of the base load is currently generated by nuclear power stations.

Mr. Goodlad: The CEGB has advised me that, where possible, it operates its nuclear power stations continuously throughout the year, and all are regarded as base load stations at all times. However, the overall number of stations regarded as base load varies from season to season because of the different levels of demand. It is therefore not possible to provide a fixed proportion on the basis requested. Based on provisional figures some 20 per cent. of the electricity available from the United Kingdom public supply system was provided by nuclear power in 1986.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Arms Sales

70. **Mr. Simon Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will review his policy towards arms sales to foreign Governments which are responsible for sustained human rights abuses.

Mr. Renton: The export of military and paramilitary equipment is controlled by the Export of Goods (Control) Order. All applications for the export of such equipment are considered individually on their merits. We do not permit the export of military or paramilitary equipment to countries with poor human rights records if we consider that the equipment is likely to be used for internal repression.

WEU (Assembly)

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he takes to ensure that the Assembly of the Western European Union has sufficient facilities for the effective pursuit of its duties; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: Together with our partners on the WEU council, we seek to provide the Assembly with adequate resources to conduct its work. The Council has authorised real budgetary growth for the Assembly against forecast inflation in each of the last three years.

Diplomats (Offences)

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 27 January to the hon. Member for Leicester, East, *Official Report*, column *177*, if he will now publish a table giving a breakdown by diplomatic mission of the 3,970 cars with diplomatic registration and the number of alleged motoring offences, including the fixed penalties, committed by each diplomatic mission.

Mr. Eggar: No. Figures for unpaid fixed penalties incurred for parking offences were given in my reply to my hon. Friend on 14 January at columns *200-203*.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Plastic Bullets

Mr. Kevin McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, how many formal complaints have been made about incidents of police use of plastic baton rounds in 1986; in how many cases the complaint has been upheld; and in how many cases disciplinary action has been taken against the officers involved.

Mr. Scott [*pursuant to his reply* 16 February 1987, c. *464*]: During 1986 15 formal complaints were made concerning the use of plastic baton rounds by the Royal Ulster Constabulary. One was later withdrawn. Police reports on 10 others were sent to the Director of Public Prosecutions who directed no prosecution on each. The question of disciplinary action is now being considered by the Deputy Chief Constable, and in due course the papers will be referred to the Police Complaints Board. The remainder are still under investigation.

SCOTLAND

Sizewell B Power Station

Mr. Allan Stewart asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will estimate the employment consequences for Scottish industry of a positive decision in relation to the proposed Sizewell B power station; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Rifkind: Orders for power stations, whether coal-fired or nuclear, would be welcome to Scottish industry. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy is currently considering the case for Sizewell B in the light of Sir Frank Layfield's report and until he has reached his decision, it would be inappropriate to comment further.

Chiropodists (Tayside)

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many chiropodists are currently employed by Tayside health board; and what is the equivalent funded establishment number of chiropodists for Tayside health board.

Mr. John MacKay: There were 40·7 (whole-time equivalent) chiropodists employed by Tayside health board on 30 September 1986. This is the funded establishment number for the board.

Blood Donors (Tayside)

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many effective blood donors there have been in Tayside health board in each year since 1981; and how many blood donations were made in each year.

Mr. John MacKay: The available information relates to the east of Scotland region of the Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service, which draws donors from north-east Fife as well as from the area of Tayside health board. The total number of "effective blood donors" is not recorded but the Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service maintains an active donor panel of the order of 35,000 persons in the region, which has been found adequate to meet demand. The number of blood donations in the region were as follows:

Year	Donations Taken
1 April 1981—31 March 1982	31,653
1 April 1982—31 March 1983	31,627
1 April 1983—31 March 1984	31,093
1 April 1984—31 March 1985	29,508
1 April 1985—31 March 1986	27,345
1 April 1986—31 December 1986 (part year)	20,808

Life Expectancy

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the current life expectancies by social class; and what were the corresponding figures in 1957 and 1967.

Mr. John MacKay: Information on life expectancies at birth by social class is not available. Standardised mortality ratios by social class for the period 1959-63 are contained in the publication "Occupational Mortality 1959-63" (Registrar General for Scotland); and standardised mortality ratios for manual and non-manual occupational groups for the periods 1969-73 and 1979-83 are discussed in a report in the vital statistics return of the Registrar General, Scotland, weeks 41-44, 1986. Copies of these publications are in the Library.

Infant and Perinatal Mortality

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the current rates of infant and perinatal mortality by social class for legitimate birth; and what are the comparable figures for 20 years previously.

Mr. John MacKay: The information is as follows:

Infant and perinatal death rates of children whose parents were married to each other, Scotland, 1965 and 1985

	Social Class					
	I	*II*	*IIINM*	*IIIM*	*IV*	*V*
Infant deaths (per 1,000 live births)						
1965	10·5	18·3	22·0[1]		26·4	33·9
1985	7·5	8·6	8·5	8·5	8·2	11·3
Perinatal deaths (per 1,000 births live and still)						
1965	15·1	23·1	31·3[1]		35·6	37·4
1985	6·7	9·4	9·4	8·6	10·7	9·6

[1] Manual/non-manual split not available.

Cervical Cytology (Tayside)

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland, how many smears for cervical cytology examinations have been taken in Tayside health board in each of the past five years; and what was the detection rate in each year.

Mr. John MacKay: The figures for cervical cytology examinations in Tayside health board for the years 1982 to 1985 inclusive are set out in the table. Data for 1986 are not yet available.

	Number of examinations	*Percentage positive*
1982	28,356	0·92
1983	31,616	1·03
1984	32,310	0·62
1985	36,535	0·45

Prescriptions (Tayside)

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table for Tayside health board showing for 1986 *(a)* the number of prescriptions dispensed by general practitioners on which charges had to be paid, and *(c)* the average annual prescription charge per item.

Mr. John MacKay: The information for the financial year ending 31 March 1986 is as follows:—

Prescribed items dispensed by	*Number of prescribed items dispensed*	*Number of prescribed items charged*	*Percentage of prescribed items charged*
Chemists	2,760,233	543,144	19·7
Appliance Suppliers	3,657	539	14·7
Dispensing Doctors	73,865	8,473	11·5
TOTAL	2,837,755	552,156	19·5

The prescription cost is £2·00 per item but the total income from charges in 1985-86 of £1,222,333 includes £118,236 from pre-payment certificates which do not relate to prescriptions classified as charged. The number of prescriptions obtained on such pre-payment certificates is not known.

Chiropody Treatment (Tayside)

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the current waiting list for chiropody treatment within Tayside health board; and how many of those on the list are men aged over 65 years and women over 60 years.

Mr. John MacKay: This information is not available centrally.

Labour Statistics (Tayside)

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the numbers employed within Tayside health board by main staff group; and what are the equivalent figures for 1980.

Mr. John MacKay: The information is as follows and relates to whole-time equivalents:

	1980	*1986*
Medical-dental	971	977
Pharmacists-opticians	51	51
Nurses-midwives	5,905	5,966
Scientific-professions supplementary to medicine	389	436
Technical	411	457
Works-tradesmen	350	352
Administratiop-clerical	1,169	1,219
Ancillary	2,902	2,516

Nursing and Midwifery Staff

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish details of the average earnings of nursing and midwifery staff within the National Health Service at all grades.

Mr. John MacKay: Specific information on average annual earnings of nursing staff is not collected centrally. Average figures would cover a wide range of earnings. Basic salary varies according to qualification, experience and service and may be augmented by additional payments for working unsocial hours and overtime, and there are also allowances for staff employed in certain geriatric and psychiatric units.

The table below shows the mid points of the basic pay scales for the main grades at 1 July 1986.

Grade	*1 July 1987* £
Chief Area Nursing Officer	
SDAT1+	26,495
SDAT1	25,630
SDAT2	25,190
SDAT3	24,555
SDA1	24,555
SDA2	23,920
SDA3	22,880
SDA4	17,160
Director of Nursing Services/Director of Nurse Education	
DNS/DNE1+	21,055
1	19,085
2	17,450
3	15,960
4	14,795
5	13,510
6	12,215
Senior Nurse/Senior Nurse Educational/ Managerial	
1+	18,700
1	17,450
2	15,960
3	14,795
4	13,510
5	12,215
6	11,840
7	11,220
8	10,520
Tutor	11,575
Clinical Teacher	10,765
Health Visitor	10,240
Nursing Sister 1	10,520
2	9,435
Staff Nurse, RGN	7,240
Enrolled Nurse	6,360
Nursing Auxiliary	4,895
Student Nurse (2nd Year)	4,510

District Wards (Dundee)

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the composition of each district ward in Dundee by social class at the 1981 census *(a)* in terms of numbers, *(b)* by percentage and *(c)* in terms of the number of economically active people.

Mr. John MacKay: The relevant readily available information relates to

i. all residents in those private households which had an economically active head and

ii. residents in private households who were themselves economically active.

The information is derived from a 10 per cent. sample of the 1981 census returns. I am arranging for this information to be published in the *Official Report* and placed in the Library of the House.

District ward and social class	*(a) Number by social class of economically active head of household*	*(b) (a) as percentage[2] of total*	*(c) Economically active persons by social class*
Ancrum			
I	190	6	80
II	1,080	34	600
III N	450	14	530
III M	1,200	38	500
IV	180	6	290
V	30	1	50
A.F.+I.D.[1]	30	1	50
Total	3,160	100	2,100
Atgller			
I	0	0	0
II	250	8	120

District ward and social class	(a) Number by social class of economically active head of household	(b) (a) as percentage[2] of total	(c) Economically active persons by social class
III N	260	8	370
III M	1,450	46	790
IV	990	31	640
V	130	4	90
A.F.+I.D.[1]	80	3	150
Total	3,160	100	2,160
Balgillo			
I	380	10	160
II	1,960	52	800
III N	660	17	700
III M	610	16	230
IV	170	5	100
V	0	0	10
A.F.+I.D.[1]	0	0	60
Total	3,780	100	2,060
Baxter Park			
I	150	6	50
II	670	25	420
III N	610	23	490
III M	620	23	390
IV	310	12	220
V	110	4	140
A.F.+I.D.[1]	170	6	90
Total	2,640	100	1,800
Blackshade			
I	0	0	0
II	300	9	230
III N	320	9	430
III M	1,620	48	580
IV	690	20	420
V	320	9	150
A.F.+I.D.[1]	130	4	140
Total	3,380	100	1,950
Broughty Ferry			
I	370	14	110
II	920	36	470
III N	400	16	410
III M	560	22	290
IV	260	10	150
V	30	1	40
A.F.+I.D.[1]	30	1	60
Total	2,570	100	1,530
Caird			
I	0	0	0
II	300	9	230
III N	210	6	330
III M	1,430	42	620
IV	870	25	580
V	400	12	290
A.F.+I.D.[1]	220	6	250
Total	3,430	100	2,300
Central			
I	30	2	40
II	800	43	550
III N	310	17	380
III M	380	21	200
IV	180	10	160
V	30	2	70
A.F.+I.D.[1]	110	6	70
Total	1,840	100	1,470

District ward and social class	(a) Number by social class of economically active head of household	(b) (a) as percentage[2] of total	(c) Economically active persons by social class
Clipington			
I	80	6	40
II	180	13	140
III N	280	19	330
III M	500	35	280
IV	340	24	200
V	60	4	50
A.F. + I.D.[1]	0	0	30
Total	1,440	100	1,070
Coldside			
I	50	2	10
II	360	15	180
III N	170	7	210
III M	900	38	530
IV	480	20	390
V	400	17	270
A.F. + I.D.[1]	40	2	60
Total	2,400	100	1,650
Craigie Bank			
I	300	12	130
II	430	18	350
III N	350	14	450
III M	840	35	400
IV	290	12	210
V	120	5	100
[1]A.F. + I.D.	100	4	60
Total	2,430	100	1,700
Craigie Barns			
I	410	14	100
II	970	33	490
III N	530	18	380
III M	540	18	340
IV	320	11	270
V	100	3	60
[1]A.F. + I.D.	60	2	90
Total	2,930	100	1,730
Douglas			
I	80	3	20
II	210	7	150
III N	270	9	400
III M	1,410	46	630
IV	730	24	650
V	300	10	270
[1]A.F. + I.D.	90	3	160
Total	3,090	100	2,280
Downfield			
I	200	5	70
II	1,210	30	640
III N	580	15	620
III M	1,240	31	610
IV	600	15	570
V	110	3	130
[1]A.F. + I.D.	50	1	80
Total	3,990	100	2,720
Drumgeith			
I	0	0	10
II	240	7	140
III N	170	5	260
III M	1,850	52	790
IV	790	22	600

District ward and social class	(a) Number by social class of economically active head of household	(b) (a) as percentage[2] of total	(c) Economically active persons by social class
V	350	10	250
[1]A.F.+I.D.	160	5	220
Total	3,560	100	2,270
Dudhope			
I	0	0	10
II	210	10	170
III N	310	15	350
III M	520	25	380
IV	600	29	420
V	260	13	190
A.F+I.D.[1]	150	7	100
Total	2,050	100	1,620
Eastern			
I	420	12	120
II	1,110	31	500
III N	500	14	550
III M	1,120	31	450
IV	370	10	230
V	20	1	50
A.F.+I.D.[1]	50	1	20
Total	3,590	100	1,920
Fairmuir			
I	100	4	70
II	770	30	490
III N	480	18	520
III M	890	34	390
IV	290	11	240
V	50	2	90
A.F.+I.D.[1]	30	1	60
Total	2,610	100	1,860
Fintry North			
I	0	0	10
II	170	4	130
III N	420	11	400
III M	2,000	51	850
IV	900	23	570
V	330	8	280
A.F.+I.D.[1]	140	4	160
Total	3,960	100	2,400
Fintry South			
I	60	2	20
II	210	6	200
III N	250	7	380
III M	2,100	57	900
IV	580	16	500
V	470	13	410
A.F.+I.D.[1]	40	1	170
Total	3,710	100	2,580
Gillburn			
I	0	0	0
II	600	17	260
III N	430	12	480
III M	1,210	34	490
IV	760	22	430
V	430	12	270
A.F.+I.D.[1]	100	3	150
Total	3,530	100	2,080
Gourdie			
I	40	1	10
II	210	8	250

District ward and social class	(a) Number by social class of economically active head of household	(b) (a) as percentage[2] of total	(c) Economically active persons by social class
III N	240	9	260
III M	1,270	46	610
IV	820	30	600
V	160	6	120
A.F. + I.D.[1]	30	1	70
Total	2,770	100	1,920
Gowrie			
I	430	14	170
II	700	23	410
III N	390	13	450
III M	950	31	500
IV	430	14	250
V	120	4	130
A.F. + I.D.[1]	40	1	120
Total	3,060	100	2,030
Hilltown			
I	30	1	20
II	250	8	220
III N	270	9	360
III M	1,310	43	530
IV	760	25	610
V	390	13	320
A.F. + I.D.[1]	70	2	180
Total	3,080	100	2,240
Law			
I	170	9	110
II	560	29	380
III N	300	15	380
III M	600	31	290
IV	220	11	250
V	10	1	120
A.F. + I.D.[1]	80	4	50
Total	1,940	100	1,580
Lochee East			
I	120	4	60
II	430	13	240
III N	320	10	370
III M	1,320	40	810
IV	680	21	500
V	320	10	200
A.F. + I.D.[1]	80	2	110
Total	3,270	100	2,290
Lochee West			
I	0	0	0
II	260	10	250
III N	280	10	360
III M	1,140	42	600
IV	710	26	540
V	290	11	210
A.F. + I.D.[1]	40	1	140
Total	2,720	100	2,100
Logie			
I	210	10	90
II	830	38	530
III N	330	15	350
III M	570	26	290
IV	230	10	140
V	30	1	50
A.F. + I.D.[1]	0	0	30
Total	2,200	100	1,480

District ward and social class	(a) Number by social class of economically active head of household	(b) (a) as percentage[2] of total	(c) Economically active persons by social class
Longhaugh			
I	30	1	10
II	70	2	90
III N	280	9	310
III M	1,010	33	380
IV	950	31	550
V	480	16	310
A.F. + I.D.[1]	240	8	290
Total	3,060	100	1,940
Maryfield			
I	190	8	80
II	600	24	380
III N	360	14	390
III M	790	32	460
IV	330	13	240
V	150	6	120
A.F. + I.D.[1]	80	3	80
Total	2,500	100	1,750
Riverside			
I	540	21	250
II	950	37	560
III N	360	14	430
III M	440	17	210
IV	220	9	180
V	30	1	20
A.F.+I.D.[1]	10	—	60
Total	2,550	100	1,710
Rockwell			
I	70	3	30
II	460	22	240
III N	430	20	450
III M	580	27	330
IV	420	20	280
V	140	7	130
A.F.+I.D.[1]	40	2	70
Total	2,140	100	1,530
St. Mary's			
I	0	0	10
II	320	9	200
III N	300	8	340
III M	1,840	51	810
IV	820	23	590
V	190	5	290
A.F.+I.D.[1]	130	4	190
Total	3,600	100	2,430
St. Ninian's			
I	170	6	40
II	290	10	240
III N	320	11	430
III M	1,310	45	520
IV	570	20	580
V	250	9	210
A.F.+I.D.[1]	0	0	90
Total	2,910	100	2,110
Sidlaw			
I	270	7	120
II	1,430	39	720
III N	560	15	440
III M	1,090	29	640
IV	310	8	380
V	50	1	50

District ward and social class	(a) Number by social class of economically active head of household	(b) (a) as percentage[2] of total	(c) Economically active persons by social class
A.F.+I.D.[1]	0	0	100
Total	3,710	100	2,450
Menzieshill			
I	230	7	120
II	600	19	410
III N	330	10	370
III M	1,230	38	690
IV	610	19	410
V	200	6	190
A.F. + I.D.[1]	40	1	60
Total	3,240	100	2,250
Midmill			
I	0	0	10
II	140	4	100
III N	80	2	170
III M	1,010	31	620
IV	1,280	39	710
V	570	17	390
A.F. + I.D.[1]	220	7	180
Total	3,300	100	2,180
Monifieth East			
I	380	10	120
II	1,540	41	700
III N	670	18	620
III M	800	21	320
IV	320	8	180
V	70	2	50
A.F. + I.D.[1]	10	—	50
Total	3,790	100	2,040
Monifieth West			
I	570	20	230
II	1,010	35	480
III N	500	17	530
III M	650	22	290
IV	110	4	120
V	30	1	40
A.F. + I.D.[1]	30	1	70
Total	2,900	100	1,760
Pitalpin			
I	50	2	20
II	340	11	250
III N	280	9	410
III M	1,500	46	650
IV	670	21	530
V	250	8	240
A.F. + I.D.[1]	140	4	140
Total	3,230	100	2,240
Trottick			
I	20	1	10
II	220	6	180
III N	510	13	360
III M	1,820	47	780
IV	740	19	410
V	390	10	290
A.F.+I.D.[1]	200	5	270
Total	3,900	100	2,300
Wellgate			
I	10	—	10
II	370	14	370

District ward and social class	(a) Number by social class of economically active head of household	(b) (a) as percentage[2] of total	(c) Economically active persons by social class
III N	440	17	480
III M	910	36	400
IV	450	18	340
V	310	12	160
A.F.+I.D.[1]	70	3	120
Total	2,560	100	1,880
West Ferry			
I	470	14	160
II	870	27	450
III N	500	15	420
III M	780	24	420
IV	290	9	210
V	280	9	210
A.F.+I.D.[1]	60	2	110
Total	3,250	100	1,980
Whitfield			
I	30	1	20
II	290	10	260
III N	260	9	270
III M	1,030	36	500
IV	730	26	440
V	150	5	140
A.F.+I.D.[1]	360	13	260
Total	2,850	100	1,890

[1] Armed forces and inadequately described
[2] Sum of individual percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding

Nurses (Resignations)

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many qualified nurses have resigned from working in the National Health Service in each of the past three years; and if he will provide a breakdown of the figures by health board area.

Mr. John MacKay: The information requested is not readily available and could not be provided except at disproportionate cost.

Hospital Beds (Tayside)

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) *Official Report*, 4 February, columns *709* to *712*, to what factors he attributes the changes in average available staffed beds within Tayside health board in the broad specialties mentioned in the period 1979 to 1985.

Mr. John MacKay: The position in each of the specialties is as follows:

Acute

The number of beds in the acute sector has been reduced by the changes of use of Arbroath infirmary, closure of Sidlaw hospital and the gradual rundown of Bridge of Earn hospital. Outdated facilities have been replaced by new ones at Dundee royal infirmary and Perth royal infirmary.

Geriatric

During the period in question, the main increase took place in Perth and Kinross where geriatric units were developed at several smaller hospitals.

Mental Illness

The closure of Murthly hospital, a substantial reduction in beds at Sunnyside hospital, Montrose, and a decrease in demand for mental illness beds are the main factors in this category.

Mental Handicap

The reduction in the number of beds has taken place mainly at Strathmartine hospital and is due to the health board's policy of enabling some mentally handicapped patients to return from hospital gradually to the community.

Maternity

Small uneconomic units with low levels of occupancy have been closed. The demand for maternity beds is being adequately met.

Earnings

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what information his Department has on the current weekly earnings by social class or social-economic group in Scotland.

Mr. Lang: Information of the form requested is not available. The table provides estimates of average gross weekly earnings by occupational group for April 1986, the latest date for which such information is available at present. These statistics will appear in the 1986 *New Earnings Survey* part E, which will soon be available in the Library of the House.

Average Gross Weekly Earnings in Scotland
Full-time employees on adult rates, whose pay for the survey pay-period was not affected by absence

April 1986

Occupational Group	*Males* £	*Females* £
I Managerial (general management)	..	..
II Professional and related supporting management and administration	277·4	182·0
III Professional and related in education, welfare and health	243·3	175·1
IV Literary, artistic and sports	..	..
V Professional and related in science, engineering, technology and similar fields	262·3	147·4
VI Managerial (excluding general management)	249·2	..
VII Clerical and related	159·2	119·1
VIII Selling	181·6	97·4
IX Security and protective service	207·7	..
X Catering, cleaning, hairdressing and other personal service	137·1	94·4
XI Farming, fishing and related	131·1	..
XII Materials processing (excluding metals)	167·4	106·7
XIII Making and repairing (excluding metal and electrical)	172·2	106·8
XIV Processing, making, repairing and related (metal and electrical)	200·5	127·0
XV Painting, repetitive assembling, product inspecting, packaging and related	170·5	112·4
XVI Construction, mining and related not identified elsewhere	171·1	..
XVII Transport operating, materials moving and storing and related	166·6	..
XVIII Miscellaneous	161·0	..
All non-manual occupations	238·3	139·1
All manual occupations	173·0	103·2
All occupations	201·3	129·8
	Males	*Females*

.. indicates not available, because the estimate would be based on a sample of fewer than 50 employees or would have a standard error of more than 4 per cent. (that is, there would be a 1 in 3 chance that the estimate would be in error by more than 4 per cent.)
Source: 1986 New Earnings Survey Part E (forthcoming)

Housing Starts

Mr. Maxton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide details of the numbers of new dwellings started by each local authority in Scotland for each of the years 1978-79 to 1985-86 inclusive, and the total number of new dwellings started by each local authority for the whole of that period.

Mr. Ancram: The information requested is set out in the table below.

New dwellings started by Local Authorities

Area	*Financial Years* 1978-79	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	*Total*
SCOTLAND	4,195	4,578	2,694	2,030	2,372	2,175	1,705	1,665	21,414
Borders	31	93	24	65	32	59	38	16	358
Berwickshire	22	29	0	0	11	8	38	8	116
Ettrick and Lauderdale	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
Roxburgh	4	12	20	55	21	51	0	8	171
Tweeddale	0	52	4	10	0	0	0	0	66
Central	269	187	79	86	73	88	149	139	1,070
Clackmannan	222	23	0	0	0	1	23	30	299
Falkirk	33	23	24	68	40	75	126	103	492
Stirling	14	141	55	18	33	12	0	6	279
Dumfries and Galloway	320	399	271	313	226	274	136	195	2,134
Annandale and Eskdale	103	193	146	124	136	144	44	51	941
Nithsdale	123	80	50	18	27	18	64	68	448
Stewartry	78	39	51	73	11	64	0	62	378
Wigtown	16	87	24	98	52	48	28	14	367
Fife	493	139	197	193	244	157	214	247	1,884
Dunfermline	150	69	0	83	101	14	74	140	631
Kirkcaldy	70	25	88	29	51	83	103	85	534
North East Fife	273	45	109	81	92	60	37	22	719
Grampian	731	1,100	668	437	730	477	380	410	4,933
Aberdeen	346	595	165	84	78	133	45	81	1,427
Banff and Buchan	167	180	230	117	159	120	116	70	1,159
Gordon	0	0	89	32	274	1	112	84	592
Kincardine and Deeside	46	4	20	80	40	78	105	66	439
Moray	172	421	164	124	179	145	2	109	1,316
Highland	244	439	218	185	229	264	103	252	1,934
Badenoch and Strathspey	26	10	41	54	38	16	16	0	201
Caithness	49	60	20	0	55	30	4	21	239
Inverness	33	126	79	38	84	109	0	131	600
Lochaber	19	90	6	12	0	0	0	0	127
Nairn	0	0	0	0	0	0	24	20	44
Ross and Cromarty	92	99	63	38	31	65	12	34	434
Skye and Lochalsh	1	25	9	13	0	24	32	20	124
Sutherland	24	29	0	30	21	20	15	26	165
Lothian	68	66	127	43	96	32	110	40	582
East Lothian	15	31	17	43	94	25	110	40	375
Edinburgh	29	35	110	0	0	0	0	0	174
Midlothian	24	0	0	0	0	7	0	0	31
West Lothian	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2

Area	Financial Years 1978-79	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	Total
Strathclyde	1,460	1,795	735	486	452	489	389	178	5,984
Argyll and Bute	152	54	70	32	0	94	0	0	402
Bearsden and Milngavie	79	51	56	0	12	0	16	0	214
Clydebank	35	103	0	0	0	0	0	0	138
Clydesdale	33	22	47	26	29	4	0	30	190
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	30	27	0	0	16	8	0	0	81
Cumnock and Doon Valley	29	61	2	6	10	4	0	2	114
Cunninghame	35	97	10	79	45	56	65	33	420
Dumbarton	45	0	0	0	0	0	0	14	59
East Kilbride	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Eastwood	25	3	0	14	0	36	40	1	119
Glasgow	68	790	146	62	32	118	49	0	1,265
Hamilton	117	102	91	99	70	30	83	0	592
Inverclyde	0	12	26	0	0	0	64	0	102
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	91	40	0	0	33	0	0	0	164
Kyle and Carrick	241	43	19	94	20	96	2	70	585
Monklands	12	41	8	0	48	30	0	0	139
Motherwell	161	229	36	14	0	0	36	0	476
Renfrew	124	120	184	60	132	0	22	10	652
Strathkelvin	183	0	40	0	6	13	12	18	272
Tayside	486	123	214	147	171	246	150	117	1,654
Angus	69	7	0	12	34	54	31	114	321
Dundee	133	51	82	85	50	6	56	3	466
Perth and Kinross	284	65	132	50	87	186	63	0	867
Orkney Islands	7	20	18	0	43	8	14	6	116
Shetland Islands	31	131	46	47	34	31	20	24	364
Western Isles	55	86	97	28	42	50	2	41	401

Homeless Persons

Mr. Maxton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide details of applications made in Scotland under the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 for the period 1 April 1985 to 31 March 1986, in a form similar to the tables published on pages 42, 43 and 44 of "Scottish Housing Statistics" 1985.

Mr. Ancram: Such of the information requested as is currently available centrally is set out in the tables.

Figures for 1986 are provisional and exclude applications made to the districts indicated in the tables for which returns have not been submitted. Estimates for the more significant missing districts are: Stirling (1,200), Dumbarton (860), Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (700) and Nithsdale (170).

Table 1
Applicant households by status, whether accommodation provided and period of application

Status	Period of application (year ending 31 March)	As assessed by local authority: Number of applicants	Number of intentionally homeless	Number for whom accommodation secured
Homeless	1981	7,025	541	6,111
	1982	8,270	491	7,433
	1983	8,664	523	7,658
	1984	8,086	518	7,203
	[1]1985	9,585	659	7.942
	[1]1986	10,021	634	8,419
Potentially homeless	1981	2,443	342	1,652
	1982	1,988	281	1,274
	1983	2,000	352	1,293
	1984	2,301	279	1,465
	[1]1985	3,390	310	2,251
	[1]1986	4,158	315	3,077
Neither homeless nor potentially homeless	1981	1,785	—	767
	1982	1,678	—	619
	1983	1,522	—	515
	1984	1504	—	427
	[1]1985	1,731	—	725
	[1]1986	1,943	—	1,179
Not stated or contact lost	1981	3,615	—	85
	1982	4,019	—	32
	1983	4,273	—	43
	1984	3,625	—	35
	[1]1985	5,085	—	—
	[1]1986	5,315	—	—

Status	Period of application (year ending 31 March)	As assessed by local authority: Number of applicants	Number of intentionally homeless	Number for whom accommodation secured
Total applications	1981	14,868	883	8,615
	1982	15,955	772	9,358
	1983	16,539	875	9,509
	1984	15,516	797	9,130
	[1]1985	19,791	969	10,918
	[1]1986	21,437	949	12,675

[1] Based on incomplete returns.

Table 2—Applicant Households by reason for loss of last accommodation and type of priority need (1 April 1985 to 31 March 1986)

Reason for loss of last accommodation	Type of priority need: Household with dependent children	Household member pregnant	Household member vulnerable because of: Old age	Physical disability	Mental illness	Other special reason	Household homeless in emergency	Household not in priority need	Total number	Total percentage
Parents, friends or relatives no longer willing/able to accommodate	3,553	1,323	316	163	93	1,189	2	2,446	9,085	42·4
Dispute with spouse/cohabitee—violent	2,277	77	53	29	28	296	0	197	2,955	13·6
Dispute with spouse/cohabitee—non-violent	2,199	66	86	34	36	293	1	713	3,426	16·0
Court order	741	46	34	26	9	89	0	153	1,098	5·1
Loss of service tenancy	181	23	27	5	3	14	0	67	320	1·5
Action by landlord	362	91	71	19	6	34	3	292	878	4·1
Fire, flood, storm etc.	226	9	79	9	3	6	539	21	914	4·3
Discharged from institution	7	3	17	13	43	65	0	85	233	1·0
Lost accommodation in hostel/hotel	56	50	29	17	8	43	2	197	402	1·9
Gave up secure accommodation	333	39	40	14	6	43	1	197	875	4·1
Other	850	122	131	45	26	123	7	574	1,867	8·7
Total number	10,978	1,851	883	374	259	2,194	575	4,922	21,437	100·0
Total percentage	51·2	8·6	4·1	1·7	1·2	10·2	2·7	23·0	100·0	

[1] Households may be in priority need for more than one reason. All reasons given are shown in the table.

Table 3 Applicant Household by circumstances as assessed by the authority and type of accommodation secured
1 April 1985 to 31 March 1986

Circumstances as assessed by the Authority	Type of accommodation secured: Permanent accommodation	Short stay accommodation only	Name	Transferred to another authority	Total Number	Percentage
Priority homeless, unintentional	5,610	1,656	174	79	7,519	35·1
Priority homeless, intentional	249	108	265	12	634	3·0
Non-priority homeless	335	441	1,066	6	1,868	8·7
Priority potentially homeless, unintentional	2,239	158	183	24	2,604	12·1
Priority potentially homeless, intentional	136	28	148	3	315	1·5
Non-priority, potentially homeless	444	72	723	0	1,239	5·8
Neither homeless nor potentially homeless	1,144	35	761	3	1,943	9·1
Contact lost, etc			5,315		5,315	24·8
Total Number	10,177	2,498	8,635	127	21,437	100·0
Total Percentage	47·5	11·7	40·3	0·6	100·0	

Table 4—Summary of district returns

Area	Applicants: Number	Per 1,000 households	Applicants assessed as in priority need: Number	Number intentionally homeless	Number of applicants for whom permanent accommodation secured	Number of applicants for whom only short stay accommodation secured	Number of applicants in short stay accommodation on 31 March 1986
SCOTLAND	21,437	11·20	11,072	634	10,177	2,498	875
Borders	33	0·82	33	2	12	20	4
Berwickshire	5	0·49	5	0	3	1	1
Ettrick and Lauderdale	11	0·84	11	2	7	4	1
Roxburgh	17	1·21	17	0	2	15	2
Tweeddale[1]	..	..	..	..	..	..	..

Area	Applicants		Applicants assessed as in priority need		Number of applicants for whom permanent accommodation secured	Number of applicants for whom only short stay accommodation secured	Number of applicants in short stay accommodation on 31 March 1986
	Number	Per 1,000 households	Number	Number intentionally homeless			
Central	2,067	20·59	1,580	17	434	1,278	161
Clackmannan	468	26·83	306	7	242	16	13
Falkirk	1,599	29·62	1,274	10	212	1,262	10
Stirling[1]	..	..	..	..	..	..	138
Dumfries and Galloway	177	3·21	130	5	105	32	28
Annandale and Eskdale	55	4·02	30	0	22	10	3
Nithsdale[1]	..	..	..	..	..	..	16
Stewartry	73	8·17	59	3	61	1	4
Wigtown	49	4·30	41	2	22	21	5
Fife	1,439	11·13	773	27	974	89	14
Dunfermline	539	11·53	371	16	345	32	11
Kirkcaldy	505	8·86	255	6	332	53	2
North East Fife	395	15·46	147	5	297	4	1
Grampian	1,593	8·58	775	29	975	178	24
Aberdeen	1,235	14·65	524	17	738	169	10
Banff and Buchan	46	1·54	30	0	23	6	0
Gordon	52	2·09	44	4	41	0	4
Kincardine and Deeside	18	1·08	18	0	18	0	0
Moray	242	8·05	159	8	155	3	10
Highland	341	4·80	181	24	142	30	18
Badenoch and Strathspey[1]	..	..	..	..	..	..	2
Caithness	2	0·21	2	0	2	0	2
Inverness	273	12·85	137	21	106	23	6
Lochaber	42	6·03	25	3	24	1	1
Nairn	24	6·56	17	0	10	6	3
Ross and Cromarty[1]	..	..	..	..	..	..	3
Skye and Lochalsh[1]	..	..	..	..	..	..	2
Sutherland[1]	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Lothian	2,618	9·16	1,006	86	1,023	429	72
East Lothian	430	14·10	249	16	282	15	9
Edinburgh	1,608	9·08	546	27	656	289	38
Midlothian	332	11·62	89	24	8	55	13
West Lothian	248	4·98	122	19	79	90	12
Strathclyde	11,699	13·50	5,350	392	5,406	340	496
Argyll and Bute	204	8·38	94	5	87	7	1
Bearsden and Milngavie	65	4·65	31	1	39	1	7
Clydebank	281	15·31	252	3	212	2	24
Clydesdale	45	2·17	37	0	32	5	1
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth[1]	..	..	..	..	..	..	6
Cumnock and Doon Valley	46	2·91	37	4	19	16	5
Cunninghame	319	6·34	278	8	221	47	8
Dumbarton[1]	..	..	..	..	..	..	45
East Kilbride	431	14·82	195	30	168	79	33
Eastwood	7	0·35	7	0	3	4	1
Glasgow	5,890	20·70	2,005	131	2,077	14	86
Hamilton	425	11·27	266	22	236	77	22
Inverclyde	352	9·85	208	19	199	14	27
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	277	9·22	196	18	141	8	18
Kyle and Carrick	514	12·01	275	28	214	16	10
Monklands	398	10·91	142	10	141	3	21
Motherwell	1,075	20·40	246	62	483	35	44
Renfrew	1,151	15·23	927	41	1,000	6	135
Strathkelvin	219	7·47	154	10	134	6	2
Tayside	1,333	8·73	1,137	46	1,030	42	24
Angus	224	6·25	143	10	117	14	9
Dundee	660	9·30	600	5	599	1	12
Perth and Kinross	449	9·78	394	31	314	27	3
Orkney Islands	11	1·57	11	2	8	3	3
Shetland Islands	97	11·84	76	4	28	50	28
Western Isles	29	2·64	20	0	18	7	3

[1] Returns not received from these districts.

Homeless Persons

Mr. Maxton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide details of the numbers of applications made under the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 in Scotland for each of the years 1978-79 to 1985-86, inclusive.

Mr. Ancram: The information requested is set out in the table below.

Financial Year	*Number of Applicant Households*
1978-79	16,037
1979-80	15,466
1980-81	14,868
1981-82	15,955
1982-83	16,539
1983-84	15,516
[1]1984-85	19,791
[1]1985-86	21,437

[1] Based on incomplete returns.

House Possessions

Mr. Maxton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has as to how many formerly owner-occupied properties in Scotland were taken into possession by *(a)* building societies, *(b)* local authorities, and *(c)* other mortgagors in the 12 months ended December 1986; and what are the figures in actual and percentage terms compared with those for each 12 month period since January 1980.

Mr. Ancram: This information is not available.

Housing Revenue Account (Expenditure)

Mr. Maxton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide details of housing revenue account expenditure by local authorities for 1978-1979 and 1985-1986, inclusive, detailing the amount for expenditure on *(a)* loan charges, *(b)* supervision and management, *(c)* repairs and maintenance, *(d)* loss of rent, and *(e)* other, expressing these figures in (i) cash prices and (ii) 1985-86 out-turn prices.

Mr. Ancram: The information requested is set out in the table.

Housing Revenue Account: Local Authority Expenditure

Financial Year	*Loan Charges* £	*Supervision and Management* £	*Repairs and Maintenance* £	*Loss of Rent*[1] £	*Other Expenditure* £	*Total* £
Cash Prices						
1978-79	276·34	32·51	94·04	[1]	7·21	410·08
1979-80	342·17	38·91	125·09	5·05	6·10	517·33
1980-81	400·10	51·32	146·40	5·91	11·58	615·29
1981-82	413·83	55·86	163·56	7·91	8·28	649·43
1982-83	416·02	57·28	177·87	10·72	7·88	669·76
1983-84	399·05	61·43	186·54	12·07	7·32	666·42
1984-85	414·12	66·64	197·03	12·43	7·98	698·20
1985-86	431·45	70·38	183·88	14·18	8·89	708·78
1985-86 Outturn Prices						
1978-79	522·37	61·46	177·76	[1]	13·62	775·19
1979-80	553·48	62·94	202·34	8·18	9·87	836·81
1980-81	545·56	69·98	199·63	8·06	15·79	838·99
1981-82	513·79	69·35	203·07	9·82	10·28	806·30
1982-83	481·60	66·31	205·91	12·41	9·12	775·35
1983-84	442·24	68·08	206·73	13·38	8·11	738·55
1984-85	439·94	70·79	209·31	13·20	8·48	741·72
1985-86	431·45	70·38	183·88	14·18	8·89	708·78

[1] "Loss of rent" information included with "Other Expenditure" figures.

Household Income

Mr. Maxton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide details of the average weekly household income in Scotland for each of the years 1978 to 1986, inclusive.

Mr. Lang: The information available relates to average gross weekly income of households as shown in the family expenditure surveys and is provided below. Information for 1986 is not yet available.

Average gross weekly income[1] of households in Scotland

	£
1978	111
1979	118
1980	135
1981	150
1982	167
[2]1983	*a*168
	*b*166
1984	185
1985	211

[1] Gross income as defined in the family expenditure survey comprises cash income (eg from employment, investments, pensions and cash social security benefits) together with selected other benefits such as the imputed value of owner-occupied accommodation and the value of luncheon vouchers. It does not cover most non-cash benefits such as free prescriptions or benefits in kind (eg free coal, company cars). Gross income will not reflect rent and rates rebates, except insofar as described in note 2 below.

[2] Under the housing benefit scheme, introduced in stages from November 1982, some cash transactions were eliminated leading to a reduction in the level of cash income. For 1983 figures are given *(a)* covering the same transactions as in the earlier years and *(b)* on a cash transactions basis consistent with the years 1984 and 1985.

House Sales

Mr. Maxton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list details of sales of council housing to sitting tenants up to the latest convenient date, by district within regional sub-totals; and what was the percentage of the relevant stock that existed at 30 September 1979 which has been sold to date;

(2) if he will list details of sales of *(a)* Scottish Special Housing Association housing and *(b)* New Town Development Corporation housing to sitting tenants up to the latest convenient date, indicating the percentage of the relevant stock that existed at 30 September 1979 which has been sold to date.

Mr. Ancram: The information requested is set out in the table below.

Sales to sitting tenants between 1 October 1979 and 30 September 1986

Area	*Number of sales*	*Sales as per cent. of stock*
SCOTLAND	89,611	8·6
LOCAL AUTHORITY	62,808	7·0
Borders	1,808	11·5
Berwick	371	12·9
Ettrick and Lauderdale	686	13·8
Roxburgh[1]	542	8·6
Tweeddale[1]	209	12·8
Central	4,502	8·0
Clackmannan	699	7·2
Falkirk	2,780	8·3
Stirling	1,023	7·8
Dumfries and Galloway	2,874	13·8
Annandale and Eskdale	716	14·4
Nithsdale	1,038	12·1
Stewartry	460	18·1
Wigtown	668	14·0
Fife	8,342	14·4
Dunfermline	3,218	13·9
Kirkcaldy	3,446	13·0
North East Fife	1,678	21·0
Grampian	7,769	10·9
Aberdeen	2,878	7·5
Banff and Buchan	1,672	13·2
Gordon	1,105	18·1
Kincardine and Deeside	564	15·6
Moray	1,550	14·6
Highland	2,797	10·9
Badenoch and Strathspey	193	18·0
Caithness	532	12·4
Inverness	839	12·0
Lochaber	278	8·3
Nairn	178	16·1
Ross and Cromarty	509	8·1
Skye and Lochalsh	105	15·0
Sutherland[1]	163	9·4
Lothian	9,878	9·1
East Lothian	1,682	10·4
Edinburgh	5,203	9·2
Midlothian	1,634	12·4
West Lothian	1,359	6·0
Strathclyde	18,366	4·0
Argyll and Bute	673	8·1
Bearsden and Milngavie	284	15·5
Clydebank	415	3·5
Clydesdale	267	2·8
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	228	5·2
Cumnock and Doon Valley	412	4·0
Cunninghame[1]	1,287	5·5
Dunbarton	458	3·5
East Kilbride	189	11·6
Eastwood	281	13·8
Glasgow	4,549	2·6
Hamilton	967	4·2
Inverclyde	1,005	5·0
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	898	4·9
Kyle and Carrick[1]	1,606	8·8
Monklands	588	2·1
Motherwell	1,037	2·6
Renfrew[1]	2,311	5·8
Strathkelvin	911	8·3
Tayside	5,601	7·9
Angus	1,706	11·7
Dundee	1,572	3·9
Perth and Kinross	2,323	14·2
Orkney Islands	201	13·9
Shetland Islands	248	10·2
Western Isles Islands	422	17·7
NEWTOWNS	12,056	22·9
S.S.H.A.	14,824	16·0

[1] Returns outstanding.

Owner-Occupation

Mr. Maxton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has as to how many owner-occupied dwellings which are *(a)* owned outright, and *(b)* currently being purchased on a mortgage.

Mr. Ancram: It is estimated that, at December 1985, 840,000 dwellings were owner-occupied; of these around 380,000 were owned outright, and around 460,000 were being purchased on a mortgage.

Mobile Homes

Mr. Maxton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide details of the numbers of households living in mobile homes for each of the years 1978 to 1986, inclusive.

Mr. Ancram: Complete information is not held centrally.

Health Centres (Argyll and Clyde)

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report* the number of general practitioners and patient populations in each of the health centres in the Argyll and Clyde health board area.

Mr. John MacKay: The information requested is shown in the table below:

Health centre	*Number of GPs*	*Number of patients*[1]
Campbeltown	5	8,157
Dumbarton	17	25,827
Gourock	5	7,472
Rothesay	5	7,681
Greenock	39	62,536
Port Glasgow	12	20,201
Barrhead	10	17,841
Bishopton	4	6,337
Linwood	8	15,615

[1] As at 1 October 1986.

Manpower Services Commission

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report* the Manpower Services Commission's area manpower boards in Scotland; the number of projects proposals accepted for Manpower Services Commission schemes under the Manpower Services Commission community programmes approved by each of the area manpower boards in each of the past three years, the average amounts awarded, the names of the management agents and the total amount awarded in each of those three years.

Mr. Lang: The information is not available in the precise form requested. The number of community programme projects operating in Scotland at the end of the last two completed financial years and the latest available figure (January) for the current financial year by area manpower board are shown in the table below.

Community Programme Projects Operating in Scotland

Manpower Board	*March 1985*	*March 1986*	*January 1987*
Ayrshire, Dumfries and Galloway	191	223	200
Central and Fife	119	219	245
Glasgow City	221	337	383
Grampian and Tayside	136	194	203
Highlands and Islands	120	153	163
Lanarkshire	123	153	171
Lothian and Borders	120	155	180
Renfrewshire, Dunbartonshire, Argyll and Bute	147	193	189
SCOTLAND TOTAL	1,177	1,627	1,734

The average amounts awarded, the names of the management agents involved and the total amount awarded in each of those three years are not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

TRANSPORT

Lorry Sizes

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Transport if the Council of Ministers of the European Community have indicated their intention to consider legislation on lorry sizes on the basis of majority voting under the Single Act; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moore: The Council adopted in December 1984 a Directive (85/3 EEC) on the weights and dimensions of heavy lorries. The Directive contains a derogation for the United Kingdom and Ireland as regards certain of the weight limits, and makes it clear that the duration of the derogation is to be decided under Article 75(3) of the treaty which provides for unanimous decisions. This is not affected by the Single European Act. The UK has no need for a derogation on lorry dimensions; the dimensions specified in the Directive are within our limits, and lorries in other Community countries are no bigger than those permitted in this country.

Air Traffic Controllers

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Transport in what circumstances air traffic controllers are permitted to listen to conversations between pilots and their bases in other countries; to what use such information may be put; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Air traffic control matters are the responsibility of the Civil Aviation Authority. The CAA has informed me that air traffic controllers monitor designated air traffic control frequencies used for the purpose of providing air traffic or alerting service. They do not monitor airline company frequencies

Trunk Roads and Motorways (Expenditure)

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will provide information on central Government expenditure on *(a)* trunk roads and *(b)* motorways for all years since 1978-79 inclusive, by standard United Kingdom region, showing the absolute, indexed and per capita form of the following disaggregated costs: (i) construction costs, (ii) maintenance costs, (iii) capital account costs and (iv) current account costs.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Not all of this information is available. What can be given is extensive and will take time to assemble. I will write to the hon. Member when this has been done and place a copy in the Library.

Driver-only Trains (Safety)

Mr. Hoyle asked the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the implication for safety of trains running from Stanlow oil refinery without guards; what information he has as to how long this has been happening; what loads are being carried; what safety precautions are being taken; when the decision to use single man operation was implemented; who was consulted about this decision; and what is the cost saving.

Mr. David Mitchell: The British Railways Board has established criteria for the circumstances under which driver-only operation may be permitted. These criteria cover all types of train, including freight trains, and have been agreed by the Railway Inspectorate as providing a satisfactory basis for the safe operation of trains by the driver only. As the board has the responsibility for the safe, efficient and economical operation of its railway the hon. Member should write to it for the detailed information he requires in relation to the remaining parts of his question.

Vehicle Excise Duty

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the total revenue from vehicle excise duties in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available: and what was the percentage change in such revenues on the preceding year in each case.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The figures requested are as follows:

Year	*Total revenue from vehicle excise duty (£ million)*	*Percentage increase on previous year*
1976-77	814	6·4
1977-78	1,045	28·4
1978-79	1,086	3·9
1979-80	1,162	7·0
1980-81	1,360	17·0
1981-82	1,618	19·0
1982-83	1,840	13·7
1983-84	1,997	8·5
1984-85	2,264	13·4
1985-86	2,426	7·2

Drunk Driving

Mr. Sims asked the Secretary of State for Transport if, in the light of the information supplied to him by the hon. Member for Chislehurst, he has anything to add to his statement of 2 February, *Official Report* at column 675, regarding the percentage of road accidents attributable to drinking and driving.

Mr. Moore: In my statement of 2 February I was reported as saying at column 675 that 95 per cent. of accidents in this country involved drinking and driving. That figure is incorrect. 25 per cent. of all road deaths are alcohol-related. I have asked for the *Official Report* to be corrected.

EMPLOYMENT

YTS

Mrs. Peacock asked the Paymaster General how many young people have completed YTS schemes in Batley and Spen and Yorkshire to date; how many left before completing their full entitlement to training; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: The information is not available in the form requested.

By the end of March 1986, around 2,800 young people in the local authority district of Kirklees had completed YTS schemes since the scheme was introduced in 1983. The comparable figure for Yorkshire is 32,000. Over the same period, around 4,600 young people in Kirklees and 44,500 in Yorkshire, left the scheme before completing their full entitlement.

Independent research has shown that most young people who leave their schemes early are either employed or are in further education-training. Of those who completed the YTS schemes in Yorkshire and Kirklees between April 1985 and March 1986, 61 per cent. and 74 per cent. respectively were in employment three months after leaving YTS. I am very encourged by the achievements reflected in these results.

"Services—the Second Industrial Revolution"

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton asked the Paymaster General what policy changes he intends to make in the light of the findings of the report "Services—the Second Industrial Revolution?" from the Institute of Manpower Studies, a copy of which has been sent to him; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: None.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Pike asked the Paymaster General what is the number of people living in *(a)* Lancashire, *(b)* Greater Manchester, *(c)* Merseyside and *(d)* Cheshire who have never worked since leaving school.

Mr. Trippier: The following information is in the Library. The table shows the numbers of unemployed claimants in the counties of Lancashire, Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Cheshire of all ages who had not had a job since leaving full-time education, as at 8 January 1987, together with those aged under 18 years.

County	*Unemployed Claimants*	
	All ages	*Aged under 18 years*
Lancashire	5,330	1,495
Greater Manchester	16,714	4,756
Merseyside	16,692	4,232
Cheshire	5,382	1,590

Mr. Mason asked the Paymaster General (1) if he will give the total numbers of men and women employed in Yorkshire and Humberside, South Yorkshire and Barnsley travel-to-work area in 1979, and each succeeding year to date;

(2) what is the up-to-date average unemployment figure for each of the travel-to-work areas in the United Kingdom, specifying the male, female, long-term unemployed and youth unemployed, separately.

Mr. Lee: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Ms. Clare Short asked the Paymaster General what assumption is made for the purposes of compiling his Department's estimates of the number of employees in employment of the number of YTS trainees with contracts of employment.

Mr. Trippier: None. Employers are instructed to include, but not separately identify, only those YTS trainees with contracts of employment in completing the statistical returns from which the employees in employment series is derived.

Mr. Duffy asked the Paymaster General if he will give the total number of men and women employed in Yorkshire, Humberside, South Yorkshire and the Sheffield travel-to-work area in 1979 and each succeeding year to date.

Mr. Lee: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Community Programme

Dr. Godman asked the Paymaster General how much money is budgeted in the current financial year and for 1988-89 for Manpower Services Commission community programme schemes in *(a)* Great Britain, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Strathclyde region and *(d)* the Renfrewshire, Dunbartonshire and Argyll area manpower board.

Mr. Lee: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Hotel Classification

Mr. Gregory asked the Paymaster General what are the criteria for the five gold crowns award under the English Tourist Board's new hotel classification scheme; what is the anticipated number of recipients; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: I am informed by the English tourist board that their criteria for the award of five gold crowns under their voluntary hotel classification scheme are as follows:

"The main criteria are that the establishment should have achieved and maintained, over the course of at least three years, a wide range and high standard of facilities and services. In addition the establishment would normally be expected to provide the following facilities and services, over and above the standard requirements for five crowns.

1. A tended reception / writer / office available at all hours.
2. Portering provided by uniformed staff and a storage room for luggage.
3. A valet service, comprising dry cleaning, pressing, laundry and shoe cleaning. (This service may involve the use of outside facilities).
4. All services provided by well-trained, well-presented and efficient staff.
5. Accommodation, both in respect of bedrooms and public rooms, of a particularly high level of comfort, with furnishings and decor to a standard significantly higher than the minimum required for five crowns.
6. A restaurant, serving breakfast, lunch and dinner to residents and their guests each day. All menus offering an appropriate range of choice. Table appointments and decor to a high standard. Last orders for dinner no earlier than 9.30 pm.
7. A 24 hour room service to include the provision of hot meals at any hour of the day or night.
8. A bar or lounge service, with cocktail facilities.
9. A range of leisure and other additional facilities. Examples: bookstall, theatre ticket bureau, haidressing salon, games room, swimming pool, sauna, solarium, tennis courts, squash courts, golf course, typewriting, photocopying and secreterial service.
10. Adequate security and service arrangements to enable guests to preserve their personal privacy and avoid unwelcome attention or disturbance.

When applying these criteria the award committee will take into full consideration the nature and location of the hotel and the particular needs of the clientele it seeks to serve.

I understand from the ETB that it expects no more than 40 hotels to receive the five gold crown award.

Literacy

Mr. Ashdown asked the Paymaster General when he received the report of a working group of the Manpower Services Commission on illiteracy among long-term unemployed people; what estimates are given in that report of the numbers and proportion of persons with such inadequate skills among the long-term unemployed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: My right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State for Employment received the report on 12 February 1987. The report estimates that some 25 per cent. of the long-term unemployed, or between 350,000 and 400,000 people, have literacy or numeracy problems that might affect their opportunities of securing employment. In 1986-87 the Manpower Services Commission is spending £5-6 million on basic literacy and numeracy skills training; this provision is in addition to spending by local education authorities. The figures in the report emphasise, however, the scale of the problem that remains.

Mr. Ashdown asked the Paymaster General whether he will arrange discussions with *(a)* the adult literacy and basic skills unit, *(b)* the National Federation of Voluntary Literacy Schemes and *(c)* representatives of local education authorities, in considering what steps to take about illiteracy among the long-term unemployed; if he will publish a discussion document; when he expects to announce decisions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: My right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State for Employment is considering the report in conjunction with other colleagues with relevant departmental responsibilities and will decide what, if any, action to take on it as soon as possible.

ENVIRONMENT

Rate Support Grant

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the rate support grant settlement in cash terms to *(a)* Burnley borough council and *(b)* Pendle borough council for each year since 1979; and what are the comparative figures in 1979 prices.

Mr. Chope: The information for 1981-82 and later years, expressed in cash terms and at 1981-82 prices, is as follows. Figures for earlier years are not available on a comparable basis.

	Rate support grant[1]			
	Burnley borough council		Pendle borough council	
	Cash	1981-82 prices[2]	Cash	1981-82 prices[2]
1981-82	5·435	5·435	4·430	4·430
1982-83	5·081	4·738	4·439	4·139
1983-84	5·539	4·944	4·385	3·914
1984-85	5·481	4·690	4·371	3·740
1985-86	4·928	3·969	4·178	3·365
1986-87	5·112	3·997	4·354	3·405

[1] Rate support grant comprises block grant and domestic rate relief grant.

[2] Cash values converted to 1981-82 price levels using the GDP deflator.

In 1981-82 and 1982-83 the amounts are final rate support grant payments. In 1983-84 and 1984-85 the amounts are grant entitlements based on the latest supplementary reports in each year; in 1985-86 they are grant entitlements based on the Secretary of State's firm intentions for the third supplementary report and in 1986-87 they are based on the Secretary of State's firm intentions for the first supplementary report.

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish central Government expenditure on the rate support grant to all local authorities, excluding domestic rate relief and hold-back for all years since 1978-79 to 1986-87 inclusive, giving this information in absolute, indexed and per capita forms.

Mr. Chope: I have today placed the information in the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Peter Shore asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what, in constant prices, was the value of the rate support grant payment to the London borough of Tower Hamlets in 1986-87 and for each preceding year to 1978-79; what is the proposed payment of 1987-88 showing separately for each relevant year the payments received by the London borough of Tower Hamlets in respect of services transferred from the Greater London Council after abolition and information available to him on expenditure in Tower Hamlets and the Greater London Council on such services.

Mr. Chope [*pursuant to his reply*, Monday 23 February 1987]: Rate support grant payments to the London borough of Tower Hamlets, in constant prices, for the period 1981-82 to 1986-87 and estimated payments in 1987-88 assuming Tower Hamlets spends at the 1987-88 rate support grant settlement level, are given in the table. The arrangements for paying rate support grant changed in 1981-82 when the needs, resources and domestic elements were replaced by block grant and domstic rate relief grant. Information is therefore not available on a comparable basis in earlier years.

Rate Support Grant[1]

Year	£m 1981-82 prices[2]
1981-82	25·757
1982-83	23·500
1983-84	22·912
1984-85	20·113
1985-86	17·269
[3]1986-87	48·740
[3]1987-88	45·498

[1] Rate support grant comprise block grant and domestic rate relief grant.

[2] Cash values converted to 1981-82 price levels using the GDP deflator.

[3] Rate support grant payments in these years reflect increased responsibilities taken on by London boroughs following the abolition of the GLC.

In 1981-82 and 1982-83 the amounts are final rate support grant payments. In 1983-84 and 1984-85 the amounts are grant entitlements based on the lastest Supplementary Reports in each year; in 1985-86 they are grant entitlements based on the Secretary of State's firm intentions for the third supplementary report and in 1986-87 they are based on the Secretary of State's firm intentions for the first supplementary report. The estimated amount of rate support grant payments in 1987-88 are based on the Secretary of State's intentions for the 1987-88 rate support grant settlement and assume that Tower Hamlets spends at its "expenditure level" given in the settlement.

Block grant is an unhypothecated grant and amounts cannot therefore be specifically attributed to services transferred to Tower Hamlets following the abolition of the GLC, nor is information available centrally on expenditure by Tower Hamlets on such transferred services.

Man-made Mineral Fibres

Mr. Knowles asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the possible risks of man-made mineral fibres, in the light of the work by the World Health Organisation on this subject.

Mr. Ridley: A summary report of an international symposium published last December by the World Health Organisation indicates that an increased lung cancer risk was observed in workers involved in the early days of the manufacture of these materials. The DHSS committee on carcinogenicity has reviewed the available evidence for workplace exposure at the request of the HSE and has indicated that exposure to man made mineral fibre (MMMF) should be accepted as having the potential to increase the risk of lung cancer.

The evidence we have shows that, in the MMMF industry, existing safety precautions are keeping fibre concentrations at the point of manufacture well below the limits considered by the WHO at the symposium. Further advice will be offered by HSE on other occupational exposures.

Work has recently begun to assess the extent of domestic exposures. MMMF in the form of glasswool and rockwool constitute the majority of loft insulation materials used in this country. On the limited data so far available, there appears to be negligible risk to the health of householders, either from existing loft insulation installations, or from laying it themselves, or from infrequent visits to their lofts. As a precautionary measure, the Government have work in hand to collect more data, and assess risks. We will give further advice and take action as necessary. Meanwhile, there is no reason for householders to remove MMMF from their lofts, but they should take simple precautions which we have already recommended such as wearing masks and gloves when working in lofts or in other places where the insulation is exposed.

I shall make another announcement when further medical advice is received.

Community Change

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what account he proposes to take, in reaching final decisions on the form of the proposed community charge, of the representations from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy regarding *(a)* the extent to which the community charge may vary from place to place and *(b)* the length of the transitional period during which domestic rates and the community charge will run in tandem; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: On 15 December, my right hon. Friend set out his proposals for the operation of the community charge and confirmed the Government's intention to introduce a simpler grant system and a uniform rate poundage for business [*Official Report*, c. *392*.] So far as other aspects of the system set out in the Green Paper "Paying for Local Government" (Cmnd. 9714) are concerned, we are still considering the responses that were made, including that from CIPFA.

Housing Investment Programme

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish information on central Government expenditure on the housing investment programme for all years since 1978-79 inclusive, by standard United Kingdom region, showing the absolute, indexed and per capita from of the following disaggregated costs: (i) capital account costs and (ii) current account costs.

Mr. Tracey: The available information is for English local authorities' and new towns' housing and is given in the tables. For estimates for other parts of the United Kingdom, I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland, for Wales and for Northern Ireland.

(i) New towns gross housing capital expenditure

£ million except where stated

Region[1]	*1978-79*	*1979-80*	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*
(a) Cash terms								
North	8	12	13	7	4	4	5	2
East Midlands	6	13	14	7	2	4	2	—
East Anglia	12	13	17	11	6	5	6	3
South East	50	59	55	47	35	44	42	37
West Midlands	17	21	21	13	4	6	9	5
North West	36	43	44	30	20	24	19	10
England	129	160	164	115	71	85	82	56
(b) 1985-86 cost terms								
North	16	20	18	8	5	4	5	2
East Midlands	10	20	19	9	3	4	2	—
East Anglia	23	21	23	13	6	5	6	3
South East	95	95	75	59	41	49	45	37
West Midlands	32	33	29	16	5	6	10	5
North West	68	70	60	37	23	27	20	10
England	244	260	223	143	83	94	88	56
(c) £ per capita[2]								
North	2·70	3·90	4·10	2·20	1·30	1·10	1·50	0·80
East Midlands	1·40	3·30	3·60	1·90	0·60	0·90	0·40	—
East Anglia	6·40	7·10	9·00	5·50	2·90	2·40	3·00	1·70
South East	3·00	3·50	3·20	2·80	2·10	2·60	2·50	2·20
West Midlands	3·30	4·00	4·10	2·50	0·90	1·10	1·70	0·90
North West	5·50	6·60	6·80	4·70	3·10	3·70	3·00	1·50
England	2·80	3·40	3·50	2·50	1·50	1·80	1·80	1·20

[1] No new towns in Yorkshire and Humberside or south west regions.
[2] Using total population of region.

(ii) New towns gross housing current[3] *expenditure*

£ million except where stated

Region[1]	*1978-79*	*1979-80*	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*
(a) Cash terms								
North	−5	7	8	8	9	11	12	9
East Midlands	8	9	11	11	11	13	13	—
East Anglia	−10	11	13	13	14	16	16	16
South East	27	32	36	37	39	50	53	54
West Midlands	16	19	20	20	20	24	24	16
North West	24	29	34	35	36	42	45	29
England	60	107	122	124	130	156	162	125
(b) 1985-86 cost terms								
North	−10	12	11	10	10	13	13	9

Region[1]	1978-79	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86
East Midlands	15	15	15	14	13	14	14	—
East Anglia	−19	18	17	17	16	18	17	16
South East	51	51	49	46	46	55	56	54
West Midlands	31	31	28	25	23	26	26	16
North West	46	48	47	43	42	47	48	29
England	114	173	167	154	150	173	173	125
(c) £ per capita[2]								
North	−1·70	2·30	2·70	2·60	2·80	3·70	3·90	3·00
East Midlands	2·00	2·40	2·80	2·90	3·00	3·30	3·30	—
East Anglia	−5·30	5·90	6·60	7·10	7·30	8·20	8·20	8·30
South East	1·60	1·90	2·10	2·20	2·30	2·90	3·10	3·20
West Midlands	3·20	3·60	3·90	3·80	3·80	4·60	4·70	3·10
North West	3·80	4·50	5·30	5·40	5·70	6·60	7·10	4·50
England	1·30	2·30	2·60	2·70	2·80	3·30	3·50	2·60

[1] No new towns in Yorkshire and Humberside or South West regions.
[2] Using total population of region.
[3] Subsidy payments.

Urban Development Programme

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish information on central Government expenditure on the urban development programme for all years since 1978-79 inclusive, aggregated for the standard United Kingdom regions, giving the information in absolute, indexed, and per capita forms.

Mr. John Patten: I will answer this question shortly.

Heritage Conservation

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all those organisations which, under the auspices of his Department, receive Government funds for the general purposes of protecting, improving and restoring the heritage; and if he will list the amounts involved.

Mr. Waldegrave: The relevant organisations, covering the built and natural heritage in England, and the amounts applicable in 1986-87, are listed below. In some cases their responsibilities extend to other parts of the United Kingdom. Government funding in this area has increased substantially over the last few years: in 1979-80 it totalled some £61 million—an increase of about 58 per cent. in real terms over the period.

Government funding in 1986-87

	£ million
Royal Parks and Palaces	32·5
Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England	61·5
Royal Armouries	2·8
National Heritage Memorial Fund	[1]3·0
Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England	3·2
Redundant Churches Fund	0·9
Countryside Commission	17·7
Nature Conservancy Council	32·1
National Parks Authorities	6·4
Grants to voluntary bodies:	
Civic Trust (Central and Regional)	0·1
British Trust for Conservation Volunteers	0·1
Other bodies	0·3
Total	160·7

[1] Funded jointly by DOE and Offices of Arts and Libraries.

Spectrum Arena

Mr. Hoyle asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to the reply of 10 February 1987, *Official Report*, column *157*, if one of the conditions of the sale of the Spectrum Arena will ensure that it remains in leisure use; if he envisages any change in the different types of leisure facilities currently available at the Spectrum Arena after its sale; what percentage of the proceeds of the sale of the Spectrum Arena will be spent on new facilities at Birchwood; and what will the remaining proceeds be used for.

Mr. John Patten: It is for the development corporation in the first instance to determine any conditions of sale in relation to the Spectrum Arena. I understand that the corporation's preference is for continued leisure use, but the precise nature of such use would be for discussion between the corporation and prospective purchasers.

Substantial amounts were due to the development corporation at the time the Spectrum Arena closed in respect of loans to the former lessees, the Birchwood Project (Warrington) Limited. Those amounts will be a first call on the proceeds of sale, after provision for the proposed investment in new facilities in Birchwood referred to in my previous reply. No specific proposals have been submitted to the Department as to the amount and nature of that new investment.

Angling

Mr. Mason asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if, in respect of the Nature Conservancy Council's establishment of sites of special scientific interest, he will introduce a consultative procedure including the water authorities and established angling clubs where their fishing rights are likely to be affected; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: Any notification, as being of special interest, of a site owned or occupied by a water authority is made to that water authority. The Nature Conservancy Council and the National Anglers Council are preparing joint guidelines for the management of fishing activities within sites of special scientific interest and have agreed to

meet regularly to exchange information and views. I endorse this approach and see no need for more formal consultation arrangements.

Mr. Mason asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set up an appeals procedure against Nature Conservancy Council's decisions on the establishing of sites of special scientific interest, allowing for access to such a procedure for the angling fraternity where its sport is liable to be affected; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: No. The question of a right of appeal has been considered and rejected during the passage of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and subsequently by the House of Commons Select Committee on the Environment. I am satisfied that existing procedures are adequate.

Housing Defects Act

Sir George Young asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many owner-occupiers in the South West region live in houses designated under the Housing Defects Act.

Mr. John Patten: I will answer this question shortly.

Sir George Young asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many owner-occupiers in the South West region have been awarded grants under the Housing Defects Act.

Mr. John Patten: Local authorities in the South West region have reported paying 44 reinstatement grants during the period December 1984 to September 1986.

Nitrates

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received on the detrimental effect to health of people living in areas which have a high incidence of nitrates in the soil; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: My Department has this year received about a dozen representations referring to possible health risks from nitrate when it passes into drinking water supplies. Advice on the health implications of nitrate in drinking water are set out in a letter from the Government's Chief Medical Officer to local medical officers on 27 November 1985; this letter is reproduced as appendix B to the report of the Nitrate Co-ordination Group. A copy of which is available in the Library. No public supplies contain nitrate concentrations above levels considered acceptable by the Chief Medical Officer.

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what central Government financial help is available to water authorities to encourage them to reduce the level of nitrates in the soil; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: Water authority investment is funded from water charges and not grant aided by the Government. If nitrate in the soil needs to be limited in order for example to limit nitrate concentrations in water supplies, costs should where practicable be borne by those responsible for the increased levels. I am at present considering the report of the Nitrate Co-ordination Group which made a number of recommendations for dealing with the nitrate issue.

The Rural Economy

Mr. Campbell-Savours asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he plans any changes to the policy announced by his predecessor on 30 April 1986, *Official Report*, column *412*, regarding change of use of agricultural buildings, in the light of his recent announcement of a new draft planning circular in connection with Her Majesty's Government's proposals for the rural economy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: No. Paragraph 6 of the draft circular "Development Involving Agricultural Land" would reaffirm the Government's existing policy on re-use of redundant buildings in Green Belts and elsewhere.

Water Services (Share Sales)

Mr. Squire asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he proposes to make any changes to the cash limit for class X, vote 9 Department of the Environment, sales of shares in the water services public limited companies.

Mr. Ridley: The cash limit for Class X, Vote 9 for 1986-87 will be reduced by £1,000,000 from £2,500,000 to £1,500,000. This decrease reflects the revised timetable for water authority privatisation which I announced to the House on 3 July 1986 at columns 1261-70. The saving will be surrendered as a reduction in public expenditure.

Anti-Fouling Paint

Mr. Hanley asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the results of the first year's monitoring programme for TBT in the aquatic environment, and what further action he proposes to take.

Mr. Waldegrave [*pursuant to his answer*, 13 January 1987, c. *143*]: In the light of evidence that the existing controls have not been effective in reducing contamination of the aquatic environment to acceptable levels and of evidence that the existing environmental quality target has been set too high to protect the most sensitive species, the Government have decided that further controls are necessary. The Government intend, therefore, to make further regulations under section 100 of the Control of Pollution Act as soon as possible to ban the retail sale of anti-fouling paints containing tributyl-tin (TBT). This should effectively prevent their use on small craft. In addition the regulations will prohibit products containing TBT being used to treat fish farm nets and cages.

From 1 July all anti-fouling paints will become subject to the provisions of the Food and Environment Protection Act and, as my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, announced in his reply to the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) on 3 February, he has asked the Advisory Committee on Pesticides to consider and advise on the scientific evidence on TBT in the aquatic environment, with a view to making appropriate recommendations well before 1 July.

London Docklands

Mr. Mikardo asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to the answer of 27 January, *Official Report*, column *169*, concerning the price of land to be sold to the Canary Wharf Consortium by the

London Docklands Development Corporation, what factors other than land price will be taken into account in assessing the terms of the agreement overall; whether the consideration of other factors excludes acceptance of a price below the market value of land in the enterprise zone; if he will list all the previous occasions on which land for which he has any responsibility has been sold at a price below the market value as a result of priority being given to other factors involved in the transaction; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten [*pursuant to his reply*, 13 February 1987, c. *382*]: Other factors to be considered in assessing any overall agreement between the LDDC and the consortium include the relative strength and value of the commitments by both parties, for example to the provision of essential infrastructure; the implications of the term of LDDC's regeneration task and resources; and the potential economic benefit for docklands as a whole. The LDDC is responsible for determining the conditions of any sale for the Canary Wharf site, and these will be reflected in the price.

Details of all disposals at less than best price of all publicly-owned land for which my right hon. Friend has responsibility could be provided only at disproportionate costs. However, I am not aware, in the case of the LDDC, of any disposals at less than best price.

Rates

Mr. Peter Shore asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, how many ratepayers there are in each of the following boroughs; Brent, Camden, Hackney, Haringey, Islington, Lambeth, Lewisham, Southwark and Tower Hamlets; how many of these pay no rates at all; and how many are partially rate rebated.

Mr. Chope [*pursuant to his answer*, 9 February 1987, c. *126*]: The information available centrally about the numbers of domestic ratepayers and those receiving full and partial rebates in 1985-86 is as follows:

	Number of domestic ratepayers[1] *(000's)*	*Ratepayers on supplementary benefit receiving rebates*[2] *(000's)*	*Ratepayers receiving standard rebates including housing benefit supplement*[2] *(000's)*
Brent	94·5	16·5	23·4
Camden	80·1	16·5	13·1
Hackney	75·4	24·3	14·9
Haringey	83·9	18·4	17·8
Islington	69·4	19·4	10·2
Lambeth	106·6	30·5	18·2
Lewisham	97·1	18·6	15·8
Southwark	96·6	27·4	18·0
Tower Hamlets	62·0	19·2	11·2

[1] These are the numbers of domestic hereditaments. They are not strictly comparable with the numbers of rebate recipients, which are households, as there can be more than one household receiving rebates in a hereditament.

[2] Local authorities' latest estimates of the average number of households receiving certificated (supplementary benefit claimants) and standard (other claimants) rebates in 1985-86. The majority of those receiving certificated rebates receive full rebate and the majority of those receiving standard rebates receive partial rebates.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Manufacturing Investment

Mr. Dixon asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his latest available figure for the percentage fall in the real value of manufacturing investment in the North since 1979.

Mr. Giles Shaw: When the world recession hit a sector suffering from poor competitiveness—the result of years of high inflation, low productivity growth and poor rates of return on investment—a sharp fall in manufacturing investment in the regions occurred up to 1983. In real terms, manufacturing investment in the North between 1979 and 1984 fell by 42 per cent. Industry is now more competitive and better adapted to the demands of a modern economy — manufacturing investment in the North over the most recent year for which there is data, 1983-84, grew by 28 per cent. in real terms.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the latest available figure for the percentage fall in the real value of manufacturing investment in Wales since 1979.

Mr. Giles Shaw: When the world recession hit a sector suffering from poor competitiveness—the result of years of high inflation, low productivity growth and poor rates of return on investment—a sharp fall in manufacturing investment in the regions occurred up to 1983. In real terms, manufacturing investment in Wales between 1979 and 1984 fell by 32 per cent. Industry is now more competitive and better adapted to the demands of a modern economy—manufacturing investment in Wales over the most recent year for which there is data, 1983-84, grew by 28 per cent. in real terms.

Machinery (Investment)

Mr. Nellist asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give figures to show how much was invested in new machinery per worker in 1975, 1980, 1985 and at the latest available date; and what comparative information he has for the United States of America, Germany, France, Japan and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development average for the same years.

Mr. Alan Clark: I will reply to the hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

Regional Development Grant

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish information on central Government expenditure on the regional development grant, distinguishing between different levels of assistance and aggregating the information to the standard United Kingdom regions, for all years since 1978-79 inclusive.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I will reply to the right hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

Insurance and Pension Fund Investment

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish information available to him on insurance and pension fund investment for all years since 1978-79 inclusive, by standard United Kingdom region in absolute, indexed, and per capita forms.

Mr. Howard: Information on investment by insurance companies and pension funds is not collected on a regional basis. Statistics on investment by insurance companies operating in the United Kingdom, for the calendar years 1980 to 1985, were published in *British Business* on 28 November 1986. Corresponding data for investment by self-administered pension funds managed from within the United Kingdom were published in *British Business* on 12 September 1986. Information on the holdings of assets at the end of 1978 and 1979 and net investment during 1979 for United Kingdom insurance companies and self-administered pension funds was published in *British Business* on 7 September 1984.

Employment (Assistance)

Mr. Mason asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the organisations which are relevant to assisting employment in the regions who have moved out of the southern region to the north since 1979; with what impact on employment therein; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I will reply to the right hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

Credit

Mr. Nicholls asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations he has received about the availability of credit to young people from organisations providing funds; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: In 1986 I received some 23 letters relating to personal over-indebtedness and roughly one third of these expressed particular concern about the availability of credit facilities to young people. This year, to date, I have received a further four letters on this subject, all but one concerned with young people. I shall continue to keep the situation under review but I do not believe it would be right to impose restrictions on the availability of credit to young people.

Rolls-Royce

Mr. Millan asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give details of the years since 1971 in which loans were made to Rolls-Royce Ltd., the years in which the loans were repaid and the interest received by the Government in the relevant years.

Mr. Pattie: I will reply to the right hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

Correspondence (Delays)

Mr. Neil Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) when his Department expects to be able to reply to letters from M. J. Palmer dated 30 January and 6 February;

(2) when he expects to be in a position to reply to a letter addressed to him dated 2 February from Mohamed Al Fayed.

Mr. Howard: The matters contained in these letters are receiving careful consideration. I cannot say at present when a substantive reply will be given to them.

United States (Export Controls)

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many of the members of the trade associations referred to in his answer of 19 February are United States subsidiary companies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: This Department does not possess the information requested.

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) whether the approved foreign consignee status to which he referred in his answer of 19 February involves mandatory compliance with the United States export laws including re-export licensing requirements from the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement;

(2) pursuant to his answer of 19 February if the distribution licence system requires, directly or indirectly, a United States re-export licence for goods to be exported from the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: Whatever their requirements, extraterritorial re-export controls are rejected by the Government, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made clear on 19 February.

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry under what powers he intends to decide on visits of American officials to check the books of United Kingdom companies to which he refers in his answer of 19 February; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: The Government's permission is required before any such visit by an official of a foreign power, acting in that capacity, can take place within the United Kingdom.

Fireworks

Mrs. Shields asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to restrict further the sale of fireworks to individuals.

Mr. Howard: The Fireworks (Safety) Regulations 1986 give magistrates the power to impose a penalty of fines up to £2,000 or three months imprisonment on retailers who

sell fireworks to the under-16s. The Consumer Protection Bill will give magistrates power to impose similar penalties for throwing fireworks about in the street.

I do not intend to ban the retail sale of fireworks altogether since many people get a great deal of innocent pleasure from domestic fireworks parties.

I will continue to keep under review the scope for reducing the number of firework injuries. The 1986 fireworks safety campaign had novel features and I believe achieved considerable impact. Officials will shortly be discussing with the suppliers the scope for changes in the voluntary restraint arrangements whose effect on the accident and injury statistics should not be underestimated.

THE ARTS

Marketing and Management

Mr. Murphy asked the Minister for the Arts if he will make a statement on the progress of his new marketing scheme to help arts and heritage bodies improve their marketing and management.

Mr. Luce: The details have been widely circulated through arts agencies. Completed application forms must reach the Office of Arts and Libraries by 30 April 1987.

I am encouraged by the reports that I have had of the interest and enthusiasm being shown, and by the development of arts marketing in general.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Finance Ministers (Paris Meeting)

Mr. Forman asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will make a statement about the meeting of Finance Ministers in Paris on 22 February.

Mr. Lawson: I attended a meeting of the Finance Ministers and central bank governors of six of the group of seven major industrialised countries in Paris on 22 February. A copy of the joint statement issued at the end of the meeting has been placed in the Library. As I said at the press conference in Paris after the communiqué had been issued:

"For a number of weeks there has been speculation in the press about a possible meeting of the G5 or the G7. I have all along insisted that there should be no meeting until it had been properly prepared and that we knew we were close to an agreement of substance.

And that we have now had—a well prepared meeting that has reached an agreement of substance.

Along with Secretary Baker and Minister Stoltenberg I am one of the three survivors of the Plaza Agreement of 1985. And I see this as its lineal descendant—Plaza II.

Then, we were all agreed that the dollar needed to fall and we acted accordingly. Now, we all agree that the time has come for a period of stability, and we will act accordingly. I welcome that."

Free Ports

Mr. Alton asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether his Department has any plans to offer capital investment grants or low interest loans to non-European Economic Community companies wishing to set up in British free port zones.

Mr. Brooke: No. The Government made it clear from the start that it had no financial commitment to the free ports other than the customs staff involved with them. Businesses setting up in free ports may of course be eligible to incentives as a result of the application of other Government policies, for example regional assistance.

Civil Service Pension Schemes

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has any plans to include years of war service as contributing towards Civil Service pension schemes other than the transfer of war service from the National Health Service superannuation scheme for the Civil Service pension scheme.

Mr. Brooke: The reckoning of war service for Civil Service superannuation purposes is governed by the Superannuation Act 1946. This, and regulations made under it, provided that people who entered the Civil Service for the first time before 30 June 1950 could count their full-time service in the armed forces during the war as though it had been unestablished service in the Civil Service. In recent years, the reckoning of war service concession has been extended to employees in the other public services, ie to local government and NHS employees, teachers, policemen and firemen. People who entered pensionable public service employment before 1 July 1950 and who, without a break in pensionable employment, have subsequently had their accrued pension benefits transferred to the Civil Service pension scheme may therefore count their war service for Civil Service pension purposes to the extent that it would have reckoned had they remained subject to their former pension scheme. There are no plans to extend the war service concession further.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Ottaway asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much value added tax receipts have risen in the period 1 October 1986 to 31 January 1987; what was the comparable rise in the same period of 1985-86; and how much of the increase is attributable to penalties for the late payment of value added tax.

Mr. Brooke: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what has been the total revenue from value added tax on fuel sales in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available; and what was the percentage change in such revenues on the preceding year in each case;

(2) what has been the total revenue from value added tax on vehicle service and repair in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available; and what was the percentage change in such revenues on the preceding year in each case;

(3) what has been the total revenue from value added tax upon motor vehicle sales in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available; and what was the percentage change in such revenues on the preceding year in each case.

Mr. Brooke: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Excise Duties

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the total revenue from fuel excise

duties in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available; and what was the percentage change in such revenues on the preceding year in each case.

Mr. Brooke: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Tax Revenue

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the total revenue from the taxation of cars or benefits in kind in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available; and what was the percentage change in such revenues on the preceding year in each case.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what has been the total revenue from car tax in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available; and what was the percentage change in such revenues on the preceding year in each case;

(2) what has been the total revenue from all motoring taxes in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available; and what was the percentage change in such revenues on the preceding year in each case.

Mr. Brooke: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

DEFENCE

RAF Range, Tain

8. **Mr. Kennedy** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what prior notification was given to local residents of the controlled detonation of an unexploded practice round at the Royal Air Force range, Tain, on 18 December 1986.

Mr. Freeman: Under the procedures that apply at Tain, notice is given to the local police of such occurrences usually about 24 hours ahead. In this case notification was given to them by telephone on 16 December that a controlled detonation would take place on 18 December. On that day the range authorities reminded the local police of the planned detonation shortly before it was subsequently undertaken.

Maritime Strategy

9. **Mr. Randall** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what consultations he has had with North Atlantic Treaty Organisation allies concerning maritime strategy.

10. **Mr. Sean Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether there have been any recent changes in the role of the Royal Navy in the Atlantic.

Mr. Stanley: My right hon. Friend regularly discusses a wide range of strategy issues with his NATO counterparts, including the maritime component.

There have been no recent changes in the basic maritime strategy of either NATO or the Royal Navy.

HMS Hermes (Replacement)

18. **Mr. Nicholas Brown** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what provision he has made to fill the aviation support ship role formerly carried out by HMS Hermes.

Mr. Stanley: Plans have been made to provide a limited helicopter lift capability in support of amphibious operations from within existing assets. We shall be addressing the means of providing helicopter lift in support of amphibious operations over the next few months.

Dangerous Military Cargoes

19. **Mr. Janner** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received regarding procedures for transporting nuclear weapons following the recent road accident on Salisbury Plain.

Mr. Stanley: I assume the hon. and learned Member is referring to the accident involving a military convoy that occurred on 10 January near West Dean in Wiltshire. My Department as of 20 February had received 51 letters from right hon. and hon. Members and members of the public regarding that accident. In accordance with the practice of successive Governments, I can neither confirm nor deny the presence of nuclear weapons, nor comment on their method of transportation.

Mr. Hoyle asked the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his reply on 10 February, *Official Report*, column *184*, if those in charge of the arrangements for the transportation of dangerous military cargoes are informed of the number and type of 50-tonne road mobile cranes that are available for hire close to the routes of military convoys carrying dangerous cargoes; and what assessment has been made of the availability for hire by his Department of 50-tonne road mobile cranes throughout the United Kingdom and at any time.

Mr. Stanley: The drivers of all military vehicles carry instructions advising them which Service unit to contact if recovery assistance is required in the event of a breakdown. Service units maintain information on the recovery facilities available for hire, when required, from local commercial sources. No detailed assessment has been made of 50-tonne road mobile cranes as these are readily available for hire.

Surveillance Satellites

21. **Mr. David Atkinson** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the United Kingdom's current capability to launch surveillance satellites.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The United Kingdom does not have a satellite launch capability of its own.

Trident

22. **Mr. Hirst** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is his latest estimate of the value of contracts which have been, or will be, placed with United Kingdom contractors under the Trident programme.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence announced to the House on 27 January, 62 per cent. of the total of the latest Trident project estimate will be spent in the United Kingdom. This amounts to more than £5,700 million.

37. **Mr. Michael Brown** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received following his announcement of the revised cost of the Trident programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: One written representation has been received.

48. **Mr. Stevens** asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the Trident fleet to be fully operational.

Mr. Stanley: The United Kingdom Trident force will be introduced progressively from the mid-1990s. For reasons of security, it is not our normal practice to publish detailed in-service dates.

65. **Mr. Cohen** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will declassify information on the number of warheads to be carried in Trident submarines.

Mr. Stanley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) on 20 February.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he used *(a)* the gross domestic product deflator and *(b)* a special defence price index to convert Trident spending into 1986-87 prices.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Allowances for pay and prices in the Trident estimate are calculated by using indices for the appropriate defence industrial sectors. The GDP deflator is not, therefore, used.

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for Defence what undertakings he has received from the United States Administration with regard to the United Kingdom's use of Trident in circumstances where the United States President has not authorised the firing of United States nuclear weapons; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Younger: The Trident D5 missile system is being made available to the United Kingdom under the terms and undertakings contained in the United States/United Kingdom Polaris sales agreement of 6 April 1963 (Cmnd 1995), which has been extended for this purpose. This envisages, in accordance with the Defence 1962 Nassau "Statement on Nuclear Defence Systems" that the British strategic nuclear deterrent will be used for the international defence of the Western Alliance in all circumstances except where the British Government may decide that supreme national interests are at stake. In all circumstances, decisions on the operational use of the British deterrent rest solely with the British Government.

Mr. Nellist asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many copies of the document "Trident and the Alternatives" have been produced; and what are the channels of distribution.

Mr. Stanley: To date, 1,000 copies of Defence Open Government Document No. 87/01 "Trident and the Alternatives" have been produced. Copies have been placed in the Library of both Houses and in the Vote Office, and are available on request either to my Department or to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Army Resources (Equestrian Duty Time)

23. **Mr. Marlow** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the degree and circumstances of use of Army resources including personnel property and officers in connection with equestrian duty time activity excluding the Household Cavalry.

Mr. Freeman: In addition to the Household Cavalry, the following corps and units hold Army horses:

Unit	*Number of horses*	*Nature of duties*
a. RAVC Training Centre	Averages 150 which includes some 45 from other units for treatment, rest or further training.	(i) Reprovision of horses (ii) Training remounts. (iii) Advanced military equitation training. (iv) Farrier training. (vi) Treatment and rest of horses.
b. The Kings Troop Royal Horse Artillery	111	Ceremonial.
c. Royal Military Police Provost Companies	26	Police duties including range patrol and ceremonial duties.
d. London District Staff	19	Ceremonial.
e. Defence Animal Support Unit BAOR	5	Range Patrols.
f. Royal Military Academy Sandhurst	2	Ceremonial.

Some 280 personnel are involved in duties connected with these horses.

Contracts (Cancellation Charges)

24. **Mr. Cohen** asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many of his Department's contracts are subject to cancellation charges.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A clause is included in all major contracts which enables the Ministry to determine these contracts prematurely. The clause provides for the payment of fair and reasonable costs incurred by the contractors in the event of determination.

ABM Treaty

25. **Mr. O'Neill** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with the United States Administration on the terms of the treaty with the Soviet Union on anti-ballistic missile defences.

Mr. Stanley: My right hon. Friend discussed a variety of arms control issues including the ABM treaty during his talks with Mr. Weinberger and other members of the United States Administration last week.

Strategic Defence Initiative

26. **Mr. Clelland** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what are the implications for British defence policy of any United States decision to proceed with early deployment of strategic defence systems.

Mr. Stanley: The SDI is a research programme designed to investigate the feasibility of strategic defences. It is not possible to speculate at this stage of the research on the form any deployment might take or on its implications for British defence policy. The United States

Administration have made it clear that no decisions on deployment, let alone on any particular system, have been taken.

45. **Mr. Alton** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what recent consultations he has had with members of the United States Administration about the deployment of weapons systems as part of the strategic defence initiative.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given earlier today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence to the hon. Member for Corby (Mr. Powell).

Frigate Orders

27. **Mr. Stott** asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he plans to announce further frigate orders.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Decisions on further frigate orders will be taken when appropriate.

Western European Union

28. **Mr. Wainwright** asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he next plans to attend a meeting of the Western European Union.

Mr. Stanley: Because of other commitments my right hon. Friend regrets that he is unable to attend the next ministerial meeting of the Western European Union, scheduled for 27 and 28 April in Luxembourg. He has asked me to represent him.

Tornado Programme

29. **Mr. Hickmet** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress of the Tornado programme.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Deliveries of Tornado aircraft are proceeding satisfactorily according to the approved schedule.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he intends to meet the Japanese Defence Minister to discuss the possibility of Tornado sales.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I have no plans to meet the Japanese Defence Minister.

Nuclear Missiles

30. **Mr. Forth** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received on the cost of ordering the Tomahawk sea-launched cruise missiles for the Royal Navy following the publication of the document "Trident and the Alternatives"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stanley: My Department has received no representations specifically on this matter since the publication of Defence Open Government Document No. 87/01 "Trident and the Alternatives" on 30 January. As I said in the debate on the Royal Navy on 2 February at column 708, a United Kingdom minimum deterrent based on either sea-launched or air-launched cruise missiles would be likely to be about double the cost of Trident.

39. **Mr. Greg Knight** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received about nuclear missiles following publication of his open Government document, "Trident and the Alternatives".

Mr. Stanley: No such representations relating directly to the publication of Defence Open Government Document No. 87/01 "Trident and the Alternatives" on 30 January have been received to date.

41. **Mr. Sumberg** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received in favour of purchasing sea-launched Tomahawk cruise missiles for the Royal Navy, following the publication of "Trident and the Alternatives"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stanley: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth) earlier today.

44. **Mr. Neale** asked the Secretary of State for Defence, in response to the document "Trident and the Alternatives" if he has received any representations on the merits of the French M5 nuclear missile; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stanley: My Department has received no representations specifically on this matter since the publication of Defence Open Government Document No. 87/01 "Trident and the Alternatives" on 30 January. As I said in the debate on the Royal Navy on 2 February at column 708, a switch to a French ballistic system has all the potential to cost the United Kingdom considerably more than the procurement of Trident D5.

Soviet Union Defence Minister

31. **Mr. Flannery** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any plans to seek to meet the Defence Minister of the Soviet Union.

Mr. Younger: No.

Helicopters

32. **Mr. Stan Thorne** asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he will be ordering new support helicopters for the Royal Air Force.

55. **Mr. Gerald Howarth** asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to announce his decision regarding the acquisition of support helicopters.

Mr. Younger: I refer the hon. Members to the answer that I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown).

68. **Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to safeguard the helicopter industrial base and, in particular Westland plc, through his future ordering programme.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Government addressed the defence implications of the future of Westland plc last year (Cmnd. 9916) in their response to the third and fourth reports of the House of Commons Defence Committee. As we said in the response, the pursuit of value for money in defence procurement takes full account of the longer term considerations which bear on the continued existence of companies or capabilities within the defence industrial base.

With regard to the future ordering programme for helicopters, I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given earlier today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence to the hon. Member for Yeovil.

69. **Mr. Wilkinson** asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has considered the project definition

study of the proposed NH90 collaborative helicopter; and whether he can now make a statement of his Department's intentions on funding British industrial participation in this aircraft.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Our studies are virtually complete and a decision will be announced shortly.

Anti-Submarine Warfare Capability

33. **Mr. Carter-Jones** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will outline the measures his Department is taking to improve anti-submarine warfare capability.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Anti-submarine warfare (ASW) is an area of crucial strategic importance and because of the increasing capability of the Soviet submarine fleet, we place particular emphasis on our ASW capability. We have four of the new type 23 frigates, which are optimised for ASW, on order. We plan to increase the proportion of nuclear-powered hunter-killer submarines in our fleet and introduce the new powerful and quiet Upholder class of conventional submarine. The collaborative Anglo-Italian EH101 programme to develop a new ASW helicopter is proceeding; an initial order of 50 aircraft is envisaged. In addition we maintain continuing programmes of research and development and of enhancements to and new purchases of ASW weapons and sensors. For example, initial production of the new Spearfish heavyweight torpedo is under way, an improvement programme for the Tigerfish heavyweight torpedo is nearing completion and last year we placed a large order for the lightweight Stingray torpedo.

Royal Dockyards

34. **Mr. Douglas** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a further statement regarding the preferred contractors for the royal dockyards.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the statement made today by my right hon. Friend about the contract with Devonport Management Limited in respect of Devonport dockyard and to my right hon. Friend's similar statement on 27 January at column 183 authorising a contract to be signed with Babcock Thorn Limited for the future operation of Rosyth dockyard.

Nuclear Capability

35. **Mr. Yeo** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what recent representations he has received regarding the adequacy of Britain's nuclear capability.

Mr. Stanley: Since the beginning of 1987 my Department has received about 30 written representations relating to the adequacy of Britain's nuclear capability.

Nimrod

36. **Mr. Warren** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement as to the progress of his review of the failures of management in his Department during the Nimrod advanced early warning programme.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The study of the adequacy of the arrangements for the scientific and technical specification and monitoring of major projects, which was set up against the background of our experience with Nimrod AEW, is now under way and is expected to report by the middle of the year.

Departmental Land and Property

38. **Mr. Galley** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to improve the management of his Department's land and property.

Mr. Freeman: The Ministry of Defence is constantly looking for ways to improve the utilisation of its land and property holdings. These are of course held in support of the operational, training and support needs of the Services and are managed on a single-Service basis. However, following a number of studies which recognised a need to maximise utilisation through joint usage, and which took advice from the private sector, a number of opportunities for tri-Service occupation of sites were identified which would enable the disposal of other properties. To oversee all the necessary work to achieve these savings, and to apply regular reviews of matters related to the overall management of the defence estate, a defence estate steering group was established in 1985.

Mr. Chapman asked the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has on the end use to which land disposed of by his Department has been put in the last five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: No records are maintained on the use of land which has passed out of MOD ownership.

Air Defences

40. **Mr. Litherland** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he plans to strengthen air defences between now and 1991.

Mr. Stanley: The defence of RAF establishments against possible air attack will benefit from the major programme of improvements in both the quantity and quality of our air defences which is now under way including the programmes for the Tornado air defence variant, the Boeing E-3A and improved UKADGE. In addition, specific measures are being taken to ensure survivability and the continuance of air operations, for example by hardening aircraft shelters and other key facilities and by extending our airfield damage repair capabilities.

Defence Equipment (Orders)

42. **Mr. Dykes** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he is satisfied that British defence equipment companies are receiving full and fair opportunities for securing orders for new equipment from both the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation procurement authorities direct and the member states' procurement agencies.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I can confirm that United Kingdom defence equipment companies receive full and fair opportunities for securing orders from NATO procurement agencies. Opportunities for securing orders from NATO member Governments are governed by each nation's procedures and legislation.

United States Secretary of Defence

43. **Mr. William Powell** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any plans to meet the United States Secretary of Defence to discuss nuclear defence policy; and if he will make a statement.

61. **Mr. Cartwright** asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he next plans to meet the United States Secretary of Defence to discuss progress on the strategic defence initiative.

Mr. Younger: I discussed a wide variety of issues of mutual interest during my talks with Mr. Weinberger and other members of the United States Administration in Washington last week. I have no immediate plans for any further discussions.

Cruise Missiles

46. **Mr. Boyes** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the schedule for arrival of the first cruise missiles at Molesworth.

Mr. Stanley: I have nothing to add to the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South on 15 April 1986 at column 375.

66. **Mr. Spencer** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what United Kingdom capacity exists for the manufacture of Tomahawk sea-launch cruise missiles; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is, no doubt, within the capability of British industry to manufacture Tomahawk cruise missiles under licence, but no production facility currently exists.

Exports

47. **Mr. Nicholls** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what was the value of British defence exports in 1986.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The detailed figures are not yet available, but it is already clear that 1986 was a very successful year for our firms active in this field.

Bramley Camp, Basingstoke

49. **Mr. Hunter** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a further statement about the future of Bramley camp, near Basingstoke.

Mr. Freeman: I regret that the review of possible further defence use of Bramley camp is taking longer than I had expected, and at this stage I can add nothing to the answer that I gave to my hon. Friend on 9 December *(Official Report,* c. *142)*. I will write to him when the review has been completed.

Polaris

50. **Mr. Maclean** asked the Secretary of State for Defence when the Polaris missile system will be obsolete; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stanley: To ensure the continued effectiveness and reliability of the United Kingdom's strategic deterrent it is necessary to commence replacing it in the mid-1990s.

YTS

51. **Mr. Patrick Thompson** asked the Secretary of State for Defence, if he has any plans to increase the number of YTS trainees taken on by the armed services during the next six months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The Armed Services YTS was expanded on 1 January 1987 to offer one or two year engagements in line with the Manpower Services Commission YTS. Intakes within that total are dependent upon applicants successfully meeting MSC YTS eligibility criteria and normal Service recruitment standards. Places are awarded on merit. In 1986-87 there are some 2,000 places available and vacancies still exist.

French Defence Minister

52. **Mr. Couchman** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any plans to meet the French Defence Minister to discuss nuclear defence policy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Younger: I shall be meeting my French colleague in Paris next month when I expect to discuss with him a wide variety of defence issues of mutual interest.

Pegasus 11-61

53. **Mr. Hayward** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made in negotiations with the United States Government to develop the uprated Pegasus engine, the 11-61.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We have carried out a technical evaluation of the proposed Pegasus 11-61 engine in conjunction with the United States Marine Corps. Rolls-Royce plc is now engaging in separate commercial discussions with the United States authorities and with the Ministry of Defence.

For our part, we expect to receive a formal proposal from Rolls-Royce shortly. Although there is at present no United Kingdom requirement for an uprated Pegasus, the 11-61 offers the prospect of operating costs lower than those of the current Pegasus engine. This will be taken into account in our life cycle evaluation of the proposals.

Committee of Public Accounts (Projects)

54. **Mrs. Clwyd** asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has any plans to seek to revise the terms of the major project statement in relation to the Committee of Public Accounts.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The terms of the major project statement reflect successive requests from the Committee of Public Accounts.

In 1986 the Committee agreed to my Department's suggestion that the threshold for inclusion of projects be raised. Other changes may be agreed between the Committee and my Department from time to time.

63. **Mr. Campbell-Savours** asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many defence projects of over £250 million have been communicated to the Committee of Public Accounts since 1983.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Forty-eight projects, including nuclear projects, with approved expenditure in excess of £250 million and two projects with approved expenditure

between £200 million and £250 million have appeared at various times in the major project statements submitted annually to the Public Accounts Committee since 1982. The figures are the same if 1983 is taken as the starting point. Tornado GR1 and F2 are treated as a single project in this calculation.

Royal Ordnance Factories

56. **Mr. McWilliam** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he has taken to satisfy himself that the conditions of service of employees of the royal ordnance factories have been adequately protected following the transfer of Royal Ordnance plc to the private sector.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) on 26 January 1987 at column *132*. Employees of Royal Ordnance plc will have the normal protection provided by the law in maintaining their terms and conditions of service.

AWACS (Contracts)

57. **Mr. Fry** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list any offers to quote for American defence contracts which have been made since and in connection with the decision to purchase the airborne warning and control system.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The bidding opportunities being made available by Boeing and its sub-contractors to meet their commitments in relation to the selection of the AWACS system for the RAF, and the responses by British companies, are a purely commercial matter. We are, however, closely monitoring contracts placed under the offset arrangements.

NATO (Missile Systems)

58. **Mr. Soley** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what recent consultations he has had with North Atlantic Treaty Organisation allies concerning the anti-ballistic missile systems.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given earlier today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence to the hon. Member for Corby (Mr. Powell).

European Fighter Aircraft

59. **Dr. Marek** asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether discussions on the European fighter aircraft have yet covered the question of the cancellation charges which might arise once construction commences.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The contract negotiation currently taking place with the two prime contractors will include discussion of the terms of cancellation subsequent to contract signature.

Force Level, Europe

60. **Mr. Andy Stewart** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any plans to meet the Soviet Defence Minister to discuss force levels in Europe; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Younger: No, but contacts between representatives of NATO and Warsaw Pact countries on a mandate for negotiations aimed at establishing conventional stability in Europe from the Atlantic to Urals at lower levels began this month.

Porton Down (AIDS)

62. **Mr. James Lamond** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if any use is proposed to be made of facilities at Porton Down for research to combat AIDS; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My Department's chemical defence establishment at Porton Down is not involved in work of this nature, but I understand that the centre for applied microbiological research, which is part of the DHSS's public health laboratory service and is situated at Porton Down, is engaged in research to combat AIDS.

Modular Stand-Off Weapon

64. **Mr. Duffy** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he is satisfied with progress achieved on the modular stand-off weapon collaborative programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Negotiations are proceeding satisfactorily between the governments of the United Kingdom, United States, France, Germany, Italy, Spain and Canada. It is hoped that this major programme will lead to significant economies in the use of NATO resources. It is the intention to sign a memorandum of understanding in the first half of 1987.

Royal Military School of Music, Kneller Hall

67. **Mr. Jessel** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he is now able to make a statement on the future of the Royal Military School of Music, Kneller Hall.

Mr. Freeman: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence expects to announce a decision soon.

Defence Procurement (Co-operation)

Mr. Stephen Ross asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on European co-operation on defence procurement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Good progress is being made in promoting wider and more systematic European co-operation in defence procurement, the primary forum for which is the Independent European Programme Group. Over the past two years the IEPG has been revitalised and is now establishing a considerable record of achievement. Eleven harmonised operational staff targets have been produced and discussions are under way aimed at establishing joint projects to meet them. Efforts are also being made to promote greater collaboration on defence-related research. Regular meetings at ministerial level are now held and my right hon. Friend looks forward to meeting his IEPG colleagues again in June. Outside the IEPG, regular discussions are held at all levels with our major European collaborative partners.

Defence Capability (Costs)

Mr. Stern asked the Secretary of State for Defence what would be the cost of increasing the United Kingdom's defence capability in all areas, except nuclear defence, by 10 per cent.

Mr. Stanley: The cost of increasing defence expenditure on conventional forces by 10 per cent. would be about £1·8 billion per annum based on current year estimates. The increase in capability which such a sum might buy would depend on how the money were to be spent.

Research Expenditure

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish information on central Government expenditure on defence research for all years since 1978-79 inclusive, by standard United Kingdom region giving the absolute, indexed and per capita form of the following disaggregated costs: (i) capital account costs and (ii) current account costs.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Research and development expenditure is not at present separately identified by region. I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 16 February to the hon. Member for Merionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Thomas).

Fishing Vessel (Submarine Incident)

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Defence what action was taken to rescue the fishing boat Summer Morn, from Portavogie, entrapped by a submarine in the Irish sea on Wednesday 18 February; whether his Department was in contact with the submarine; from which country the submarine originated; and what information he has as to what arrangements exist for compensation to be paid to the skipper for the loss of his fishing nets.

Mr. Stanley: RN and RAF search and rescue Helicopters went to the scene of the incident and remained there until their presence was no longer required. It is not our practice to comment on specific aspects of submarine communications. The United States navy has said that one of its submarines was involved in the incident, and that anyone who feels that they may have experienced damages or losses as a result of this incident may submit an Admiralty claim to the US Navy in London.

Pilots

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any plans to allow women to train as pilots in the armed services.

Mr. Freeman: We have no plans at present to do so.

Nuclear Weapon Programmes (Jobs)

Mr. Favell asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make an estimate of the number of jobs in the north-west dependent upon United Kingdom nuclear weapon programmes.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Estimates of the number of jobs dependent upon MOD expenditure are not made on a regional basis. It is estimated that the Trident programme will create an average 7,500 direct and 6,000 indirect jobs throughout its procurement period in the United Kingdom as a whole. About 11,000 MOD civilians are directly employed in maintaining the present nuclear deterrent.

US Bases

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) whether the existing understanding between the United Kingdom and the United States of America governing the use by the United States of its bases in the United Kingdom in an emergency applies equally to United States forces under national command and United States forces under North Atlantic Treaty Organisation command;

(2) whether the existing understanding between the United Kingdom and the United States of America governing the use by the United States of its bases in the United Kingdom in an emergency applies equally to conventional and nuclear weapons;

(3) whether the arrangements for implementing the existing understanding between the United Kingdom and the United States of America governing the use by the United States of its bases in the United Kingdom in an emergency are the same for conventional as for nuclear weapons.

Mr. Stanley [*pursuant to his reply*, 23 February 1987]: The Churchill/Truman understanding of 1952 reaffirmed that the use of these bases in an emergency would be a matter for joint decision by Her Majesty's Government and the United States Government in the light of the circumstances prevailing at the time. Appropriate arrangements exist to cover both conventional and nuclear United States forces, whether under national or NATO command. These arrangements are classified.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Cervical Screening

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he intends to review the five-year recall rota for cervical cancer tests.

Mrs. Currie: Our guidance to health authorities on the recommended interval between cervical smears is currently under review. The outcome of that review will be announced shortly.

Health Authorities (Chairmen)

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to appoint a new chairman for the North Lincolnshire health authority; and if he will consult staff and local authorities in the area before doing so.

Mrs. Currie: My right hon. Friend is not required to consult anyone before making the appointment of a health authority chairman. He does, however, take account of any names that may be put forward from various sources. An announcement will be made about the chairmanship of North Lincolnshire health authority in due course.

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to appoint a new chairman for the Humberside health authority; and if he will consult staff and local authorities in the area before doing so.

Mrs. Currie: The chairman of Humberside family practitioner committee resigned recently for personal reasons but has agreed to carry on until his successor is appointed. It is too early to say when that will be.

My right hon. Friend is not required to consult anyone in making the appointment but will take account of recommendations from various sources including any received from hon. and right hon. Members.

Medical Practitioners (Fees)

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how much has been paid to medical practitioners for services in examining claimants for *(a)* mobility allowance and *(b)* attendance allowance in each of the past 15 years, comparable at 1985 prices.

Mr. Major: The available information is in the table. Comparable information is not available for earlier years. All figures are at 1985 prices.

Total paid in respect of claims to:

	(a) Mobility allowance £	*(b)* Attendance allowance £
1981-82	2,519,415	5,369,717
1982-83	2,964,121	7,194,835
1983-84	3,547,567	7,709,134
1984-85	4,770,862	8,701,248
1985-86	4,459,386	9,391,078

Departmental Staff

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many civil servants have been employed directly to handle claims for *(a)* mobility allowance and *(b)* attendance allowance in each year set out 1974, 1979, 1983, 1984, 1985 and 1986.

Mr. Major: The numbers of civil servants employed directly to handle claims for the two allowances mentioned are as shown in the table.

	Mobility Allowance	*Attendance Allowance*
1974	—	220
1979	155	321
1983	302	469
1984	361	555
1985	420	597
1986	494	617

Notes:
(i) Mobility Allowance was introduced in 1986.
(ii) All dates are 1 April.
(iii) Most of the staff are located at North Fyled Central Office but the figures in the table include for local and regional offices an estimate of the number of full-time equivalents for staff whose duties extend beyond these two benefits.

Benefits

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how many people in *(a)* Burnley constituency area and *(b)* Pendle constituency area have been in receipt of unemployment benefit for (i) less than six months, (ii) six months to one year, (iii) one to two years and (iv) over two years at the latest date for which figures are available;

(2) how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women (i) in the Burnley constituency and (ii) in the Pendle constituency have been in receipt of unemployment benefit for each of the last five years aged *(a)* under 25 years, *(b)* 25 to 35 years, *(c)* 35 to 50 years and *(d)* over 50 years, respectively.

Mr. Lyell: I regret that the information requested is not available.

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many new claims for supplementary benefit were registered in the local offices in Brighton and Leicester, respectively, for each year since 1979 by claimants under the age of 25 years.

Mr. Lyell: I regret that the information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mrs. Beckett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many claimants were disqualified for unemployment benefit or had their supplementary benefit entitlement reduced under section 20(1) of the Social Security Act 1975 or regulation 8 of the Supplementary Benefit (Requirements) Regulations in each month since January 1979; and what change has occurred in the proportion of cases in which the maximum period of disqualification or reduction is imposed since it was increased from six to 13 weeks.

Mr. Major: The information is not available in the form requested.

The numbers of people subject to disqualification of unemployment benefit under Section 20(1) of the Social Security Act 1975 are shown in the table which gives a quarterly breakdown. The figures differ from those given by my predecessor in his reply to the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) on 1 May 1986 at columns *471-72* because they take account of decisions made following a review carried out by the adjudication officer.

	March	*June*	*September*	*December*
1979	129,519	128,489	142,464	138,072
1980	133,421	126,306	123,301	104,424
1981	88,428	86,901	87,268	85,802
1982	82,467	84,158	93,240	89,708
1983	83,711	83,142	93,475	93,859
1985	94,827	95,935	108,652	102,948
1986	96,499	102,084	111,858	n/a

Notes:
1. The figures for 1984 are not available.
2. The figures for December 1986 are not yet available.

The number of people subject to a voluntary unemployment deduction under regulation 8 of the Supplementary Benefit (Requirements) Regulations 1983 are shown in the following table the information being available only on an annual basis:

	Number
1979	364,000
1980	260,000
1981	195,000
1982	182,000
1983	299,000
1984	299,000

Notes:
1. Figures for 1985 and 1986 are not available.
2. The figures have been estimated from information in the Annual Statistical Enquiry, on the assumption that deductions apply for, on average, four weeks.
3. The figures include deductions made pending a final decision and it is estimated that 40 per cent. would be refunded when a decision went in the claimant's favour.
4. The figures in the two tables overlap where supplementary benefit is paid to people who are disqualified for receiving unemployment benefit.

Information is not yet available following the change to increase the maximum period of the penalties under section 43 of the Social Security Act 1986 which came into effect from 5 October 1986.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the average waiting period for the processing of new supplementary benefit claims by his Department's Brighton offices; and if he will provide details of waiting times for each year since 1979 on a quarterly basis.

Mr. Lyell [*pursuant to his reply*, 11 February 1987, c. *270*.]: The information is not available in the precise form requested. Figures are not available for the period before 1983, nor are they collected on a quarterly basis.

The average time taken by Brighton local office to deal with a claim for supplementary benefit from 1983-84 to date is as follows:

Year (ending April)	*Working days*
1984	4
1985	8
1986	8
1987[1]	8

[1] Period up to 10 February

Rent Arrears

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has as to the amount and proportion of total rent arrears recorded for each authority in England and Wales attributable to delayed payments from his Department.

Mr. Lyell: I regret that the information requested is not available, but I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing, Urban Affairs and Construction to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Heddle) on 10 December at columns *188-189*.

Occupational Pensions Board

Sir Fergus Montgomery asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he proposes to appoint a new chairman of the Occupational Pensions Board.

Mr. Fowler: I have appointed Mr. Jeremy Rowe CBE as Chairman of the Board from 6 April 1987, in succession to Mr. Ronald Abbott CBE, whose term of office ends on 5 April.

Mr. Rowe is Deputy Chairman of the Abbey National building society and Chairman of Peterborough development corporation. He also chaired the housing benefit review team which I set up as part of the social security review in 1984. His wide experience in both public and private sectors will enable him to bring a broad perspective to the job of chairman of the Occupational Pensions Board, reflecting the Board's wider responsibilities with the advent of our personal and occupational pension reforms.

I wish to pay tribute to the valuable service of Mr. Abbott as Chairman of the Board since July 1982 and, before that, as Deputy Chairman since its foundation. Under his leadership the board has been notably successful and authoritative in discharging their duties, and many of our pension reforms reflect their expert advice.

Mr. Abbott has received most valuable support from Mr. Eric Rogers as deputy chairman of the board; and I am delighted that Mr. Rogers has agreed to accept re-appointment for two years from 6 April.

Maternity Payments

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in Leicester and in Brighton received maternity allowance in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: Information is not available in the form requested. But in the 12 months ending April 1986, the latest year for which figures are available, the following numbers of claims to maternity allowance were made at the Department's offices which cover Leicester and Brighton respectively, although the boundaries are not conterminous:

	Number
Leicester (Burleys Way)	1,238
Leicester (Lower Hill Street)	1,558
Leicester (Norton Street)	1,781
Leicester (Yeoman Street)	2,211
Brighton	1,727

Mr. Frank Cook asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in Stockton on Tees claimed the maternity grant in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: Information is not available in the form requested. But in the 12 months ending 31 December 1986, 2,576 claims to maternity grant were made at Stockton and 2,472 claims at Middlesbrough, the Department's offices which cover the Stockton on Tees constituencies, although the boundaries are not conterminous.

Mr. Frank Cook asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in Stockton on Tees received maternity allowance in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: Information is not available in the form requested. But in the 12 months ending April 1986, the latest year for which figures are available, 1,897 claims to maternity allowance were made at Stockton and 1,299 claims at Middlesbrough, the Department's offices which cover Stockton on Tees, although the boundaries are not conterminous.

Mr. Gould asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in Dagenham claimed the maternity grant in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: Information on the number of claimants to maternity grant is not available in the precise form requested.

The Dagenham constituency is covered by the Department's offices at Barking and Ilford, although their boundaries are not conterminous with the constituency. The numbers of claims received for maternity grant is each of the two local offices during the calendar year 1986 were as follows:

	Number
Barking	1,508
Ilford	3,103

In addition, 412 claims for maternity grant were made at the Dagenham local office, which covered part of the constituency, before it closed on 14 August 1986 when the work was transferred to Barking.

Mr. Gould asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in Dagenham received maternity allowance in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: Information is not available in the form requested. But in the 12 months ending April 1986, the latest year for which figures are available, 1,395 claims to maternity allowance were made at the Department's Barking and Dagenham offices and 2,140 claims at Ilford, the offices which cover the constituency, although the boundaries are not conterminous.

Mr. Terry Lewis asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in Worsley constituency received maternity allowance in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: Information is not available in the form requested. But in the 12 months ending April 1986, the latest year for which figures are available, 906 claims to maternity allowance were made at Farnworth, 1,040 claims at Leigh and 676 claims at Salford, South, the Department's offices which cover the constituency, although the boundaries are not conterminous.

Mr. Terry Lewis asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in Bury, North constituency received maternity allowance in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: Information is not available in the form requested. But in the 12 months ending April 1986, the latest year for which figures are available, 1,622 claims to maternity allowance were made at Bury, the Department's office which covers the constituency, although the boundaries are not conterminous.

Mr. Terry Lewis asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in Bolton, North-East constituency received maternity allowance in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: Information is not available in the form requested. But in the 12 months ending April 1986, the latest year for which figures are available, 2,037 claims to maternity allowance were made at Bolton, the Department's office which covers the constituency, although the boundaries are not conterminous.

Mr. Terry Lewis asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in Worsley constituency claimed the maternity grant in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: Information on the number of claimants to maternity grant is not available in the precise form requested.

The Worsley constituency is covered by the Department's local offices at Farnworth, Leigh and Salford South, although their boundaries are not conterminous with the constituency. The numbers of claims for maternity grant received at the three local offices during the 1986 calendar year were as follows:

	Number
Farnworth	1,239
Leigh	1,462
Salford South	1,066

Mr. Terry Lewis asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in Bolton, North-East constituency claimed the maternity grant in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: Information on the number of claimants to maternity grant is not available in the precise form requested.

The Bolton, North-East constituency is covered by the Department's local office at Bolton although its boundaries are not conterminous with the constituency. The number of claims for maternity grant received at the Bolton local office during the 1986 calendar year was 3,457.

Mr. Terry Lewis asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in Bury, North constituency claimed the maternity grant in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: Information on the number of claimants to maternity grant is not available in the precise form requested. The Bury, North constituency is covered by the Department's local office at Bury, although its boundaries are not conterminous with the constituency. The number of claims for maternity grant received at the Bury local office during the 1986 calendar year was 3,982.

Family Income Supplement

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many families in Brighton and Leicester, respectively, currently receive family income supplement; what is the average weekly sum received by each family; and how many of these families are entitled to free school meals as a result.

Mr. Lyell: I regret this information is not available. Family income supplement claims are dealt with centrally by our office in Blackpool and no information is maintained about claims from particular local areas.

Family Credit

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what estimate he has made of the number of families in Brighton and Leicester, respectively, who will be entitled to receive family credit; and how many of them will be entitled to continue receiving free school meals.

Mr. Lyell: I regret that it is not possible to make an estimate on such a localised basis. Overall, family credit is expected to reach about double the number of families now helped by family income supplement. Families receiving family credit will not be entitled to free school meals, but the rates will be set at a higher level so as to give extra cash help instead.

Single Payments (Appeals)

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many appeals against decisions relating to single payments for those on supplementary benefit are currently being dealt with by the three local offices serving the Birmingham, Perry Barr constituency, namely: Soho road, Walsall road and Kingsbury road; and how these figures compare with the numbers one year ago.

Mr. Lyell: National administrative statistics for social services appeals are not disaggregated below regional level

and so figures for the individual Birmingham offices are not available. The latest available statistics are for single payment appeals lodged in the DHSS midlands region in the quarter ending 31 March 1986 when the total number of supplementary benefit single payment appeals awaiting a decision was 5,534. The equivalent figure for the quarter ending 31 March 1985 was 6,935.

Hospital Beds

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many *(a)* occupied and *(b)* unoccupied hospital beds there are in each of the regions of Great Britain.

Mrs. Currie: The requested information is given in the table for regional health authorities in England. A variety of reasons may lead to some beds being unoccupied. These include the need to have beds available for emergencies, unexpectedly early discharges which leave a bed available until the next day and unpredictable admissions (for example, in maternity cases).

The health services information steering group recommended in its first report that bed use data should include all patients using a ward in a 24-hour period and that aggregated bed occupancy statistics should not be used as an indicator of efficient bed use. A more useful measure of bed utilisation is patient throughput per available bed. For instance, in 1985 19·5 in-patient cases were treated per available bed compared with 15·00 in 1979.

Statistics for the rest of Great Britain are a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

National Health Service hospitals in England, 1985

Regional/Special Health Authority	*Average daily number of occupied beds*[1]	*Average daily number of available beds not occupied*[1]
Northern	18,900	4,873
Yorkshire	21,061	5,732
Trent	23,075	6,316
East Anglian	9,912	2,622
North West Thames	19,756	4,060
North East Thames	22,734	4,120
South East Thames	19,897	4,400
South West Thames	18,820	3,390
Wessex	14,099	3,555
Oxford	9,984	2,571
South Western	17,605	4,327
West Midlands	26,673	6,435
Mersey	15,465	2,999
North Western	23,630	5,391
Special Health Authorities	2,351	735
England Total	263,962	61,526

[1] Bed occupancy figures are based on a midnight count and do not therefore reflect the use of beds by patients who do not stay overnight.

Births (Sheffield)

Mr. Flannery asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many births were there in Sheffield in the last year for which figures are available.

Mrs. Currie: During 1985, there were 6,162 live births and 31 stillbirths to mothers living in the Sheffield metropolitan district.

McColl Report

Mr. Hannam asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a further statement on any implementation of the recommendations of the McColl report.

Mr. Major: As I said during the debate in the House on 17 February at column 796, I hope to announce decisions on some of the central recommendations of the McColl report very shortly.

Social Security Act 1986

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received from voluntary organisations concerning implementation of the Social Security Act of 1986; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Major: The Social Security Act 1986 was passed by Parliament on 25 July 1986 after 230 hours of debate. The Act was the culmination of two and a half years of intense review and discussion.

Four thousand five hundred organisations and individuals accepted an invitation to comment. Nineteen public sessions were held by Ministers with 62 organisations and individuals contributing.

The Green Paper "Reform of Social Security" (Cmnd. 9518) received over 7,000 responses. Before and after publication of the subsequent White Paper (Cmnd. 9691) in December 1985 proposals were discussed with many welfare and voluntary organisations and representatives of industry (this included the Child Poverty Action Group, Age Concern, the Disablement Income Group, the Equal Opportunity Commission, the Confederation of British Industry and the Trade Union Council).

More recently Ministers have met representatives of the Child Poverty Action Group, National Council for One Parent Families, Age Concern, Youthaid, Cleveland Welfare Rights and the Union Coalition for Social Security to discuss specific issues. Discussions are currently under way with the local authority associations on draft housing benefit regulations; with the Association of County Councils on the Social fund and with major pension interests on changes relating to pensions.

Since the autumn of last year, Ministers have attended outside engagements or held meetings with many interested organisations. Examples of these are the National Council for Voluntary Organisations, the Child Poverty Action Group, the Spastic Society, Age Concern, the Personal Finance Editors Association, the Confederation of British Industry, the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmens and Families Association and the National Association of Pension Funds.

We have received substantial, and diverse representations on the implementation of the legislation. The consultations we have fully entered into reflect the importance of the subject.

Severe Weather Payments

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give *(a)* the daily mean temperature and *(b)* the weekly mean temperature for the 64 Department of Health and Social Security weather stations for the week beginning 15 February.

Mr. Major: The Department receives information from the Meteorological Office for 63 weather stations in respect of fixed seven-day periods beginning each Monday. The information requested for the week commencing Monday 16 February is as follows:

Weather Station	*Monday*	*Tuesday*	*Wednesday*	*Thursday*	*Friday*	*Saturday*	*Sunday*	*Average*
Scotland								
Aberdeen Airport	−0·3	−0·2	1·2	0·5	5·9	5·3	4·2	2·4
Dumfries	0·2	−1·1	1·8	1·3	3·6	1·6	4·9	1·7
Edinburgh Airport	−0·2	0·1	1·7	2·7	4·0	4·7	3·8	2·4
Eskdalemuir (Galashiels)	−1·2	−0·4	0·5	0·4	2·6	0·8	3·7	0·9
Fort William	−2·1	−1·1	1·9	3·0	5·0	4·2	2·4	1·9
Glasgow Airport	−0·2	−1·0	2·0	4·1	4·9	2·3	3·8	2·3
Kinloss (Inverness)	−1·4	1·1	2·6	3·4	5·4	5·3	3·9	2·9
Kirkwall	−0·8	0·2	2·7	4·7	4·8	4·9	2·3	2·7
Lerwick	−1·7	0·1	1·2	3·5	5·3	6·2	−0·8	2·0
Leuchars (Dundee)	−0·1	0·2	1·9	3·1	3·7	5·1	3·6	2·5
Machriphanish (Campbeltown)	−0·5	−0·4	1·7	4·5	4·2	1·5	2·6	1·9
Prestwick (Ayr)	0·5	−1·1	0·7	2·8	3·8	1·1	4·2	1·7
Stornoway	−1·1	1·7	2·7	5·0	4·1	4·7	3·7	3·0
Whithorn	−0·4	−0·3	0·4	2·1	3·3	2·2	4·9	1·7
Wick	−2·2	−0·9	0·8	4·0	4·2	3·8	2·4	1·7
England								
Aughton (Liverpool)	0·8	0·4	0·9	0·2	1·7	1·3	2·6	1·1
Bedford RAE	−0·1	0·9	0·5	−0·5	−0·1	1·7	3·8	0·8
Binbrook (Hull)	0·5	−1·2	−1·7	−1·1	−0·2	2·3	4·2	0·4
Birmingham Airport	−0·4	0·4	0·6	0·5	−0·5	1·5	3·7	0·8
Blackpool Airport	1·0	1·6	1·7	−0·9	1·6	0·7	3·0	1·2
Boscombe Down (Sarum)	−1·0	0·4	0·7	−0·2	−0·4	2·0	3·5	0·7
Boulmer (Berwick)	1·0	0·9	1·2	1·2	2·3	3·1	5·3	2·1
Bournemouth Airport	−0·9	0·3	0·7	1·4	0·6	2·6	4·3	1·3
Bristol	1·6	2·0	2·3	2·1	1·5	2·3	3·8	2·2
Brize Norton (Oxford)	−0·4	1·0	1·2	0·4	0·3	2·1	3·9	1·2
Carlisle	0·0	0·7	1·3	−0·4	2·4	2·0	4·2	1·5
Chivenor (Barnstaple)	0·9	1·3	1·6	0·8	1·2	−0·1	3·6	1·3
Coltishall (Norwich)	1·5	1·6	1·3	1·5	1·1	2·6	4·8	2·0
Coningsby (Boston)	0·9	0·1	−0·1	0·3	0·4	2·7	3·8	1·2
Culdrose (Penzance)	1·8	0·6	1·1	0·7	1·4	2·0	3·1	1·5
East Hampstead	−1·4	0·9	1·1	−1·3	0·0	2·0	3·7	0·7
Eskmeals (Whitehaven)	1·6	0·1	0·0	0·1	2·9	1·0	2·5	1·2
Exeter	0·2	0·5	1·5	0·0	0·7	2·2	3·4	1·2
Finningley (Sheffield)	0·7	1·0	1·8	1·5	0·7	2·2	4·7	1·8
Gatwick Airport (Guildford)	1·1	1·0	1·5	0·6	0·4	2·8	4·1	1·6
Heathrow Airport (London)	1·2	1·7	1·9	0·5	0·8	2·3	4·2	1·8
Herstmonceux (Brighton)	1·5	1·3	1·4	1·2	0·1	2·4	4·4	1·7
Honington (Bury St. Edmunds)	0·5	0·4	0·0	−0·4	−0·9	1·8	4·4	0·8
Leeds Weather Centre	0·3	1·4	2·1	2·7	1·5	2·2	5·1	2·1
Leeming (Newcastle)	−1·0	−0·2	−0·5	−0·7	1·0	2·0	5·0	0·8
Lyneham (Chippenham)	−0·3	−0·1	0·1	−0·7	−0·9	1·1	3·3	0·4
Manchester Airport	0·1	0·8	1·3	−0·4	1·5	3·0	5·0	1·6
Manston (Dover)	2·1	2·4	1·2	1·4	1·2	2·3	4·2	2·1
Marham (Kings Lynn)	0·4	−0·7	−0·4	−0·4	−1·5	2·3	4·2	0·6
Mount Batten (Plymouth)	1·4	1·4	2·0	1·3	1·9	3·8	4·0	2·2
Okehampton	−1·3	−1·8	−0·9	−1·4	−1·7	−0·6	0·9	−1·0
St. Mawgan (Truro)	1·2	1·0	1·4	0·4	1·4	1·5	2·6	1·3
Shawbury (Shrewsbury)	−0·8	0·2	0·6	−0·3	−0·4	−0·6	2·8	0·2
Southampton Weather Centre	1·2	1·6	2·1	1·2	1·0	3·1	4·4	2·1
Stansted	0·4	0·2	0·1	−0·6	−0·3	1·1	3·4	0·6
Tynemouth (Sunderland)	1·3	0·8	2·0	1·5	1·8	2·3	5·3	2·1
Watnall (Derby)	0·3	0·6	1·2	1·6	0·5	1·6	4·1	1·4
Wattisham (Ipswich)	0·8	0·6	−0·2	−0·2	−1·2	1·3	4·0	0·7
Whitby Coastguard	1·3	1·4	2·6	2·0	0·6	1·6	4·7	2·0
Wyton (Cambridge)	0·2	0·6	1·0	−0·7	−0·6	1·5	3·1	0·7
Yeovilton (Yeovil)	−1·3	−0·4	1·3	−0·6	−0·4	2·2	3·8	0·6
Wales								
Aberporth (Aberystwyth)	0·4	2·3	1·8	−0·1	1·0	1·5	3·0	1·4
Brawdy (Pembroke)	1·6	0·8	1·1	0·8	0·3	0·8	2·3	1·1
Cilfyndd (Merthyr Tydfil)	−0·5	−0·1	0·9	0·9	0·8	1·4	2·9	0·9
Mumbles (Swansea)	2·3	1·8	2·3	2·4	2·4	3·1	4·3	2·6
Rhoose (Cardiff)	0·5	0·9	1·7	0·9	0·7	2·2	3·6	1·5
Trawsfynydd (Dolgellau)	−0·6	0·4	0·3	−1·2	−0·2	0·6	1·8	0·1
Valley (Caernarfon)	1·1	1·0	1·3	0·6	2·0	2·6	4·3	1·8

Nurses

Mr. Simon Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Social Services, what is the average pay *(a)* of trainee state enrolled nurses, *(b)* of trainee state registered nurses, and *(c)* of staff nurses, expressed as a percentage of the national average wage, for each year since 1974.

Mr. Newton: Information in the form requested is not available. The basic salary scales for staff in each of the three grades are given in the following table.

In addition, staff in these grades are eligible for additional payments mainly for working overtime and unsocial hours. Present average earnings (excluding London Weighting) of students/pupils and staff nurses are estimated to be about 12 per cent. and 17 per cent. respectively greater than basic pay.

The hon. Member may wish to refer to part A of the "New Earnings Survey" for information on national average gross earnings, copies of which are in the Library.

Settlement Date	*Student Nurse*		*Pupil Nurse*		*Staff Nurse*	
	First Year	*Third Year*	*First Year*	*Second Year*	*Minimum*	*Maximum*
23 May 1974	1,125	1,323	1,125	1,224	1,692	2,202
1 April 1975	1,560	1,740	1,560	1,641	2,121	2,646
1 April 1976[5]	1,872	2,052	1,872	1,953	2,433	2,958
1 April 1977[6]	2,002	2,182	2,002	2,083	2,563	3,106
1 April 1978[7]	2,158	2,356	2,158	2,248	2,775	3,385
1 April 1979	[8]2,452	[8]2,667	[8]2,452	[8]2,550	[9]3,150	[9]3,813
1 August 1979[1]	2,548	2,782	2,548	2,654	3,368	4,107
1 April 1980[2]	3,104	3,390	3,104	3,234	4,198	5,119
1 April 1981	3,290	3,593	3,290	3,428	4,450	5,426
23 August 1982[3]	3,695	4,035	3,695	3,850	4,998	6,094
1 April 1984	3,917	4,277	3,917	4,081	5,398	6,582
1 April 1985	4,100	4,523	4,100	4,275	5,708	6,960
1 February 1986[4]	4,100	4,580	4,100	4,275	6,000	7,175
1 July 1986	4,325	4,875	4,325	4,510	6,475	7,750

Notes

[1] 1st stage Clegg Commission award
[2] Includes 2nd stage Clegg Commission award
[3] Two year agreement
[4] Second stage of 1985/86 award
[5] Includes £312 non-enhanceable flat rate supplement
[6] Includes £312 non-enhanceable flat rate supplement plus increase of 5 per cent. subject to a minimum of £130pa and a maximum of £208pa
[7] Includes £130 non-enhanceable flat rate supplement
[8] Includes £104 non-enhanceable flat rate supplement
[9] Includes £130 non-enhanceable flat rate supplement

Mr. Simon Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish in the *Official Report* figures for the difference between the funded establishment number of nurses, and the number of qualified nurses employed by the National Heath Service *(a)* in England and Wales in total, *(b)* in each regional health authority and *(c)* in each district health authority, for each year since 1974 for which figures are available.

Mr. Newton: I regret that detailed information of this nature is not available centrally. However, I am aware of the results of a survey of a sample of health authorities in England, conducted for the Review Body for Nursing Staff, Midwives and Health Visitors, which showed that at 31 March 1984 and 1985 an average of 2·5 per cent. of wholetime equivalent funded posts for nursing and midwifery staff had remained vacant for over three months.

Mr. Simon Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps he will take to reduce the shortfall of National Health Service nurses below funded establishment numbers in *(a)* Greater London and *(b)* inner London; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: The National Health Service Management Board has commissioned a study into the nursing services in London. The steering group is currently processing the information obtained and is aiming to complete its study and report to the management board by late spring. We will then consider what local or national action may be required to remedy any problems revealed. A number of district health authorities are already taking steps such as the provision of free overnight accommodation, subsidised transport and the provision of crèches.

Mr. Simon Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what plans he has to increase the contribution of private health care organisations to the cost of training nurses.

Mr. Newton: We intend to discuss with repesentatives of the private health care sector the ways in which its contribution to nurse training can be expanded in the light of the Project 2000 proposals of the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing Midwifery and Health Visiting.

Mr. Simon Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement about his plans to reform training for the nursing profession.

Mr. Newton: On 5 February, we received proposals from the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting for the reform of education and training for the nursing profession. These proposals were based on the Council's Project 2000, on which the profession had been widely consulted.

In company with ministerial colleagues in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland we will shortly be consulting all health authorities on the management implications, particularly on manpower and costings, for the National

Health Service. At the same time we will be asking the views of other interested organisations, including those representing staff interests. This consultation process will be completed by the end of July; decisions on the way forward will be taken in the light of the views expressed.

Mr. Simon Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received on the subject of district health authorities' ability to recruit nurses up to the funded establishment number.

Mr. Newton: We have not received any formal representations from district health authorities on their ability to recruit nurses up to their funded establishment (for which there is no central definition, and which will therefore vary between authorities). We have, however, received a number of letters from health authority employees referring to nurse recruitment difficulties in particular localities and specialties.

Mr. Simon Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish in the *Official Report* the number of qualified state enrolled nurses and of qualified state registered nurses employed by the National Health Service for each year since 1974.

Mr. Newton: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Simon Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what plans he has to recruit persons under 18 years of age to work as National Health Service nursing auxiliaries.

Mr. Newton: There is no statutory mimimum age requirement for recruitment to the nursing auxiliary grade. It is therefore for individual health authorities to decide whether or not to recruit persons under 18 years of age to that grade. Such decisions would have regard to the particular location and the specialty involved. However, the training of 16 to 18-year-olds as support workers to nurses is part of the recently announced feasibility study of the scope for greater use of the youth training scheme in the National Health Service. This study is purely exploratory.

Medical Equipment

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what response he intends to give to the report on medical equipment by the Advisory Council for Applied Research and Development; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Fowler: The Government's response to the Council's report is being published today. I am placing copies in the Library.

We welcome the report as a valuable contribution to consideration of the British medical equipment industry's long-term prospects. Its recommendations will help to serve the dual interests of patients in the National Health Service and of the industry.

Our response makes clear our existing strong commitment, through measures in a variety of fields, to the support of the industry. This is exemplified by the wide-ranging programme of actions for the National Health Service announced on 15 December 1986 and designed to develop a strong, internationally competitive health-care industry in the United Kingdom. The response also outlines the further measures we shall be taking as a result of the report.

While we accept that the National Health Service has an important part to play as the major purchaser of medical equipment in this country, I should emphasise the scope that exists for British industry to assist the service in the achievement of increased efficiency and value for money, and the provision of improved care. By meeting a higher proportion of the service's needs the industry has an opportunity to build a firmer base for exports. It will have our full support in doing so.

Psychiatric and Mental Handicap Hospitals, Epsom

Mr. Patrick Thompson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the plans for the 3,500 patients and 4,000 staff at the five psychiatric and mental handicap hospitals near Epsom, to whom these plans have so far been made known; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie [*pursuant to her reply*, 3 February 1987, c. *586*]: At the ministerial review in December 1985 South West Thames regional health authority was charged with the task of presenting a report on the future of the cluster of mental handicap and illness hospitals in and around Epsom. This report, submitted by the region for ministerial approval on 31 December 1986, is due to be published in the near future. My hon. Friend the Minister for Health, in a letter on 9 February 1987 to Sir Antony Driver, chairman of the South West Thames regional health authority, paid tribute to the work put into the report and welcomed the possibilities it opens up for achieving a better life for a very large number of people.

The management of change from care in these three large mental illness hospitals and two large mental handicap hospitals to care in the community and in small units is acknowledged as the biggest task of its kind in the country.

Whilst staff employed at these institutions have, I understand, been aware of the impending changes over the past 18 months by the normal management machinery of meetings and bulletins, it was not until the steering group report was finalised that it was possible to provide members of staff with specific proposals of how, when and where those changes might take place. Early in January a detailed letter summarising the content of the report was issued to all staff accompanied by a letter from their district chairmen. The chairmen said in their covering letters that although much remains to be done to put the plans into effect, the completion of the strategy will give both management and staff a sense of direction and a clearer idea of the timescale. The regional health authority intends to keep staff involved and consulted as plans progress.

Expenditure

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish in the *Official Report* table 3.14.6 of the Government's expenditure plans 1987-88 to 1989-90 giving *(a)* the number of patients treated in each specialty and category, *(b)* the rate per 1,000 population of both cases-attendances and patients treated in each specialty and category, *(c)* the average percentage change per annum for *(a)* and *(b)*, and *(d)* the accumulative percentage change for each specialty and category.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 4 February 1987, c. 700]: The information requested that is not contained in table 3.14.6 of the Expenditure White Paper is given in the tables:

Hospital and Community Health Services—Activity statistics (England)

	thousands[1] *1978*	*1985*	*Percentage change between 1978 and 1985*
Hospital services			
Acute specialties[2]			
In-patient cases	4,204	4,865	15·7
In-patient cases per available bed	28·0	36·2	29·3
Average length of stay (days)	9·4	7·6	−19·1
Day cases	543	938	72·7
Out-patient attendances	28,407	31,751	11·8
Obstetrics and GP maternity			
In-patient cases	731	852	16·6
In-patient cases per bed	38·3	51·2	33·7
Average length of stay (days)	6·4	4·6	−28·1
Out-patient attendances	3,622	3,517	−2·9
Geriatric and younger disabled			
In-patient cases	241	389	61·4
In-patient cases per available bed	4·2	6·8	61·9
Average length of stay (days)	80·5	48·1	−40·2
Out-patient attendances	240	345	43·8
Regular day attendances	1,363	1,604	17·7
Mental illness			
Average daily number of occupied in-patient beds	78	65	−16·7
Out-patient attendances	1,661	1,803	8·5
Psychiatric regular day attendances[3]	3,098	3,682	18·9
Mental handicap			
In-patient beds	47	36	−23·4
Out-patient attendances	21	32	52·4
All specialties combined			
In-patient and day cases	5,932	7,317	23·3
Out-patient and accident and emergency attendances	47,310	51,244	8·3
Regular day attendances	4,987	5,890	18·1
Community health services			
Health visiting—persons visited	3,597	4,080	13·4
Home nursing—persons treated	3,158	3,522	11·5

[1] Except for in-patient cases per available bed and average length of stay.
[2] Defined as including all specialties other than obstetrics, geriatrics, general practitioner maternity services for younger disabled people and the specialties of mental illness and mental handicap.
[3] Includes attendances by mentally handicapped people.

Hospital and Community Health Services—Activity statistics, England
Rate per 1,000 population

	1978	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*Average percentage change per annum 1978-85*	*Percentage change between 1978-85*
Acute Specialties[2]										
In-patient cases	90·1	89·5	93·5	95·3	94·2	99·4	101·4	103·3	2·0	14·6
Day cases	11·6	12·2	13·9	14·7	14·6	16·8	18·6	19·9	8·0	71·0
Total Out-patient attendances	609·1	608·7	627·9	636·3	640·6	658·9	660·3	673·9	1·5	10·6
Obstetrics and GP Maternity[1]										
In-patient cases	77·9	82·3	84·6	81·3	80·4	80·6	81·6	83·7	1·0	7·4
Total Out-patient attendances	386·0	401·1	403·4	384·4	368·0	357·7	350·9	345·7	−1·6	−10·4
Geriatric and Units for younger disabled										
In-patient cases	5·2	5·2	5·8	6·1	6·5	7·1	7·6	8·3	6·9	59·6
Total Out-patient attendances	5·1	4·8	5·5	5·8	6·0	6·5	6·9	7·2	4·8	39·3
Regular Day attendances	28·7	25·4	32·0	32·7	32·7	35·0	35·1	34·6	2·7	20·8
Mental Illness										
Average daily occupied beds	1·7	1·6	1·6	1·6	1·5	1·5	1·4	1·4	−2·8	−18·0
Total Out-patient attendances	35·6	34·5	36·2	36·9	37·2	37·6	38·0	38·3	1·0	7·5
Regular Day attendance[3]	66·4	63·8	65·1	72·5	70·1	75·2	75·9	78·1	2·3	17·7

	1978	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*Average percentage change/per annum 1978-85*	*Percentage change between 1978-85*
Mental Handicap										
Average daily occupied beds	1·0	1·0	0·9	0·9	0·9	0·9	0·8	0·8	−3·6	−22·7
Total Out-patient attendances	0·4	0·4	0·4	0·4	0·3	0·5	0·5	0·7	9·9	69·7
All Specialties										
In-patient cases and day cases	127·2	128·3	135·5	138·3	137·3	145·8	150·8	155·3	2·9	22·1
Total Out-patients and A & E attendances	1014·4	1013·3	1032·2	1044·0	1050·0	1069·9	1082·1	1087·7	1·0	7·2
Regular Day attendances	106·9	100·5	113·0	115·7	113·9	121·8	122·6	125·0	2·3	16·9
Community Health Service										
Health Visiting—persons visited	77·1	80·0	81·6	80·3	81·5	82·4	84·9	86·6	1·6	12·3
Home nursing—persons treated	67·7	69·6	73·1	71·9	73·4	75·8	75·6	74·8	1·6	10·4

[1] Rate per 1,000 female population age 15-44.
[2] Acute is defined as all specialties except geriatric, unit for younger disabled, obstetrics, GP maternity, mental illness and mental handicap.
[3] Includes attendances by mentally handicapped people.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Beef and Veal Stocks

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what the volume of intervention stocks of beef and veal in Humberside was at the end of December 1986; where they are stored;and what is the average cost of storage per pound;

(2) what the volume of intervention stocks of beef and veal in Lincolnshire was at the end of December 1986; where they are stored; and what the average cost is of storage per pound.

Mr. Gummer: The following stocks of intervention beef were stored in Humberside and Lincolnshire at the end of December 1986. There are no support buying arrangements for veal.

Storage costs are not recorded separately for individual areas. The average cost per annum of storing beef in the United Kingdom is 14·1p per pound (bone-in) and 6·4p per pound (boneless).

Humberside
Hull 5,503 tonnes

Lincolnshire
Bourne 11 tonnes
Grantham 1,986 tonnes

EC Food Aid

Mrs. Shields asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what the criteria are for deciding who should receive meat and butter under the European Economic Community food aid scheme;

(2) what amount of meat and butter has been distributed in Ryedale under the European Economic Community food aid scheme;

(3) what proportion of meat and butter available for distribution under the European Economic Community food aid scheme has been distributed in rural areas;

(4) what consultations were held with voluntary groups before the distribution of butter and meat in the United Kingdom under the European Economic Community food aid scheme was announced.

Mr. Gummer: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Radiation Contamination

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the continued existence of sheep and lambs contaminated by radiation emanating from the Chernobyl nuclear accident.

Mr. Donald Thompson [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 February 1987, c. *1051*]: I am pleased to say that in blue-marked sheep, all of which left the restricted areas before 22 December, levels of radioactivity have dropped substantially. Live monitoring of over 50,000 of these show an average of 111 Bq/kg. We therefore propose to lift slaughter and export restrictions on blue-marked sheep with effect from 27 February. The necessary amendments to the Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (England) (No. 2) Order 1986 and the Export of Sheep (Prohibition) Order 1987 are being made.

As for further developments during 1987, my officials have written to farmers in the Cumbrian restricted area to give them our best assessment of prospects for the new lamb crop. Copies of the letter have been placed in the Library.

Fish Stocks (Seals)

Mr. John Townend asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the Government have any plans to co-operate with the Norwegian Government to reduce the growing damage done to the fish stocks in the North sea by seals.

Mr. Gummer [*pursuant to his reply*, 13 February 1987, c. *395*]: I am aware of recent media reports of a sudden influx into the Norwegian sector of the North sea of substantial numbers of harp seals, which has given rise to particular difficulties for Norwegian inshore fishermen.

We are co-operating with Norway and other countries in research on the impact of seals on fisheries within the framework of the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea. In addition, the Salmon Advisory Committee, which has recently been set up, is being asked in the early stages of its work to look at influences on salmon stocks, including predators.

Agriculture Council

Sir Peter Mills asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the Council of Agriculture Ministers meeting held in Brussels on 9-10 February; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer [*pursuant to his reply*, 11 February 1987, c. 288]: My right hon. Friend represented the United Kingdom at the meeting of the council of Agriculture Ministers in Brussels on 23-24 February.

Agreement was reached on the arrangements for payment of compensation for temporary suspension of quota in 1987-88 The Commissions original proposal, which would have had the effect of reducing the compensation payment when a producer exceeded his individual reference quota, was not adopted. This means that we succeeded in retaining the full benefit of formula B and article 4A, which was the basis of the compromise agreement reached in December. Compensation for suspension will be made during the first quarter of 1988. This is an improvement on the Commission's original proposal to pay after 1 April 1988.

The Council agreed also that if at the end of 1987-88 the target reduction in milk production for the Community as agreed in the December package has not been achieved the Council will take action to correct the position on the basis of proposals by the Commission.

The Council was unable, after lengthy discussion, to agree new intervention arrangements for butter and skim milk powder. My right hon. Friend continued to support the objective of making intervention more flexible. There was agreement on the principles which should be followed in reaching decisions. The Council will resume discussion on this at next week's meeting.

The Council will also take up next week negotiations on the socio-structural package. The main issues outstanding here remain the arrangements for early retirement (particularly whether this should be made optional and not mandatory on all member states) and the detailed provisions on extensification of production.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 25 February 1987

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

A-Levels

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether the Government intend to retain GCE A-levels; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The Government are firmly committed to retaining A-levels and to strengthening them where possible. To this end, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and I have invited Dr. Gordon Higginson, vice-chancellor of the university of Southampton, to chair a small independent committee with the following terms of reference.

"In the light of the Government's commitment to retain general certificate of education advanced level examinations as an essential means for setting standards of excellence, and with the aim of maintaining or improving the present character and rigorous standards of these examinations:

— to recommend the principles that should govern GCE A-level syllabuses and their assessment, so that consistency in the essential content and the assessment of subjects is secured;

— to set out a plan of action for the subsequent detailed professional work required to give effect to these recommendations."

The members of the committee are

Miss Sonia Beesley. Journalist and broadcaster.

Sir Roy Harding CBE. Former chief education officer of Buckinghamshire and former vice-chairman of the Secondary Examinations Council.

Mr. Graham Leech. Head of Range high school, Formby.

Mr. Mark Nicolson. Manager, Barclays Bank plc and chairman of the CBI under-35s group.

The committee will start work very shortly and has been asked to report by Easter 1988.

Student Grants

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing for each year since 1962 *(a)* the value of student grants inside and outside London, *(b)* the real value when compared with the rise in retail prices *(c)* the real value when compared with the rise in rents/accommodation costs *(d)* the real value when compared with the rise in average earnings, *(e)* the total value of student grants as a percentage of gross domestic product and *(f)* the real value when compared with the increase in book prices, all indexed using 1962 as a base.

Mr. Walden: The information with the exception of item *(e)* is as follows. I shall reply to the hon. Member regarding *(e)* as soon as possible.

	'Elsewhere' Rate of Grant (£)	Real value in percentage terms (September 1962 = 100) deflated by increases in—				London Rate of Grant (£)	Real value in percentage terms (September 1962 = 100) deflated by increases in—			
		(a) Retail Prices	(b) Average Earnings	(c) Rents	(d) Book Prices		(a) Retail Prices	(b) Average Earnings	(c) Rents	(d) Book Prices
1962-63	320	100	100	100	100	330	100	100	100	100
1963-64	320	98	93	95	96	330	98	93	95	96
1964-65	320	94	86	91	92	330	94	86	91	92
1965-66	340	95	86	91	92	370	101	90	96	97
1966-67	340	92	80	86	89	370	97	85	91	94
1967-68	340	91	78	79	82	370	96	82	84	87
1968-69	360	91	76	81	82	395	97	81	86	87
1969-70	360	86	71	76	77	395	92	75	80	82
1970-71	380	85	66	74	75	420	91	71	79	80
1971-72	430	88	67	77	74	465	92	71	81	77
1972-73	445	85	62	71	71	480	88	65	74	75
1973-74	485	85	59	71	71	520	88	61	73	74
1974-75	605	90	62	83	69	665	96	66	89	74
1975-76	740	87	60	89	71	810	92	63	95	75
1976-77	875	90	62	91	72	955	95	65	97	77
1977-78	1,010	90	66	95	69	1,145	99	73	104	76
1978-79	1,100	91	63	94	69	1,315	105	73	109	80
1979-80	1,245	88	62	92	67	1,485	102	71	106	78
1980-81	1,430	88	58	81	65	1,695	101	67	93	75
1981-82	1,535	84	56	69	62	1,825	97	64	80	71
1982-83	1,595	82	55	66	55	1,900	94	62	77	64
1983-84	1,660	81	51	65	48	1,975	93	59	75	56
1984-85	1,775	81	52	65	47	2,100	95	60	75	53
1985-86	1,830	80	†49	63	43	2,165	92	†56	72	50
1986-87	1,901	81	47	64	43	2,246	93	54	74	50
†Adjusted										
1984-85		80	50	63	45		92	58	73	52
1985-86		77	†47	61	42		89	†55	70	48
1986-87		78	46	61	42		90	53	71	48

[1] Revised.
[2] Adjusted to reflect the provision of travel costs within the main rates of grant from 1984-85.

Departmental Computers

Dr. Hampson asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what his Department has spent on *(a)* computer hardware and *(b)* computer software for each year since 1984; and what is the projected expenditure for 1987.

Mrs. Rumbold: For the year 1985-86, expenditure on hardware was approximately £1,107,000 and on software £336,000. For the year 1986-87, the expected expenditure on hardware will be approximately £1,007,000 and on software £226,000. Expenditure in 1987-88 is expected to be of the same order.

Dr. Hampson asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science to which firms his Department has awarded contracts for computer hardware for each year since 1984; and what was the value of each contract.

Mrs. Rumbold: Contracts in excess of £10,000 were awarded to the following firms. It is not possible for reasons of commercial confidentiality to provide details of the value of each contract.

In 1985-86
Apricot UK Ltd.
Delta Data Systems Ltd.
Digital Equipment Company Ltd.
Equinox Computer Systems Ltd.
IBM UK Ltd.
ICL
Micronology Ltd.
Software Sciences Ltd.
Tandy Corporation

In 1986-87
Apricot Ltd.
Coniston Computing Ltd.
Delta Data Systems Ltd.
HMSO
ICL
Inter Media Graphic Systems Ltd.
Mohawk Ltd.
Rank Xerox UK Ltd.

Under-fives

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps he has taken to consider the recommendations made by the Select Committee on Education about provision for the under-fives in its report entitled "Achievement in Primary Schools"; what discussions he has arranged on such matters; whether he intends to publish a consultative document; when he expects to make decisions regarding provision for the under-fives; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: The Government intend to respond to the Select Committee's report within the normal time scale for such responses.

Special Schools

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish a table showing for each local education authority in January 1986 the number of pupils at special schools and the percentage of the total school population in such schools; what information is available on the numbers of pupils at special schools with statements under the Education Act 1981; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: The number and percentage of the total school population, excluding independent schools, who are in special schools, for each local education authority in January 1986, are given in the table. The annual return of pupils in special schools does not distinguish pupils who have statements under the Education Act 1981 from other pupils.

	Number of pupils in special schools[1]	*Number of pupils*[2] *in primary, middle, secondary & special schools*	*Percentage*
Barking	243	24,601	0·99
Barnet	437	40,668	1·07
Bexley	370	33,247	1·11
Brent	492	35,113	1·40
Bromley	478	37,924	1·26
Croydon	573	44,069	1·30
Ealing	580	38,051	1·52
Enfield	473	39,648	1·19
Haringey	381	27,123	1·40
Harrow	264	26,877	0·98
Havering	428	37,972	1·13
Hillingdon	498	34,054	1·46
Hounslow	577	32,329	1·78
Kingston Upon Thames	267	17,975	1·49
Merton	310	22,486	1·38
Newham	605	36,518	1·66
Redbridge	455	30,688	1·48
Richmond Upon Thames	172	16,712	10·3
Sutton	294	22,440	1·31
Waltham Forest	896	32,725	2·74
Birmingham	2,983	173,992	1·71
Coventry	921	50,563	1·82
Dudley	642	48,127	1·33
Sandwell	876	52,656	1·66
Solihull	386	35,320	1·09
Walsall	675	49,600	1·36
Wolverhampton	574	44,198	1·30
Knowsley	566	29,933	1·89
Liverpool	1,797	83,105	2·16
St. Helens	499	33,548	1·49
Sefton	667	47,959	1·39
Wirral	886	54,092	1·64
Bolton	584	46,225	1·26
Bury	274	27,521	1·00
Manchester	1,824	72,251	2·52
Oldham	680	39,465	1·72
Rochdale	590	36,658	1·61
Salford	844	38,767	2·18
Stockport	783	45,148	1·73
Tameside	356	36,970	0·96
Trafford	417	30,527	1·37
Wigan	780	55,249	1·41
Barnsley	331	37,920	0·87
Doncaster	994	51,717	1·92
Rotherham	629	45,610	1·38
Sheffield	1,096	79,219	1·38
Bradford	1,214	84,492	1·44
Calderdale	356	33,185	1·07
Kirklees	678	66,128	1·03
Leeds	2,016	113,267	1·78
Wakefield	771	52,168	1·48
Gateshead	541	32,400	1·67
Newcastle Upon Tyne	944	40,570	2·33
North Tyneside	557	32,105	1·73
South Tyneside	321	25,207	1·27
Sunderland	759	52,754	1·44
Isles of Scilly	0	278	0·00

	Number of pupils in special schools[1]	Number of pupils[2] in primary, middle, secondary & special schools	Percentage
Inner London	7,082	285,440	2·48
Avon	2,282	136,753	1·67
Bedfordshire	1,171	85,713	1·37
Berkshire	1,864	109,534	1·70
Buckinghamshire	1,757	97,792	1·80
Cambridgeshire	1,370	97,906	1·40
Cheshire	1,794	154,866	1·16
Cleveland	1,787	105,590	1·69
Cornwall	313	69,264	0·45
Cumbria	585	76,746	0·76
Derbyshire	1,832	147,399	1·24
Devon	2,194	134,296	1·63
Dorset	1,283	81,561	1·57
Durham	1,119	97,794	1·14
East Sussex	1,813	83,550	2·17
Essex	3,335	234,760	1·42
Gloucestershire	1,389	77,000	1·80
Hampshire	4,227	221,445	1·91
Hereford and Worcestshire	1,506	99,350	1·52
Hertfordshire	2,406	156,176	1·54
Humberside	1,580	145,227	1·09
Isle of Wight	301	17,324	1·74
Kent	3,841	229,530	1·67
Lancashire	3,819	217,862	1·75
Leicestershire	1,327	142,149	0·93
Lincolnshire	1,206	86,073	1·40
Norfolk	990	105,999	0·93
North Yorkshire	1,357	102,688	1·32
Northamptonshire	1,486	95,489	1·56
Northumberland	617	49,988	1·23
Nottinghamshire	2,357	161,059	1·46
Oxfordshire	1,088	76,573	1·42
Shropshire	811	64,336	1·26
Somerset	851	64,538	1·32
Staffordshire	2,197	166,350	1·32
Suffolk	821	93,118	0·88
Surrey	2,903	129,335	2·24
Warwickshire	1,528	75,986	2·01
West Sussex	1,266	92,886	1·36
Wiltshire	856	80,855	10·6
England	110,915	7,260,414	1·53

[1] This includes pupils with statements in hospital schools and all pupils (full and part time) in all other special schools.
[2] Full and part-time pupils.
Number of pupils in special schools as a percentage of these pupils plus the total of pupils in maintained primary, middle and secondary schools.

Education Act 1981

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish a table showing for each local education authority and each year since 1981 the numbers of statements made under the Education Act 1981.

Mr. Dunn: The information in the following table is based on returns submitted annually by local education authorities in England since the Education Act 1981 came fully into force on 1 April 1983. Figures from the returns made in January 1987 are not yet available.

Local Education Authority	Assessments and placements during 1983[1]	Statements made for the first time during the calendar year 1984	Statements made for the first time during the calendar year 1985
Barking	32	36	30
Barnet	50	116	120
Bexley	101	137	185
Brent	73	—	—
Bromley	65	64	200
Croydon	180	638	247
Ealing	163	485	240
Enfield	115	104	40
Haringey	80	62	63
Harrow	226	178	123
Havering	34	73	86
Hillingdon	59	23	33
Hounslow	244	13	479
Kingston-Upon-Thames	34	318	83
Merton	91	82	32
Newham	76	69	65
Redbridge	51	91	88
Richmond-upon-Thames	32	45	64
Sutton	111	152	215
Waltham Forest	89	74	48
Inner London	876	570	1,203
Birmingham	284	307	412
Coventry	91	129	110
Dudley	125	88	112
Hampshire	563	614	626
Hereford and Worcester	120	14	25
Hertfordshire	411	2,518	692
Humberside	217	347	222
Isle of Wight	79	303	35
Kent	549	2,117	806
Lancashire	735	1,089	657
Leicestershire	421	410	202

Local Education Authority	Assessments and placements during 1983[1]	Statements made for the first time during the calendar year 1984	Statements made for the first time during the calendar year 1985
Lincolnshire	234	244	329
Norfolk	113	230	361
North Yorkshire	143	248	319
Northamptonshire	242	380	209
Northumberland	63	91	176
Nottinghamshire	193	266	264
Oxfordshire	146	120	112
Shropshire	126	76	185
Sandwell	111	167	168
Solihull	55	88	47
Walsall	50	808	91
Wolverhampton	56	76	123
Knowsley	189	226	112
Liverpool	190	141	184
St. Helens	65	65	107
Sefton	77	63	126
Wirral	214	150	287
Bolton	37	70	50
Bury	55	97	94
Manchester	78	244	68
Oldham	84	97	96
Rochdale	125	605	146
Salford	123	102	83
Stockport	60	106	145
Tameside	71	89	91
Trafford	63	237	173
Wigan	151	86	71
Barnsley	12	74	60
Doncaster	173	14	128
Rotherham	98	164	170
Sheffield	166	164	148
Bradford	46	83	146
Calderdale	44	53	29
Kirklees	114	80	199
Leeds	251	942	672
Wakefield	112	126	99
Gateshead	31	68	75
Newcastle upon Tyne	73	101	102
North Tyneside	48	94	90
South Tyneside	31	49	104
Sunderland	103	554	110
Isles of Scilly	1	—	—
Avon	559	503	359
Bedfordshire	97	155	100
Berkshire	149	360	258
Buckinghamshire	273	350	418
Cambridgeshire	178	227	245
Cheshire	379	380	587
Cleveland	153	360	283
Cornwall	39	958	259
Cumbria	211	816	75
Derbyshire	252	385	558
Devon	323	410	497
Dorset	156	271	346
Durham	149	149	252
East Sussex	204	167	246
Essex	1,257	733	930
Gloucestershire	180	—	224
Somerset	138	103	180
Staffordshire	262	647	601
Suffolk	141	280	313
Surrey	580	417	579
Warwickshire	155	1,007	272
West Sussex	67	235	223
Wiltshire	268	310	381
England	16,964	28,227	22,098

[1] 1983 was a transitional year. The figures in this column include pupils newly assessed under the Education Act 1944 as needing special educational treatment, plus those assessed under the 1981 Education Act as having special educational needs.

Children With Special Needs

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information is available to his Department on budgeted and outturn expenditure by local education authorities on children with special needs in

recent years; if he will publish a table showing relevant expenditure by each local education authority in the latest year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: Local education authorities make an annual return of expenditure and income to the Department of the Environment and my Department and the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy have access to the figures. CIPFA also collect budgeted figures from local authorities. The latest information is contained in columns 153 to 194 of "Education Statistics 1986-87 Estimates" published by CIPFA, a copy of which is in the Library. The information covers special schools but not special classes in primary and secondary schools. This information is not available centrally.

EC Research Grants

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the grants available from the European Economic Community to fund academic research in the United Kingdom; and what has been the total amount received by the United Kingdom institutions in each year since the inception of these schemes.

Mr. Walden: The European Economic Community promotes research and development through direct action (in community laboratories), indirect, shared-cost action (involving contracts to enterprises and research institutes) and concerted action (involving the co-ordination of national programmes). Where appropriate, United Kingdom academic institutions can apply for indirect action contracts, and in some cases for funds for concerted action. Discussions are in progress concerning the budget for the framework programme for EC research and technological development for 1987-1991.

European Economic Community: Principal Indirect and Concerted Action Programmes

Industrial Programmes	*Period*	*Budget mecu*
ESPRIT (European Strategic Programme for Research and Development in Information Technology	1984-1988	750
RACE (Research and Development in Advanced Communications Technologies in Europe)	1985-86 (definition phase)	20
BRITE (Basic Research in Industrial Technologies for Europe)	1985-1988	125
Biotechnology	1985-1989	55
Advanced Materials and Raw Materials	1986-1989	70
Technical Reference Standards	1983-1987	25
Energy Related Programmes		
Non-nuclear energy	1985-1988	175
Nuclear fusion[2] } partly funded	1985-1989	690
Nuclear fission[2] } by Euratom	1984-1987	477
Health Programmes		
3rd Medical and Public Health Programme[1]	1982-1986	14
Radiation protection[1]	1985-1989	58
Environmental Programmes		
Environmental Protection	1986-1990	55
Climatology and natural hazards	1986-1990	18
Management and storage of radioactive waste	1985-1989	62
Major technological hazards	1986-1990	3
Agricultural Programmes[1]		
Energy in Agriculture	1984-1985	8·5
Land use and water management	1984-1988	3·5
Mediterranean Agriculture	1984-1988	9
Other less favoured regions	1984-1988	0·5
Agro-food	1984-1988	2
Animal husbandry	1984-1986	3
Plant productivity	1984-1988	3·5
Other Programmes		
Stimulation Programme	1985-1988	60
Science and Technology for Development	1983-1986	40

[1] These programmes partly or wholly involve funding for concerted action.

[2] These programmes are only partly indirect action.

UK academic institutions may also be eligible for certain other EEC grants for example, from the regional and social funds.

Information about the total amount of EEC research grants awarded to UK academic institutions is not readily available. The Department will be undertaking a special exercise to bring this information together. A substantial amount of work will be involved but the results should be available later this year.

Sheffield (Report)

Mr. Cabom asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he will publish the report of Her Majesty's inspectors which was completed in 1985 on Sheffield education.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend received last week the report by Her Majesty's inspectors on educational provision in the metropolitan district of Sheffield, and will publish it. There is as yet no firm publication date. The report is based on Her Majesty's inspectors inspection of maintained schools and educational institutions within the Sheffield local education authority between 1983 and 1985.

Human Embryos

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if the Medical Research Council has been notified of or is funding any research project, either current or proposed, into genetic disease which necessitates the use of the living human embryo.

Mr. Walden: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mr. Galley) on 24 February.

Job Training Scheme

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he intends to take steps to encourage and enable colleges of further education to become involved in the new job training scheme, either as managing agents or as providers of training; and what resources will be available for the financial year 1987-88 to enable colleges to contribute effectively to the scheme.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Government recognise that colleges of further education are experienced and expert providers

of education and training. They will have an important role in the new job training scheme. A number of colleges have already been involved in the pilot scheme, both as providers and as managing agents. Their prime role will be as providers where they will need to demonstrate the value of their courses to local JTS managing agents, and to negotiate appropriate fees. Where they act as managing agents themselves, they will receive a fixed amount per trainee from the Manpower Services Commission, which is responsible for running and funding the JTS.

AIDS

Dr. Twinn asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what assessment has been made as to whether blood sampling in school science lessons carries any risk of transmitting the AIDS virus; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: There is no evidence that the AIDS virus has been transmitted through the use of blood for teaching purposes in schools or colleges. However, the accidental inoculation of infected blood may result in the transmission of infections such as HIV and hepatitis B. Individuals may not be aware that they are infected, nor may the school or college know; therefore it is my right hon. Friend's view that, in the interests of safety, students or staff should not give blood or cell samples for class use in school or for non-advanced further education work in colleges.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Departmental Computers

Dr. Hampson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) to which firms his Department has awarded contracts for computer hardware for each year since 1984; and what was the value of each contract;

(2) what his Department has spent on *(a)* computer hardware and *(b)* computer software for each year since 1984; and what is the projected expenditure for 1987.

Mr. Hurd: I shall reply as soon as possible.

Racing Industry

Mr. Hayes asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if, in the light of recent developments in the racing industry, he will set up an inquiry into bookmaking finances.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No. The Office of Fair Trading is looking at certain aspects of the bookmaking industry in response to representations made about the introduction of satellite television in licensed betting offices.

Greater Manchester Police

Mr. Arnold asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration he has given to increasing the establishment of the Greater Manchester police.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Greater Manchester police authority is responsible for determining the police establishment of the force, subject to my right hon. Friend's approval. A total of 208 additional police posts have been approved for the force since May 1979, and the existing police establishment is 6,943. The strength of the force on 31 January 1987 was 6,747, an increase of 307 since May 1979, and I understand that the police authority expects the force to reach its full police establishment during the next financial year (1987-88). The force also has a civilianisation programme, which should release police officers for operational duties.

Civil Defence

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has any plans to stage a regional civil defence exercise in 1987 along the lines of those held in Home Office regions 6 and 10 in 1986.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No.

BBC Scotland (Police Raid)

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis as to the date and time at which Metropolitan police officers arrived in Glasgow in connection with inquiries into the BBC series "The Secret Society" and as to when he decided to seek the co-operation of the Scottish authorities in procuring a search warrant for BBC Glasgow.

Mr. Hurd: Metropolitan police officers arrived in Glasgow in connection with their inquiries into the BBC series "The Secret Society" at 10.15 am on 30 January 1987. They had decided to seek the assistance of Scottish authorities in procuring a search warrant for the BBC offices in Glasgow the previous day. This decision was entirely for them.

Murder Trials

Mr. Kaufman asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons were tried for murder in each of the years from 1957 to 1986; and how many of these in each year were acquitted.

Mr. Mellor: The information requested is given in the table. These figures are published annually in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales" (for 1957-63 in table III, for 1964-75 in table II(a), for 1976-79 in table 5(a) and for 1980-85 in table 2.2A of the supplementary tables). Information for 1986 is not yet available.

Defendants tried for murder 1957-1985

Year	Total for trial	Acquitted of murder
1957	74	11
1958	61	14
1959	74	6
1960	86	20
1961	88	19
1962	66	15
1963	65	11
1964	80	23
1965	81	17
1966	106	27
1967	90	18
1968	100	22
1969	117	29
1970	115	13
1971	127	24
1972	109	20
1973	135	38
1974	144	28
1975	145	30

Year	Total for trial	Acquitted of murder
1976	149	40
1977	162	44
1978	130	22
1979	164	25
1980	215	39
1981	149	18
1982	229	40
1983	165	32
1984	191	30
1985	222	45

Radio

Mr. Gale asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about improvements in reception of independent local radio.

Mr. Hurd: I have informed the Independent Broadcasting Authority that the Government will consider sympathetically proposals to improve reception on MF or VHF/FM in particular localities within existing independent radio coverage areas. Approval of power increases or the construction of additional transmitters will be subject to national and international clearance by the Department of Trade and Industry for frequency planning purposes.

Mr. Gale asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will publish the Green Paper on radio.

Mr. Hurd: I have today presented to Parliament a Green Paper setting out the choices and opportunities which the Government see for the development of radio services in the United Kingdom. The options discussed in the Green Paper are in tune with the Government's general approach of encouraging the stimulus of competition, the broadening of consumer choice and the lightening of regulatory burdens while at the same time preserving standards. The Green Paper envisages the possible development of new national commercial services and of community stations to take their place side by side with existing independent local radio stations, all with more freedom to meet their audiences' tastes and preferences.

We are not proposing to proceed with the recommendations of the Peacock committee that BBC Radios 1 and 2 should be privatised.

I very much hope that the Green Paper will stimulate a lively debate and that ordinary listeners in all parts of the country will respond to our request for views and comments.

TRANSPORT

Departmental Computers

Dr. Hampson asked the Secretary of State for Transport what his Department has spent on *(a)* computer hardware and *(b)* computer software for each year since 1984; and what is the projected expenditure for 1987.

Mr. Moore: In 1985-86, expenditure in the Department of Transport on computer hardware was £9·5 million and on software £2·1 million. In 1986-87 the figures are expected to be £9·5 million and £1·6 million. For 1987-88, the projected expenditure is £9·8 million and £1·6 million.

Dr. Hampson asked the Secretary of State for Transport to which firms his Department has awarded contracts for computer hardware for each year since 1984; and what was the value of each contract.

Mr. Moore: The following firms have been awarded contracts for computer hardware valued at more than £10,000 by the Department of Transport in 1985-86 and 1986-87.

1985-86

ACT Limited (now Apricot (UK)) Limited
Apple
Apricot
CTG Syntag
Calcomp

Computer Supplies (Swansea) Ltd.
Hewlett Packard
IBM
Logica
Prime Computer (UK) Limited
SSL
South Wales Computers Limited (now Applecentre SW)
Storage T&K
Systime

1986-87

Apple
Appollo Computers Limited
Business Electronic Systems Limited
CDL London
Calcomp
DEC
DPCE, Bracknell
Data Graphix
Data Innovation
Harvey
IBM
Jansen Computers Limited
Micro Business Systems PLC
South Wales Computers Limited (now Applecentre SW)

The value of individual contracts is a matter of commercial confidentiality.

A12-M11 (Hackney Wick)

Sir Anthony Grant asked the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made with the consultations and statutory procedures in connection with the new all-purpose dual carriageway on the line of the A12 Hackney Wick to M11 link road; when he expects work to commence; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The road's centre-line was fixed last October. New draft orders have been published, and are open to objection until 6 March, for revised layouts at the two intermediate interchanges. Local public exhibitions are being held to explain them. There will almost certainly be a further public inquiry. Further progress will depend on the satisfactory completion of these procedures and those which will follow in respect of land acquisition. Work should start by mid-1990.

Transport Supplementary Grant

Mr. Robert Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will deposit in the Library, tables showing, in cash prices, the outturn figures for transport supplementary grant to each local authority, for every financial year from 1974-75.

Mr. Moore: Tables showing the transport supplementary grant paid to each authority from its introduction in 1975-76 have been deposited in the Library.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Nitrogen

Mr. Nicholas Baker asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has received representations about limiting the over-production of cereals in Britain and the European Economic Community through a policy of taxing or controlling the use of nitrogen; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: We have received a number of letters suggesting the imposition of some form of tax, levy or quota on the use of nitrogenous fertiliser. However, we have concluded that such matters would be neither efficient nor effective as a means of reducing the production of cereals and other agricultural produce in surplus. They would operate indiscriminately against crops not in surplus, would be costly to administer and could put at risk the viability of many farms.

Hop Industry

Mr. Warren asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received in favour of a European Economic Community funded outgoers scheme for the United Kingdom hop industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The National Farmers Union sent me a copy of its proposals for a European Community-funded outgoers scheme for hop growers. We have received nine letters on behalf of growers in favour of such a scheme.

Our officials have discussed these proposals with the NFU and other interests. We do not think that the proposals would be cost-effective and I understand that the European Commission has rejected them on the grounds of cost.

Agriculture Council

Mr. Maclennan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the outcome of the supplementary meeting of the Council of Agriculture Ministers on 23 February.

Mr. Gummer: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave yesterday to my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Sir P. Mills).

Fisheries Council

Mr. Maclennan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the outcome of the meeting of the Council of Fisheries Ministers on 23 February.

Mr. Gummer: Largely as a result of the success of the United Kingdom presidency in completing all outstanding fisheries business by the end of the year, the Council meeting arranged for 23 February, like that provisionally arranged for 12 January, was cancelled.

Wool

Mr. Allan Stewart asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he is able to announce the guaranteed price for wool for the 1987 clip; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jopling: Together with the Secretaries of State for Scotland, for Wales and for Northern Ireland, I have received the state of the wool market and prospects for the 1987 clip.

The prices achieved by the British Wool Marketing Board for United Kingdom wool improved during 1986, but since average auction prices did not rise above the guarantee level of 129p/kg Exchequer advances continued to be necessary. The deficit in the board's stabilisation fund has continued to rise and is currently at £19·3 million. Accordingly, my colleagues and I had to consider seriously whether the guarantee should be cut. However, we are mindful of the need to encourage the continued improvement in quality of British wool, a growing proportion of which is exported. Furthermore, current wool prices are significantly higher than a year ago, stock levels are low and the Wool Board has reported markedly improved prospects both in the demand for and in the price of British wool. My colleagues and I have therefore decided to maintain the price guarantee for the 1987 wool clip at 129p/kg.

Plant Health Services

Mr. Hayward asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has decided upon the charges to be made for certain plant health services; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jopling: We have now reached decisions about the charges to be made for certain plant health work from 1 April. An order introducing these charges will be laid before Parliament shortly.

We are imposing charges for only part of our plant health work: export certification and import licensing. These are two areas where services are provided at the specific request of individual growers and traders. The majority of our plant health work, including particularly the normal checks on imported material and work on controlling outbreaks of plant pests and diseases, will continue to be carried out at public expense. The import licensing charges relate only to those cases where special arrangements are made to licence imports which would normally be prohibited but which are permitted under certain strict conditions.

The basic charge for calling out an inspector to a grower's or trader's premises for export certification purposes will be £28. This charge will cover a limited amount of inspection work. There will be additional, lower charges for inspection and other services not covered by the basic charge and special rates for services which do not involve a visit. Import licences for commercial and scientific purposes will cost £150 each, with further charges for extra inspections and other services not covered by the initial licence fee. Import licences for private individuals will cost £25.

In setting the new charges we have taken very careful account of the comments we received on the proposals which we circulated last September. We have made a number of changes in our proposals in order to meet the

points put to us. In particular, in the light of the representations we received, the charging arrangements will allow seven small consignments to be certified, at the pre-export inspection stage, for the price of one. This should significantly alleviate the situation of the many small exporters who wrote to us expressing their concern about the possible impact of the original proposals. In addition, half price services will be available (up to a full cost value of £500 per year) for firms not registered for VAT or with an export turnover of under £5,000 in the previous financial year. The arrangements will also allow two small fields to be soil sampled for the price of one.

In addition officials are urgently considering with the interests concerned the possibility of introducing alternative statutory controls in place of the existing import licensing arrangements for chrysanthemum cuttings from Malta and the Canaries and for certain ornamental nursery stock from New Zealand. This would mean that the importers concerned would not need import licences. Also we are discussing with the industry interests the possibility of developing a new approval scheme for nurseries. Such a scheme would enable growers whose premises were approved under the scheme to attach a MAFF plant health logo to material which had been passed for export at growing season inspections but which in the event was sold on the home market. It should also be possible to develop from such a scheme arrangements under which approved nurseries would not be subject to such intensive pre-export checks and could thus incur lower export charges.

I believe that the new charges represent a fair and reasonable approach to recouping the cost of these plant health export and import services.

Overfishing

Mr. Hargreaves asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food pursuant to his answer of 4 December, to the hon. Member for Scarborough (Sir M. Shaw), *Official Report*, column 788, what arrangements have been made to penalise overfishing under the common fisheries policy in the European Community.

Mr. Gummer: The amendment to article 10(4) of the Control Regulation (EEC) No. 2057/82 agreed at the Fisheries Council on 5 November 1986 empowered the Commission to close a fishery when a total allowable catch has been exhausted even when one or more member states had still to fish their national quotas. In addition, provision was made for the first time to compensate those member states which suffered prejudice as a result of such a closure at the expense of the member state (or states) which had overfished their quotas of that particular stock. A Commission regulation 493/87 dated 18 February 1987 which provides the detailed rules for determining the nature and extent of the compensation has now been adopted with the approval of the Management Committee for Fishery Resources.

I believe that this is a practical and sensible regulation which gives member states and the Commission the flexibility to respond quickly in cases of overfishing and further strengthens the control arrangements of the common fisheries policy.

EC Food Aid

Mrs. Shields asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the criteria are for deciding who should receive meat and butter under the European Economic Community food aid scheme.

Mr. Gummer [*pursuant to his reply*, 24 February 1987]: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 12 February to my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin).

Mrs. Shields asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what consultations were held with voluntary groups before the distribution of butter and meat in the United Kingdom under the European Economic Community food aid scheme was announced.

Mr. Gummer [*pursuant to his reply*, 24 February 1987]: I held meetings with charitable organisations on 20 and 22 January before releases started on 23 January.

Mrs. Shields asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what amount of meat and butter has been distributed in Ryedale under the European Economic Community food aid scheme;

(2) what proportion of meat and butter available for distribution under the European Economic Community food aid scheme has been distributed in rural areas.

Mr. Gummer [*pursuant to his reply*, 24 February 1987]: I do not have figures of distributions in particular geographical areas.

ENVIRONMENT

National Housing Forum

Sir John Farr asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is Her Majesty's Government's policy towards the future role of the National Housing Forum, recently formed by local authorities and others.

Mr. John Patten: The Government have noted the creation of the National Housing Forum and are following its evolution with interest. It is too soon yet to form a judgment on the likely value of its contribution to the development of housing policy.

Public Inquiries

Mr. Cash asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will take steps to provide for the payment to objectors at public inquiries of their reasonable costs on the issue of a certificate that the issues in question raise matters of sufficient public interest, and that where the objectors proposals are accepted by the Secretary of State that the objectors costs should automatically be met in full.

Mr. Tracey: The Government's response to the fifth report from the Environment Committee, Session 1985-86, (Cmnd. 53) set out in paragraphs 63-65 our reasons for concluding against any form of public funding for objectors.

Local Authorities (Housing Loans)

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total amount of interest paid

by local authorities on loans for housing purposes in each of the financial years, 1983-84, 1984-85 and 1985-86, respectively.

Mr. Tracey: The total amount of interest on loans debited to the housing revenue accounts of local authorities, as reported by the authorities, was as follows:

Year	*£ million*
1983-84	2,327
1984-85	2,417
1985-86	2,583

Charitable Housing Associations (Tenants)

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the estimate of the cost of paying transferable discounts to tenants with charitable housing associations in the latest two years for which figures are available.

Mr. Tracey: Transferable discounts cost £3·45 million in 1984-85 and £33·99 million in 1985-86.

Departmental Computers

Dr. Hampson asked the Secretary of State for the Environment to which firms his Department has awarded contracts for computer hardware for each year since 1984; and what was the value of each contract.

Mr. Ridley: For reasons of commercial confidentiality it is not possible to provide information in the form and level and detail requested by my hon. Friend.

The Department has awarded contracts for computer hardware to a number of firms and the following lists indicate where contract values have exceeded £10,000:

1985-86: Applied Research Calcomp, DEC, DMSL, Equinox, HP, Hytec Microsystems, ICL, McDonnell Douglas, Pericom, Prime, Tektronix.

1986-87: Benson, DEC, DMSL, Halcyon, ICL, McDonnell Douglas, Micom Borer, Pericom, Prime, Wordplex.

Housing Renovation Grants

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many outstanding claims for housing renovation grants are now held by each of the local authorities in England; and what is the projected cost of such claims.

Mr. Tracey: The information requested is not available to the Department.

Liverpool (Rates)

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the present levels of domestic and business rates in the city of Liverpool; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The 1986-87 general (business) rate in the city of Liverpool is 308·36p. The domestic rate is 289·86p. Decisions about the local rate for 1987-88 are for the city council. Subject to the enactment of the Local Government Finance Bill in its present form, the joint authorities for police, fire and civil defence and transport must set their precepts within limits requiring cuts on 1986-87 precepts of 3·8 per cent. 5·4 per cent. and 36·5 per cent.

Anti-Litter Campaign

Mr. John Mark Taylor asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will report progress on the Government's anti-litter campaign.

Mr. Waldegrave: A report on the progress of UK2000 is given in my answer to the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) on Wednesday 4 February at column *721*.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Favell asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people were employed within his Department, including regional offices and branches on the latest date for which figures are available; and what were the figures for 1976.

Mr. Ridley: On 1 January 1987, the Department of the Environment (central) employed 6,439 staff. On 1 April 1976, the Department employed 28,559 staff. This figure included approximately 14,000 staff working on transport matters who formed the separate Department of Transport in September 1976.

Home Improvement Grants

Mr. Amess asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how much money was spent on home improvement grants last year; and what plans he has to increase the amount available to first-time buyers.

Mr. Tracey: We estimate that local authorities spent £444 million on grants last year. We are encouraging authorities to direct grants where they are most needed and substantial numbers of grants already go to first-time buyers.

Urban Regeneration Grant

Mr. Dover asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the latest position regarding urban regeneration grant.

Mr. John Patten: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, North (Mr. Lawler) on 26 January at column *49*.

Land

Mr. Craigen asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each six-month period since 1 January 1982 and for the latest available period *(a)* how much underused public land was on the land registers, *(b)* how much land was added to the registers, *(c)* how much land was removed from the registers, divided between the amounts sold, the amounts brought back into use and the amounts removed in other ways, *(d)* how many notices he issued under section 99 of the Local Government Planning and Land Act 1980 and how much land was involved and *(e)* how many directions he issued under section 98 of the 1980 Act and how much land was involved.

Mr. John Patten: I will answer this question shortly.

Local Authority Mortgages

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any proposals to amend the

regulations governing the issuing of local authority mortgages under the right-to-buy legislation in order to allow discretion to an authority to take a previous history of rent arrears into account before granting a mortgage; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ridley: No. Such a discretion would be open to abuse. A landlord may already, however, refuse to complete a sale under the right to buy to a tenant who has fallen a month behind with the rent and is still in arrears.

Football Supporters

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to make a statement on the possibility of the introduction of a national membership card scheme for football supporters, following his meeting with the Football League and the Football Association on 23 February.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will report on the meeting of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey) with representatives of the Football League to discuss membership cards; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tracey: Together with my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Home Office I discussed further initiatives to improve crowd control at football matches with representatives of the Football League, the Football Association and police authorities on 23 February. These discussions produced the following new measures:

The League will ask all clubs to submit detailed local plans for dealing with the management and control of their home and away supporters. These plans will be produced by the end of the current season and will be drawn up in consultation with the local police, local British Transport Police, the local authority, and other relevant organisations such as local coach operators and recognised supporters clubs.

The League, with advice and support from the Association of Chief Police Officers, will ask all clubs to develop and introduce membership schemes for specific areas of their grounds by the beginning of the 1987-88 season. The schemes will cover at least 50 per cent. of each ground's capacity as determined by the conditions of the ground's safety certificate.

A team of representatives comprising the League, the Football Trust and independent advisors will be available to help and assist those clubs in need of guidance.

The Football Association will automatically take account of club's local plans in any disciplinary hearing in the event of crowd disorder or violence.

The League, Football Association and the clubs, with advice from the local police, will consider the need for all ticket arrangements at particular matches.

The league will commission a study by independent consultants to report on the scope, costs and benefits/disadvantages of a reciprocal membership scheme embracing all 92 League clubs. The Association of Chief Police Officers has agreed to assist with and advise on this study.

As agreed, Football Trust grants will be made available to division three and four clubs for the installation of closed circuit television depending on the particular needs of individual clubs.

The League and the Football Association will support and promote the development of family enclosures and other initiatives designed to establish closer links between clubs and their communities.

This package reflects the determination of the Government, the police and the football authorities to work in partnership to tackle hooliganism in the interests of both public safety and the future wellbeing of the game.

Car Boot Sales

Dr. Glyn asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take steps to regulate car boot sales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tracey: Class IV.2 of the first schedule to the General Development Order 1977 gives permitted development rights for the use of land for markets for up to 14 days in total in any calendar year. Car boot sales benefit from this right. The local planning authority may make a direction under article 4 of the GDO withdrawing permitted development rights in any case in which it considers it expedient to do so. Specific planning permission would be required for development of the types specified in the direction and there may be a liability to pay compensation where subsequently planning permission is refused for such development. Directions which are to remain in force for more than six months require my right hon. Friend's confirmation.

Local Authorities (Political Control)

Mr. Straw asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what information is available to him on the party political control of local authorities.

Dr. Boyson: That available in publications such as the "Municipal Year Book" and the statistical digests of local authority election results published by Plymouth polytechnic, together with that gathered by the Department from the press and in the course of its normal dealings with local authorities. In addition, research on the political organisation of local authorities was carried out for the Widdicombe inquiry into the conduct of local authority business (see Cmnd. 9798, research volume 1).

Housing Defects Act

Sir George Young asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many owner-occupiers in the south-west region live in houses designated under the Housing Defects Act.

Mr. John Patten [*pursuant to his answer*, 24 February 1987]: From local authorities' HIP returns and other reports, about 6,700 of these dwellings were in private ownership in the south-west region in April 1986.

Urban Development Programme

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish information on central Government expenditure on the urban development programme for all years since 1978-79, inclusive, aggregated for the standard United Kingdom regions, giving the information in absolute, indexed, and per capita forms.

Mr. John Patten [*pursuant to his answer*, 24 February 1987]: The information requested for the urban programme is as follows:

	1978-79	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	[1]1985-86	[1]1986-87	Population
Northern Region										
absolute £ million	12·90	21·40	29·80	28·75	40·60	40·40	40·30	44·50	42·70	
indexed £ million	25·06	35·60	41·80	36·70	48·30	46·00	44·00	45·80	42·70	
per capita £	4·10	6·80	9·50	9·20	13·00	13·00	12·90	14·30	13·70	3,104,393
North West										
absolute £ million	21·00	34·50	47·70	53·40	68·70	73·20	76·10	75·00	80·00	
indexed £ million	40·80	57·40	66·90	68·10	81·80	83·30	83·10	77·30	80·00	
per capita £	3·20	5·30	7·40	8·30	10·70	11·40	11·80	11·60	12·4	6,414,168
West Midlands										
absolute £ million	11·60	19·30	26·50	27·20	41·90	36·50	44·20	42·30	44·10	
indexed £ million	22·50	32·10	37·10	35·30	49·80	41·60	48·20	43·60	44·10	
per capita £	2·20	3·70	5·10	5·30	8·10	7·90	8·50	8·20	8·50	5,148,385
Yorkshire and Humberside										
absolute £ million	8·00	12·10	16·90	18·30	26·90	30·10	25·75	23·40	24·00	
indexed £ million	15·50	20·10	23·70	14·60	30·90	34·30	28·10	24·10	24·00	
per capita £	1·60	2·40	3·40	3·70	5·30	6·10	5·20	4·80	4·90	4,860,404
East Midlands										
absolute £ million	5·00	7·50	10·40	10·60	15·20	14·50	13·20	14·40	12·80	
indexed £ million	9·70	12·40	14·60	13·50	18·10	16·50	14·50	14·80	12·80	
per capita £	1·50	2·30	3·20	3·30	4·70	4·50	4·10	4·50	4·00	3,819,187
Greater London										
absolute £ million	32·00	52·90	64·60	67·70	73·05	72·00	84·60	68·10	56·70	
indexed £ million	62·00	87·90	90·50	86·40	86·90	82·20	92·40	70·10	56·70	
per capita £	4·70	7·80	9·60	10·00	10·60	10·70	12·60	10·10	8·40	6,713,383
South West										
absolute £ million	0·90	1·50	1·70	2·00	2·60	3·40	3·80	2·50	1·90	
indexed £ million	1·70	2·50	2·40	2·60	3·40	3·80	4·10	2·60	1·90	
per capita £	0·20	0·30	0·30	0·40	0·60	0·70	0·80	0·50	0·40	4,348,988
South East										
absolute £ million	1·90	1·65	1·80	2·25	2·85	3·55	5·00	3·10	0·70	
indexed £ million	1·90	2·70	2·50	2·80	3·39	4·00	5·40	2·20	0·70	
per capita £	0·10	0·10	0·10	0·20	0·20	0·30	0·40	0·20	—	10,092,591
Eastern										
absolute £ million	1·10	1·70	1·90	2·30	2·90	4·00	3·10	1·00	0·30	
indexed £ million	2·10	2·80	2·70	2·90	3·50	4·60	3·40	1·00	0·30	
per capita £	0·50	0·90	1·00	1·20	1·50	2·10	1·60	0·50	0·10	1,871,635

[1] Estimated outturn.
[2] Allocations.

Indexed prices relate to 1986-87. All per capita figures are calculated on the basis of the population of the whole region in 1981. These should be treated with caution since Urban Programme funding is highly concentrated within regions on the districts of greatest need.

Carsington Reservoir

Mr. McLoughlin asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has received any representations from any organisation or body requesting that there should be a public enquiry into the future of Carsington reservoir following the publication of the Coson report.

Mr. John Patten [*pursuant to his answer*, 23 February 1987]: Following publication of the Coson report, I received a letter from Kirk Ireton parish council urging that a public inquiry be held to reconsider the Carsington scheme. There have been no other representations since then. It is for Severn-Trent water authority to decide, in the light of Mr. Coson's report, what action to take following the failure of the embankment. I understand that the authority will this year make application to the local planning authority, in respect of matters reserved for its decision, for approval of a new embankment to a revised design.

DEFENCE

Helicopters (Search and Rescue)

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to announce arrangements, and the date of commencement, for the stationing of a military helicopter on the west coast of Scotland to be available for search and rescue work; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport on 18 February 1987 at columns 627-28.

Mr. Maclennan asked the Secretary of State for Defence if, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland, 18 February, *Official Report*, column 687, he will state the time when *(a)* the alarm

signal from the Guide Onward was initially received at Pentland Station, *(b)* information regarding the incident aboard the vessel was first logged at Edinburgh rescue co-ordination centre and *(c)* the rescue co-ordination centre called out the Sea King helicopter from RAF Lossiemouth.

Mr. Freeman: A distress message from the fishing vessel Guide Onward was received by the Pentland maritime rescue sub-centre at 10.13 pm on 14 February 1987. Information about the incident was then passed to the rescue co-ordination centre at Edinburgh at 10.17 pm, following which the rescue co-ordination centre called out a Sea King helicopter from RAF Lossiemouth at 10.19 pm.

Israel (Arms Embargo)

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Defence if the United Kingdom continues to observe the arms embargo on Israel introduced after the invasion of Lebanon in 1982; and if it affects the training of members of the Israeli armed forces by Britain and invitations to Israel to visit British military exhibitions.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We remain disappointed by the residual Israeli presence on Lebanese territory and continue to maintain restrictions on arms sales to Israel. This policy is kept under review. Proposals for military training and visits of members of the Israeli defence force are in each case considered carefully on their merits.

Western European Union

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy on the role to be played by Defence Ministers within the Western European Union; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stanley: The Western European Union provides a forum for Foreign and Defence Ministers of the seven member states to meet jointly to discuss issues related to European security. Defence and Foreign Ministers play full and complementary parts in these discussions.

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for Defence which tasks are assigned to the Standing Armaments Committee of the Western European Union and the Independent European Programme Group; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Following the revitalisation of both the Western European Union and the Independent European Programme Group towards the end of 1984, the Standing Armaments Committee has helped to provide political impetus towards increased European armaments co-operation, assisting the IEPG in translating this into practical achievement; it also advises the WEU Council on these matters. The IEPG is directly responsible for the harmonisation of operational requirements and research goals, and for promoting the establishment of collaborative projects to meet these needs.

The effectiveness of these arrangements will be reviewed from time to time.

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for Defence what stage has been reached in the British-German-Italian programme for production of a joint armoured howitzer; if he envisages strengthening the programme in the framework of armaments co-operation in the Western European Union; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Kingston-upon-Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) on 16 February at column 489. I see no reason to raise the matter in the WEU.

Exercise Brave Defender

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to repeat the national military home defence exercise, Brave Defender, last practised in 1985, during the current year.

Mr. Stanley: None.

ENERGY

Gas Supply (Report)

Mr. Powley asked the Secretary of State for Energy whether he has received the Director General of Gas Supply's annual report, pursuant to section 39(3) of the Gas Act 1986; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: The Director General of Gas Supply Mr. James McKinnon, has today published his annual report and I have arranged for copies to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Nuclear Accidents

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Energy, further to his reply to the hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury on 21 January, *Official Report*, column 569, mentioning formal registers of accidents, incidents and untoward occurrences at licensed nuclear installations, what is the name of such registers; what are the instructions governing whether an entry is made in such a register; for what period such registers are retained in use; and what relevant copies or extracts are held either by his Department or by Her Majesty's Nuclear Installations Inspectorate; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad [*pursuant to his reply*, 3 February 1987, c. 577]: The register of incidents is called the register of site incidents. The incidents which are recorded are defined by a directive by Her Majesty's Nuclear Installations Inspectorate of the Health and Safety Executive under the nuclear site licence. The registers are kept on site by the licensees for 30 years or less if directed by the HSE. Copies or extracts are not held by my Department or HMNII.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Democracy

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) on 18 February, *Official Report*, column 905, in which countries, other than Nicaragua, it is an objective of Her Majesty's Government to establish a full pluralist democracy.

Mr. Eggar: It is an objective of this Government's foreign policy to uphold the right of self-determination, the rule of international law and respect for human rights,

in accordance with the United Nations Charter and related international instruments. This applies to our relations with all countries, including Nicaragua. I refer the hon. Member to my speech to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva on 10 February 1987, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

WALES

Industrial Support

Mr. Forth asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the per capita expenditure on industrial support for Wales for the current year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Estimated outturn expenditure by my Department on regional development grants and regional selective assistance in 1986-87 is £122 million; per capita expenditure will therefore be approximately £43.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many new jobs have been created, other than those on Government-funded job creation schemes, in each year since 1979 in each parliamentary constituency in Wales;

(2) how many jobs have been lost in each year since 1979 in each parliamentary constituency in Wales;

(3) how many new job vacancies have been filled in each year since 1979 in each parliamentary constituency in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The information is not available in the form requested.

MSC (Schemes)

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many people are currently taking part in each of the Manpower Services Commission's schemes in each parliamentary constituency in Wales.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Information is not available for individual constituencies. For adult training and the voluntary projects programme information is available only for participants over a period and not at a particular time. The latest available information is as follows:

Manpower Services Commission Area	*Youth Training Scheme numbers in training at 31 January 1987*	*Adult Training entrants 1 April 1986 to 31 January 1987*
Gwent	3,725	3,488
Mid and South Glamorgan	6,679	3,173
West Glamorgan and Dyfed	5,461	3,661
Gwynedd, Clwyd and Powys	5,542	4,302

Enterprise allowance scheme: 5,016 participants at 17 February 1987.

New job training scheme (Neath and Port Talbot pilot): 155 participants at 3 February 1987.

Voluntary projects programme: 6,601 participants between 1 April 1986 and 31 December 1986.

Information for the last three schemes is available only for the whole of Wales.

Dairy Farmers

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales, of those farmers who have left the dairy industry in Wales, in each county, in each year since the implementation of the milk quota scheme, what proportion formerly produced on average *(a)* under 240,000 litres per annum and *(b)* 240,000 litres per annum or more.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: This information is not available.

Food (Radiation Levels)

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales what changes have been made in contingency plans for the testing of radiation levels in foodstuffs, in Wales, in the event of a nuclear accident following the experience of the Chernobyl disaster.

Mr. Mark Robinson: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) on 18 December 1986, at columns *612-13* by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

Land

Mr. Craigen asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for each six-month period since 1 January 1982 and for the latest available period *(a)* how much underused public land was on the land registers, *(b)* how much land was added to the registers, *(c)* how much land was removed from the registers, divided between the amounts sold, the amounts brought back into use and the amounts removed in other ways, *(d)* how many notices he issued under section 99 of the Local Government Planning and Land Act 1980 and how much land was involved and *(e)* how many directions he issued under section 98 of the 1980 act and how much land was involved.

Mr. Mark Robinson: The land register legislation was brought into operation in Wales on a trial basis in six districts in March 1983. It was extended to the remaining 31 districts in October 1984 and 16 land registers have now been published. Details of registrations and changes registered to date are set out in the following table:

Acres

	(a)	(b)	(c) Sold	(c) Brought back into use	Other
6 months ending					
31 December 1983	1,048	1,048	—	—	—
30 June 1984	3,189	2,141	—	—	—
31 December 1984	7,269	4,080	—	—	—
30 June 1985	7,269	—	—	—	—
31 December 1985	7,598	336	—	—	7
30 June 1986	9,753	2,183	4	22	2
31 December 1986	11,825	2,095	23	—	—
1 January 1987 to 24 February 1987	11,825	—	—	—	—

(d) and (e)—none.

Cancer Screening

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has for developing cancer screening for women; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mark Robinson: I have recently received the report of the United Kingdom expert working group on breast cancer screening and I should like to record our thanks to its chairman, Professor Sir Patrick Forrest and to his committee for their work.

In Wales, about 750 women die each year from breast cancer and the report shows there is potential to save a substantial number or these lives. The development of this major new service, however, can proceed only if there is widespread support. For this reason, the Department will shortly be issuing a circular to district health authorities and to the professions setting out how we propose to ensure that the service is planned in a way that secures its successful introduction.

We shall be establishing an expert group, as envisaged in the report, to advise on implementation and on future development. We propose also that there should be a national training and demonstration centre to provide a sound basis for the development of the service throughout Wales and that this should be established during the course of 1987-88. One of the first tasks of the expert group will be to advise on the location and work of this centre. The group will also advise on the location of the network of assessment centres which will be developed in fulfilment of our objective that every part of Wales should be covered by the service by 1989-90.

Turning to cervical cancer screening, in the light of the recommendations of the committee on gynaecological cytology we shall be asking health authorities to ensure that call and recall begins at age 20. All DHAs will have appointed officers to be responsible for their screening programmes and all authorities should have computerised call and recall facilities by the end of 1987.

In order to strengthen the screening programme, in June 1986 I asked the health education advisory committee for Wales to consider what health education measures were needed. I have recently received its most helpful report, a copy of which has been placed in the Library. We have made available the funds needed to make possible the supply of materials developed by the committee. I intend to seek advice on health education support for breast cancer screening from the Welsh Health Promotion Authority, the creation of which my right hon. Friend announced on 16 January.

We have already provided additional recurring resources of £400,000 per annum to enable district health authorities to strengthen the screening service. Subject to parliamentary approval, we shall be providing a further £1·05 million per annum from the next financial year to continue this process and to lay the foundations for the breast cancer screening service. These initiatives are a further important demonstration of this Government's commitment to the promotion of women's health in the Principality.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Crown Prosecution Service (Trainees)

Mr. Evennett asked the Attorney-General whether the Crown Prosecution Service provides articles or pupillage for *(a)* trainee solicitors and *(b)* pupil barristers; and if he will make a statement.

The Solicitor-General: No. Solicitors within the Crown Prosecution Service are unable to offer the range of experience necessary for recognition by the Law Society for the purpose mentioned. Similarly, the Bar Council requires that pupillage be served with a barrister in private practice (as opposed to an employer lawyer). The Crown Prosecution Service has, however, developed its own traning programmes to ensure that its lawyers receive the necessary formal and informal training suitable for the work they undertake.

State Security

Mr. Dalyell asked the Attorney-General if, pursuant to the answer of 18 February, *Official Report*, column 619, by the Solicitor-General for Scotland, he has any plans to seek to amend section 9 of the Official Secrets Act 1911 to provide for warrants under that section to be issued by sheriffs in Scotland.

The Solicitor-General: This would not fall within the Attorney-General's ministerial responsibility.

PRIME MINISTER

Homeless Children

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Prime Minister if she will make a statement about co-ordination between the Department of Health and Social Security and the Home Office of Her Majesty's Government's policy on provision for homeless children.

The Prime Minister: Local authority social service departments have a range of statutory provisions available to them to help meet the needs of homeless children. Department of Health and Social Security and Home Office officials meet from time to time to discuss matters of common concern.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Casualties

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will list the total number of fatal and non-fatal casualties for soldiers, members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, and for civilians, in Northern Ireland for each year since 1969.

Mr. Scott: The information is as follows:

	1969	*1970*	*1971*	*1972*	*1973*	*1974*	*1975*	*1976*	*1977*	*1978*
Deaths										
Civilian	12	23	115	322	171	166	216	245	69	50
Army/UDR	—	—	48	129	66	35	20	29	29	21
RUC/RUC 'R'	1	2	11	17	13	15	11	23	14	10
Total	13	25	174	468	250	216	247	297	112	81
Injuries										
Civilian	—	245	1,838	3,813	1,812	1,680	2,044	2,162	1,027	548
Army/UDR	54	620	390	578	548	483	167	264	188	135
RUC/RUC 'R'	711	191	315	485	291	235	263	303	183	302
Total	765	1,056	2,543	4,876	2,651	2,398	2,474	2,729	1,398	985

	1979	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*
Deaths									
Civilian	51	50	57	57	44	36	25	37	3
Army/UDR	48	16	23	28	15	19	6	12	1
RUC/RUC 'R'	14	9	21	12	18	9	23	12	1
Total	113	75	101	97	77	64	54	61	[1]5
Injuries									
Civilian	557	530	878	328	280	513	468	773	43
Army/UDR	153	77	140	98	88	86	33	55	6
RUC/RUC 'R'	165	194	332	99	142	267	415	622	9
Total	875	801	1,350	525	510	866	916	1,450	[2]58

[1] Deaths up to 24 February 1987
[2] Injuries up to 31 January 1987

Housing Executive

Mr. Dicks asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he will lay the latest accounts of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive before Parliament; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tom King: The accounts of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive for 1985-86 together with the reports of the local government auditor and of the Comptroller and Auditor-General thereon were laid today (Comnd. 80). The matters raised have been discussed between the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland and the Housing Executive and the agreed follow-up action will be monitored. On this occasion the report is generally encouraging but it also identifies some weaknesses in systems in the internal control of the Executive's nursery, in housing benefit administration and financial procedures concerned with microfilm records.

I have arranged for copies of a statement by the Housing Executive in response to the local government auditor's report to be placed in the Library.

Rape

Ms. Richardson asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many men have been prosecuted for rape in each of the last five years in Northern Ireland; how many men have been convicted in each of these years; of these, how many have not been sent to prison; how many have been sentenced to terms of imprisonment of less than three years, between three and five years, between five and 10 years, and over 10 years, respectively; and what orders were made in respect of those convicted but not sent to prison.

Mr. Scott [*pursuant to his reply*, 23 February 1987]: The information requested is as follows:—

	1981	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*
Found guilty	9	10	15	14	11
Not sent to prison					
Young offenders centres	—	—	1	1	4
Hospital order	—	—	1	1	—
Training school	1	—	—	—	—
Non-custodial	—	—	3	3	1

	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985
Sent to prison					
Up to three years	1	2	1	2	—
Three to five years	3	3	2	1	4
Five to ten years	4	5	7	6	2
Over ten years	—	—	—	—	—

SCOTLAND

Public Sector Housing

Mr. Maxton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many public sector dwellings in Scotland are *(a)* of traditional build, and *(b)* of non-traditional build.

Mr. Ancram: Consistent information is not available regarding the number of non-traditional dwellings across the public sector as a whole. Figures provided by local authorities indicate that in 1985 approximately 157,000 of the 858,000 local authority dwellings were of non-traditional build.

Housing Revenue Account (Income and Expenditure)

Mr. Maxton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide a detailed breakdown of *(a)* housing revenue account income and *(b)* housing revenue account expenditure for (1) the Scottish Special Housing Association and (2) the New Town Development Corporations for the years 1978-79 to 1985-86, inclusive, expressing this in *(x)* cash terms and *(y)* 1985-86 out-turn prices.

Mr. Ancram: The information is set out in the tables, in cash terms and at 1985-86 constant prices:

Scottish Special Housing Association: Income

£ million

	Rents		Government Deficit Grant		Other Income		Total	
	Cash	1985-86 Prices	Cash	1985-86 Prices	Cash	1985-86 Prices	Cash	1985-86 Prices
1978-79	23·3	44·0	29·5	55·8	0·5	0·9	53·3	100·8
1979-80	26·5	42·9	31·1	50·3	0·5	0·8	58·1	94·0
1980-81	33·5	45·7	30·6	41·7	1·1	1·5	65·2	88·9
1981-82	42·2	52·4	26·6	33·0	2·7	3·3	71·5	88·8
1982-83	51·8	60·0	25·2	29·2	3·0	3·5	80·0	92·6
1983-84	56·9	63·1	23·0	25·5	2·7	3·0	82·6	91·5
1984-85	60·0	63·7	23·0	24·4	2·6	2·8	85·6	90·9
1985-86	63·9	63·9	23·0	23·0	2·8	2·8	89·7	89·7

Scottish Special Housing Association: Expenditure

£ million

	Loan Charges		Management		Repairs and Maintenance		Other Expenditure		Total	
	Cash	1985-86 Prices	Cash	1985-86 Prices	Cash	1985-86 Prices	Cash	1985-86 Prices	Cash	1985-86 Prices
1978-79	33·6	63·5	3·3	6·2	15·5	29·3	1·0	1·9	53·4	100·9
1979-80	35·7	57·7	4·0	6·5	16·8	27·2	1·2	1·9	57·7	93·3
1980-81	40·4	55·1	4·9	6·7	14·7	20·0	4·6	6·3	64·6	88·1
1981-82	45·9	57·0	5·0	6·2	18·5	23·0	0·9	1·1	70·3	87·3
1982-83	50·8	58·8	5·2	6·0	21·5	24·9	1·9	2·2	79·4	91·9
1983-84	54·8	60·7	6·6	7·3	18·8	20·8	1·7	1·9	81·9	90·8
1984-85	58·4	62·0	5·6	5·9	19·4	20·6	2·2	2·3	85·6	90·9
1985-86	61·8	61·8	7·0	7·0	18·9	18·9	2·0	2·0	89·7	89·7

New Towns Development Corporations: Expenditure

£ million

	Loan Charges		Management		Repairs and Maintenance		Other Expenditure		Total	
	Cash	1985-86 Prices	Cash	1985-86 Prices	Cash	1985-86 Prices	Cash	1985-86 Prices	Cash	1985-86 Prices
1978-79	33·9	64·1	1·8	3·4	4·9	9·3	3·0	5·7	43·6	82·4
1979-80	36·7	59·4	2·1	3·4	6·3	10·2	3·8	6·1	48·9	79·1
1980-81	40·4	55·1	2·6	3·5	8·1	11·0	4·4	6·0	55·5	75·7
1981-82	44·2	54·9	2·8	3·5	8·3	10·3	4·5	5·6	59·8	74·2
1982-83	47·7	55·2	2·8	3·2	9·9	11·5	5·4	6·3	65·7	76·1
1983-84	49·4	54·7	2·9	3·2	10·6	11·7	5·2	5·8	68·1	75·5
1984-85	50·8	54·0	3·0	3·2	11·0	11·7	4·8	5·1	69·6	73·9
1985-86	52·1	52·1	3·3	3·3	11·3	11·3	4·9	4·9	71·6	71·6

Total figures may not equal the sum of other rows due to rounding.

New Town Development Corporations: Income

£ million

	Rents		Government Grant		Other Income		Total	
	Cash	1985-86 Prices	Cash	1985-86 Prices	Cash	1985-86 Prices	Cash	1985-86 Prices
1978-79	16·3	30·8	26·9	50·8	0·3	0·6	43·6	82·4
1979-80	18·0	29·1	30·6	49·5	0·3	0·5	48·9	79·1
1980-81	21·6	29·5	32·4	44·2	1·5	2·0	55·5	75·7
1981-82	27·1	33·6	32·1	39·9	0·6	0·7	59·8	74·2
1982-83	32·9	38·1	32·1	37·2	0·7	0·8	65·7	76·1
1983-84	34·6	38·3	32·8	36·4	0·7	0·8	68·1	75·5
1984-85	36·4	38·7	32·4	34·4	0·8	0·8	69·6	74·3
1985-86	38·2	38·2	32·6	32·6	0·8	0·8	71·6	71·6

Housing (Repairs and Modernisation)

Mr. Maxton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide details of the average amount per dwelling spent on repairs and modernisation by *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* the Scottish Special Housing Association and *(c)* the New Town Development Corporations for each of the years 1978-79 to 1985-86, expressed in (i) cash terms and (ii) 1985-86 outturn prices.

Mr. Ancram: This question has been interpreted as seeking information on current expenditure on repairs and maintenance and capital expenditure on modernisation. The information is set out in the tables, in cash terms and at 1985-86 constant prices.

Current expenditure per dwelling on repairs and maintenance

	Local Authorities		Scottish Special Housing Association		New Town Development Corporations	
	Cash	1985-86 prices	Cash	1985-86 prices	Cash	1985-86 prices
1978-79	105·80	200·00	171·80	324·76	93·71	177·14
1979-80	139·99	226·44	182·20	294·72	117·29	189·72
1980-81	163·79	223·34	158·30	215·85	153·24	208·95
1981-82	183·35	227·64	199·40	247·57	158·03	196·20
1982-83	201·15	232·86	233·50	270·31	190·64	220·69
1983-84	213·32	236·41	206·70	229·07	210·59	233·38
1984-85	228·45	242·69	213·00	226·28	225·87	239·95
1985-86	215·66	215·66	219·80	219·80	239·04	239·04

Capital expenditure per dwelling on modernisation

	Local Authorities		Scottish Special Housing Association		New Town Development Corporations	
	Cash	1985-86 prices	Cash	1985-86 prices	Cash	1985-86 prices
1978-79	124·79	234·89	103·90	196·40	n/a	n/a
1979-80	151·04	244·31	244·20	395·01	n/a	n/a
1980-81	158·70	216·40	160·10	218·31	n/a	n/a
1981-82	181·62	225·49	223·60	277·61	171·32	212·70
1982-83	195·03	225·78	441·20	510·75	141·73	164·07
1983-84	240·35	266·37	477·00	528·63	201·69	223·52
1984-85	202·90	214·91	528·80	561·76	341·93	363·25
1985-86	243·02	243·02	422·10	422·10	330·94	330·94

Notes:

1. Figures for New Towns for 1978-79 to 1980-81 are not available.
2. The figures for local authorities include expenditure on capital repairs which cannot be separately identified.

Rented Housing

Mr. Maxton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has as to how many dwellings are *(a)* privately rented other than from a housing association and *(b)* rented from a housing association; and if he will provide this information for each of the years 1978 to 1986, inclusive.

Mr. Ancram: The information requested is as follows. The figures in the first three columns are based on the 1981 census and are consistent with figures published by the Department of the Environment. The figures in the fourth column are based on information collected by the Scottish Development Department.

Estimated number of dwellings rented

('thousands)

At December	(1) From all private landlords	(2) From housing associations	(3) From other private landlords	(4) From registered housing associations[1] (included in c. (2))
1981	194	31	163	14
1982	187	33	154	18
1983	182	36	146	22
1984	178	40	138	26
1985	174	43	131	31
1986	176	46	130	34

[1] At 31 March.

Departmental Computers

Dr. Hampson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what his Department has spent on *(a)* computer hardware and *(b)* computer software for each year since 1984; and what is the projected expenditure for 1987.

Mr. Rifkind: The expenditure of my Departments in 1985-86 and 1986-87 and an estimate of their expenditure in 1987-88 is set out in the table. Expenditure on turnkey systems has been included in the hardware figures.

	1985-86 (£'000)	*1986-87 (£'000)*	*1987-88*[1] *(£'000)*
Hardware	3,741	2,181	4,447
Software	387	719	998

[1] Estimated.

Dr. Hampson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland to which firms his Department has awarded contracts for computer hardware for each year since 1984; and what was the value of each contract.

Mr. Rifkind: Firms awarded contracts valued in excess of £10,000 are:

Year and Company	*Number of Contracts*
1985-86	
Computacentre Ltd.	1
Digital Equipment Co. Ltd.	2
Harris Systems Ltd.	1
International Computers Ltd.	1
IBM United Kingdom Ltd.	15
Sperry Computer Systems	4
Summit Computers (UK) Ltd.	1
Videcom Ltd.	1
1986-87	
CAP Northern Ltd.	1
International Computers Ltd.	1
IBM United Kingdom Ltd.	4
Kurzweil Computer Products	1
Memorex UK Ltd.	1
Rank Xerox (UK) Ltd.	1
ROCC Computers Ltd.	1
Sperry Computer Systems	4
Wordplex Ltd	1

Aberdeen (Leisure Centre)

Mr. Robert Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will now withdraw his objections to the use of the common good fund of the Aberdeen city district council for use in the funding of a leisure centre; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: At no time has my right hon. and learned Friend sought to intervene in Aberdeen district council's use of the common good fund itself. He is concerned at this stage not with whether a particular item of expenditure is a legitimate use of the fund, which is a matter for the council to decide, but rather with ensuring that the total of the council's capital spending, however financed, does not exceed the limits he has laid down. The Secretary of State remains of the view that a local authority requires his consent before incurring any liability to meet capital expenses, otherwise than out of current revenue, even although such capital expenses are being met out of the common good fund.

Spittal Quarry, Caithness

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what advice he has had from the Nature Conservancy Council on the likelihood of finding further fossils on the site of special scientific interest at Spittal quarry, Caithness; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: The Spittal quarry area of special scientific interest is still being worked as a quarry, and the NCC expects that more fossils will be found.

Prison Staff

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will list the levels of alcoholism and suicide rates for prison staff at each of the prisons in Scotland for each of the past 10 years.

Mr. Lang: The information is not available.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Companies (Headquarters Relocation)

1. **Mr. Kennedy** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has concerning the numbers of companies who have moved their headquarters from Scotland to England in the last three years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Such information is not centrally collected, although I am aware of certain individual cases.

Industrial Production

19. **Mr. John Mark Taylor** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on industrial production trends in the west midlands.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I am encouraged that total industry production in the west midlands is estimated to have grown strongly in real terms between 1984 and 1985, the most recent year for which data are available.

66. **Mr. James Lamond** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give the latest figure for industrial production in the United Kingdom using 1979 as a base of 100.

Mr. Alan Clark: In 1986 Q4 output of the production industries (comprising manufacturing and the energy and water supply industries) reached a level of 102·2, based on 1979 equal to 100.

Saudi Arabia (Visit)

20. **Mr. Andrew MacKay** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on his recent visit to Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Channon: I visited Saudi Arabia between 16 and 19 January for talks with Ministers and senior officials on a wide range of trade topics. We agreed that United Kingdom-Saudi relations were excellent and owed much to recent exchange visits culminating in the very successful tour last November by their Royal Highnesses the Prince and Princess of Wales.

In 1986 United Kingdom exports to Saudi Arabia, our largest market outside western Europe and North America, were £1,507 million, an all-time record. I believe that despite reduced oil revenues Saudi Arabia continues to offer excellent opportunities for British exporters.

Manufacturing Investment

21. **Mr. Fisher** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his latest available figure for the percentage fall in the real value of manufacturing investment in the west midlands since 1979.

Mr. Giles Shaw: When the world recession hit a sector suffering from poor competitiveness—the result of years of high inflation, low productivity growth and poor rates of return on investment—a sharp fall in manufacturing investment in the regions occurred up to 1983. In real terms, manufacturing investment in the west midlands between 1979 and 1984 fell by 19 per cent. Industry is now more competitive and better adapted to the demands of a modern economy — manufacturing investment in the west midlands over the most recent year for which there is data, 1983-84, grew by 35 per cent. in real terms.

22. **Mr. Haynes** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his latest figure for the percentage fall in the real value of manufacturing investment in the east midlands since 1979.

Mr. Giles Shaw: When the world recession hit a sector suffering from poor competitiveness—the result of years of high inflation, low productivity growth and poor rates of return on investment—a sharp fall in manufacturing investment in the regions occurred up to 1983. In real terms, manufacturing investment in the east midlands between 1979 and 1984 fell by 21 per cent. Industry is now more competitive and better adapted to the demands of a modern economy—manufacturing investment in the east midlands over the most recent year for which there is data, 1983-84, grew by 18 per cent. in real terms.

28. **Mr. Martin** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his latest figure for the percentage fall in the real value of manufacturing investment in Scotland since 1979.

Mr. Giles Shaw: When the world recession hit a sector suffering from poor competitiveness—the result of years of high inflation, low productivity growth and poor rates of return on investment—a sharp fall in manufacturing investment in the regions occurred up to 1983. In real terms, manufacturing investment in Scotland between 1979 and 1984 fell by 28 per cent. Industry is now more competitive and better adapted to the demands of a modern economy — manufacturing investment in Scotland over the most recent year for which there is data, 1983-84, grew by 22 per cent. in real terms.

68. **Mr. Allen McKay** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his latest estimate of the percentage fall in the real value of manufacturing investment in Yorkshire and Humberside since 1979.

Mr. Giles Shaw: When the world recession hit a sector suffering from poor competitiveness—the result of years of high inflation, low productivity growth and poor rates of return on investment—a sharp fall in manufacturing investment in the regions occurred up to 1983. In real terms, manufacturing investment in Yorkshire and Humberside between 1979 and 1984 fell by 34 per cent. Industry is now more competitive and better adapted to the demands of a modern economy — manufacturing investment in Yorkshire and Humberside over the most recent year for which there is data, 1983 to 1984, grew by 16 per cent. in real terms.

Regional Aid

23. **Mr. D. E. Thomas** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of his Department's expenditure on regional aid to industry in the financial year 1985-86 benefited industry in Wales.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Expenditure on regional aid to industry in Wales is almost entirely undertaken by the Welsh Office. In 1985-86 less than 1 per cent. of my Department's expenditure on regional development grants and regional selective assistance was paid to industry in Wales. Taking account of Welsh Office expenditure, however, the amount spent in Wales in 1985-86 under these headings represented some 22 per cent. of the total for Great Britain.

40. **Mr. Wigley** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the total expenditure of his Department on regional aid to industry and selective aid to industry under section 8 of the Industry Act in the financial year 1985-86; and what were the corresponding figures for 1979-80.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Expenditure by the Department of Trade and Industry on regional aid to industry in 1985-86 was £225·3 million. This figure includes regional development grants (RDGs) and project and training grants under section 7 of the Industrial Development Act 1982. Expenditure on selective aid to industry under section 8 of the Industrial Development Act in 1985-86 was £66·6 million. The corresponding figures for 1979-80 were £391·4 million for regional aid and £75·6 million for section 8. However, it should be noted that the 1979-80 figures for regional aid include expenditure on RDGs in Scotland and Wales, responsibility for which was transferred from the DTI to the Scottish and Welsh Offices in November 1984. Expenditure on regional aid in England alone in 1979-80 was £255·2 million and in 1985-86 is estimated at £221 million.

41. **Mr. Fallon** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many jobs have been created or preserved through regional aid in the northern region since 1983.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Approximately 9,800 jobs have been created in the Northern region — consisting of the counties of Cumbria, Cleveland, Durham, Northumberland and the county area of Tyne and Wear —in projects for which payments of new-style regional development grants have been made from the beginning of the scheme in November 1984 to the end of 1986; 28,600 jobs were expected to be created and 14,800 jobs preserved as a result of offers of regional selective assistance in the calendar years 1983 to 1986 inclusive. No estimate can be made of the effect of employment of payments of old-style regional development grants in this period.

72. **Mr. Simon Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his estimate of the change in real terms in expenditure on regional industrial assistance since 1979.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Figures for calendar years ae not readily available, but between the financial years 1979-80 and 1985-86 expenditure in real terms on regional industrial assistance fell by £262·4 million in 1985-86 prices.

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the changes which have been made in the regulations regarding his Department's expenditure on regional aid to industry since 1979.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I will reply to the hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish information on central Government expenditure on the regional grant development, distinguishing between different levels of assistance and aggregating the information to the standard United Kingdom regions, for all years since 1978-79 inclusive.

Mr. Giles Shaw [*pursuant to his reply*, 24 February 1987]: The question has been interpreted to refer to payments of regional development grants broken down by assisted area status and by standard economic region. Payments of old-style RDGs were as follows:

(£ Million)

Area and Assisted Area Status	*1978-79*	*1979-80*	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*
Northern								
SDA	51·6	49·9	55·4	55·8	54·6	57·3	54·0	34·2
DA	83·6	72·4	62·1	88·0	72·6	44·0	35·0	23·9
IA	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Total	135·2	122·4	117·5	143·9	127·2	101·3	89·0	58·1
North-West								
SDA	48·6	46·0	82·2	107·0	86·3	74·7	72·6	51·9
DA	0·1	—	4·8	13·2	7·3	7·3	7·0	4·6
IA	15·6	12·7	18·8	23·2	3·7	1·0	0·4	0·1
Total	64·3	58·7	105·7	143·4	97·3	83·0	79·9	56·5
Yorkshire and Humberside								
SDA	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
DA	14·3	9·9	19·7	31·1	33·9	23·3	26·7	18·8
IA	15·8	11·6	19·0	16·0	2·5	0·3	0·1	Nil
Total	30·2	21·5	38·7	47·1	36·4	23·5	26·8	18·8
East Midlands								
SDA	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
DA	Nil	Nil	0·3	3·1	7·9	8·2	3·8	2·8
IA	2·3	2·4	2·9	4·0	0·9	—	0·1	—
Total	2·3	2·4	3·2	7·2	8·8	8·2	3·8	2·8
West Midlands								
SDA	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
DA	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
IA	0·1	—	0·1	—	0·1	Nil	Nil	Nil
Total	0·1	—	0·1	—	0·1	Nil	Nil	Nil
South West								
SDA	Nil	—	0·7	2·0	2·1	1·6	1·6	1·3
DA	5·3	4·2	7·1	7·8	8·9	6·2	7·9	6·4
IA	0·7	0·8	0·8	0·5	—	Nil	Nil	Nil
Total	6·0	5·0	8·5	10·3	11·0	7·8	9·5	7·7
Scotland								
SDA	54·5	36·5	63·7	88·9	107·6	71·1	74·8	71·4
DA	52·3	32·8	48·7	51·8	179·0	71·9	34·1	24·2
IA	0·5	0·9	0·9	2·0	0·8	—	Nil	Nil
Total	107·3	70·2	113·3	142·7	287·3	143·0	109·0	95·6
Wales								
SDA	16·2	10·2	21·5	48·2	60·8	39·0	60·9	55·2
DA	52·7	39·4	79·3	72·6	60·6	33·2	31·8	25·1
IA	2·5	1·1	2·6	1·4	0·1	Nil	Nil	Nil
Total	71·5	50·7	103·5	122·2	121·5	72·1	92·7	80·3
Great Britain Total								
SDA	170·9	142·7	223·5	301·9	311·3	243·7	263·9	213·9
DA	208·4	158·7	222·0	267·7	370·2	193·9	146·3	105·8

Area and Assisted Area Status	1978-79	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86
IA	37·5	29·4	45·0	47·2	8·1	1·3	0·5	0·1
Grand Total	416·9	330·8	490·5	616·8	689·6	438·9	410·6	319·8

Payments of new-style RDGs, which were introduced in November 1984, were as follows:

Area	£ Million 1984-85	1985-86
Northern	0·1	9·2
North West	—	5·6
Yorkshire & Humberside	—	5·4
East Midlands	—	1·6
South West	—	0·9
Scotland	0·2	11·9
Wales	—	4·1
TOTALS	0·3	38·6

Notes:
(1) Key to assisted area status:
SDA—Special development area
DA —Development area
IA —Intermediate area.

New-style RDGs are available in development areas only. (special development areas were abolished in November 1984.)
(2) Totals do not always equal component parts due to rounding.
(3) —indicates an amount of less than £50,000.
(4) Northern Ireland has its own schemes of assistance which are the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

ECGD

24. **Sir Michael Shaw** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the future of the Export Credits Guarantee Department.

Mr. Alan Clark: No changes are envisaged in the basic statutory functions of ECGD or in its financial objectives.

EC (Internal Market)

25. **Mr. William Powell** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he is satisfied with recent progress towards removing barriers within the internal market of the European Community.

Mr. Alan Clark: Excellent results were achieved during the recent United Kingdom presidency, with agreement on 48 separate individual internal market measures. We hope that this rate of progress will be maintained under subsequent presidencies.

BT Share Offer (Vouchers)

26. **Sir Kenneth Lewis** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of the vouchers made available for subscribers to shares in British Telecom and to be used for reduction by that amount of subscribers' telephone accounts, were not used before the deadline date; and how much money was saved by Her Majesty's Government as a result.

Mr. Pattie: Five per cent. of the vouchers which have passed the expiry dates of 25 April 1986 and 23 October 1986 were not used. This has resulted in a saving to Her Majesty's Government of around £1 million in voucher repayments and associated administrative costs.

Consumer Protection

27. **Mr. Gregory** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will estimate the sums expended by Government and local authorities, respectively, in the enforcement of consumer protection legislation for each year since 1983.

Mr. Howard: The expenditure by Government and local authorities in England, Wales and Scotland on the enforcement of consumer protection legislation was £60·9 million in the financial year 1983-84; £65·6 million in 1984-85; and is estimated at £72·6 million for 1985-86.

It is not possible accurately to divide the funding for consumer protection between central and local government because the allocation of the rate support grant to services is for the local authorities to decide, but on aggregate about 46·5 per cent. of local authorities' relevant expenditure is met by Exchequer grant.

Overseas Contracts

29. **Mr. Kenneth Carlisle** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has any evidence on the benefits for the United Kingdom economy of Her Majesty's Government's aid for large overseas contracts won by British companies.

Mr. Alan Clark: My Department and bodies such as NEDO — as well as private companies — have commisioned reports on the economic benefits of aid and trade provision supported projects.

Post Office (Chairman)

30. **Mr. Galley** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he last met the chairman of the Post Office; and what topics were discussed.

Mr. Pattie: My right hon. Friend last met the chairman of the Post Office on 24 September last year to discuss the Post Office's financing needs in the context of the public expenditure survey.

Caterpillar Tractor Company

31. **Mr. James Hamilton** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on his Department's involvement in the proposed closure of Caterpillar's Tractor Company at Tannockville, Glasgow; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: My Department was informed of Caterpillar's decision on 13 January 1987. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and I met senior Caterpillar executives on 20 January to urge the company to reconsider its decision. Subsequently, officials of DTI and the Scottish Office met Caterpillar senior management for further clarification.

While I regret Caterpillar's decision, and the manner in which it was taken, following hard upon an earlier decision to modernise the Uddingston plant, it is ultimately a

commercial issue for the company to resolve. However, I hope that as a result of the study of the site and factory recently put in hand by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Scottish Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Lang), some manufacturing and employment may be maintained.

37. **Mr. Chris Smith** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the impact of the proposed closure of the Caterpillar factory in Scotland on component manufacturers in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I understand that Caterpillar is working closely with its United Kingdom suppliers to help them maintain a continuing relationship through supply to other Caterpillar plants, notably to Grenoble to which production of the D6 tractor dozer is being transferred.

43. **Mr. Flannery** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will seek an urgent meeting with the American owners of the Caterpillar factory at Uddingston to discuss its future.

Mr. Giles Shaw: No. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and I have already met senior Caterpillar executives. No further meeting involving Ministers is planned at present, but officials are in touch with the company to make a study of the site and factory at Uddingston to see whether some manufacture and employment can be maintained.

49. **Mr. Ernie Ross** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether his Department was informed about the proposed closure of the Caterpillar factory in Scotland before it was publicly announced; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: My Department was informed of Caterpillar's decision on 13 January 1987, the day before the announcement.

While I regret Caterpillar's decision and the manner in which it was taken, following hard upon an announcement in September 1986 that the Glasgow plant was to be modernised, it is ultimately a commercial issue for the company to resolve. However, I hope that as a result of the study of the site and factory at Uddingston recently put in hand by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, Scottish Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Lang), some manufacturing and employment may be maintained.

50. **Mr. Hoyle** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions have taken place between his Department and the Caterpillar company about the proposed closure of its factory in Scotland.

Mr. Giles Shaw: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and I met senior Caterpillar executives on 20 January to urge them to reconsider their decision. Officials of DTI and the Scottish Office subsequently met Caterpillar senior management on 2 February for further clarification.

Airbus

32. **Dr. Godman** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received about Government support for the airbus project.

Mr. Channon: My Department has received representations about the provision of Government support for the airbus A330/A340 project from a number of hon. Members, from trade union representatives and from others with an interest in these projects, including Airbus Industrie and British Aerospace.

38. **Mr. Wallace** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he intends to make a statement on launch aid for the A340 Airbus.

Mr. Pattie: Her Majesty's Government are aiming to reach a decision on British Aerospace's application for launch aid in respect of its participation in the airbus A330 and A340 programme as soon as circumstances allow, in parallel with the decision-making process of the French and German Governments and taking account of the progress of Airbus Industrie and its partners towards launching the programme. The House will be informed as soon as possible thereafter.

Japan (Trade Deficit)

33. **Mr. John Townend** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the estimated United Kingdom deficit in trade with Japan for the calendar year 1986.

Mr. Alan Clark: In 1986 United Kingdom trade with Japan on an overseas trade statistics basis was estimated to be in deficit by £3·7 billion.

Leyland Trucks

34. **Mr. Robert Atkins** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received about the long-term future of Leyland Trucks Limited.

Mr. Giles Shaw: A number of representations have been received. I myself met a delegation led by my hon. Friend on 12 February. These representations were taken into account in reaching the decisions announced by my right hon. Friend in his statement on 19 February.

44. **Mr. Boyes** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a further statement on the future of Leyland Trucks.

61. **Mr. Pike** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a further statement on the future of Leyland Trucks.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I have nothing to add to my right hon. Friend's statement on 19 February at column *1059-73*.

69. **Mr. McWilliam** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions he has had with the trade unions concerning the recently announced redundancies at Rover.

Mr. Channon: I met a delegation including trade union representatives from Leyland Trucks yesterday, led by my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins).

Mr. Robert Atkins asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy towards further financial assistance to Leyland Trucks.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The Government have, of course, already announced their intention to provide up to £750 million to write off the accumulated debts from Leyland Bus and Leyland Trucks left in the Rover Group and the restructuring costs resulting from their sale. The Government have notified the European Commission of

this intention and the normal procedures are in train. The Rover Group businesses involved in the new joint venture with DAF announced on 19 February by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry are expected to be:

Leyland Trucks
Leyland Parts
Freight Rover
Freight Rover Parts
Butec
Leyland Albion Tanzania Limited
Leyland Albion (East Africa) Limited
Leyland Motors Zambia Limited
Leyland Motor Corporation (East Africa) Limited
Leyland Motor Corporation Malawi Limited
Industrie Nationale Zairoise des Automobiles Leyland
Leyland Motors (Ghana) Limited
Leyland Albion (Uganda) Limited
Leyland Zimbabwe Limited
ABM Equipment (Pty) Limited
Leyland Kenya Limited
Land Rover Tanzania Limited

As with other disposals, including those in which RG retains a minority shareholding, the Government will, following the completion of the merger with DAF of these businesses, accept no further responsibility for the obligations of these businesses or the joint venture.

Northern Regional Development Agency

35. **Mr. Dormand** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions he has had on the establishment of a northern regional development agency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I have had no discussions on the establishment of such an agency. I have, however, followed carefully the progress made by the new Northern Development Company, with which I have had several discussions, including its presentation to central Government this month of its first business plan. That plan is currently under consideration.

Manufacturing Industry

36. **Mr. Richard Page** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what are the latest productivity figures of British manufacturing industry.

Mr. Alan Clark: In 1986, Q4 productivity (output per head) in manufacturing industry reached a level of 136, based on 1980 equal to 100. Since 1979, productivity in the United Kingdom has grown at an annual average rate of more than 3½ per cent., the fastest rate of growth of all major industrialised countries.

70. **Mr. Evans** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his latest available figure for the percentage fall in the real value of manufacturing investment in the north-west since 1979.

Mr. Giles Shaw: When the world recession hit a sector suffering from poor competitiveness—the result of years of high inflation, low productivity growth and poor rates of return on investment—a sharp fall in manufacturing investment in the regions occurred up to 1983. In real terms, manufacturing investment in the North West between 1979 and 1984 fell by 31 per cent. Industry is now more competitive and better adapted to the demands of a modern economy — manufacturing investment in the North West over the most recent year for which there is data, 1983-84, grew by 12 per cent. in real terms.

Power Engineering Industry

39. **Mr. Tony Lloyd** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the Government's policy towards support for the power engineering industry.

Mr. Giles Shaw: My Department recognises that the power engineering sector needs further work and we therefore consider every possible support for their efforts in securing export orders and in developing their manufacturing facilities to enable them to compete more effectively. Since 1980 the sector has benefited from more than £50 million provided by the Industry Acts and has received more than £160 million from the aid and trade provision (securing more than £750 million export orders) and nearly £500 million from the bilateral aid programme.

Financial Services

42. **Mr. Maples** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received in the last month concerning regulation in the financial services sector.

Mr. Howard: My right hon. Friend received the Securities and Investments Board's request for transfer of powers on 10 February. As required by the Financial Services Act, my right hon. Friend has sent to the Director General of Fair Trading a copy of the material submitted by the SIB. My right hon. Friend and I have received a number of letters concerning the SIB's proposals, which will be fully considered. If after considering the Director General's report and any other points put to him he is satisfied that the requirements of the Act have been met, my right hon. Friend will lay the necessary order as soon as possible.

55. **Mr. McCrindle** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has received recent representations on the cost of authorisation under the Financial Services Act 1986.

Mr. Howard: About 50 right hon. and hon. Members have written to me about particular aspects of the cost of authorisation under the Financial Services Act. There have been a number of letters on the same topic from members of the public.

Rolls-Royce

45. **Mr. Hickmet** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement about the future of Rolls-Royce.

Mr. Pattie: Subject to market conditions, the Government intend to return Rolls-Royce to the private sector in April or May 1987.

Mr. Nellist asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he last met senior management of Rolls-Royce to discuss the proposed privatisation of the company.

Mr. Pattie: I am in frequent touch with the senior management of Rolls-Royce as the preparations for privatisation proceed.

Mr. Millan asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give details of the years since 1971 in

which loans were made to Rolls-Royce Limited, the years in which the loans were repaid and the interest received by the Government in the relevant years.

Mr. Pattie [*pursuant to his answer*, 24 February 1987]: Following is the information:

Fiscal year	*Loan advanced £ million*	*Repaid £ million*	*Interest £ million*
1973-74	[1]62·3	27	—
1974-75	6·0		5·4
1975-76	30·0		5·9
1976-77	20·0		9·3
1977-78	3·0		11·1
1978-79	3·0	25·3	10·1
1979-80		6·0	8·3
1980-81		30·0	5·6
1981-82		26·0	2·9

[1] Includes a £27 million non-interest bearing loan advanced on 23 July 1973 and repaid in full on 23 October 1973 and an additional £10 million originally paid by Her Majesty's Government in 1973-74 as part of a loan to the Company but later converted to equity.

United Kingdom-Soviet Trade

46. **Mr. Couchman** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the prospects for United Kingdom-Soviet trade.

Mr. Alan Clark: Despite the fall in oil prices in 1986 which will tend to restrict the Soviet ability to import from the West, there are good prospects for growth in United Kingdom-Soviet trade. There are many opportunities which are currently being pursued by United Kingdom exporters to provide technology and equipment to meet the Soviet priority of modernising its industry. The reform of the Soviet foreign trade structure is designed to develop Soviet exports of manufactured goods. Companies which are prepared to make a long-term commitment to the market and develop a close trading and co-operative relationship with Soviet organisations can expect to prosper there. The United Kingdom-USSR credit agreement concluded in January 1987 is designed to ensure that United Kingdom credit terms will be fully competitive and will, I believe, be of great help to British exporters.

Self-regulatory Organisations

47. **Mr. Butterfill** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress is being made in the establishment of self-regulatory organisations under the Financial Services Act; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: In its application to become a designated agency, the Securities and Investments Board has indicated that, if the power to recognise self-regulating organisations were to be transferred to it, it would expect to receive applications for recognition as a self-regulating organisation from The Securities Association, the Financial Intermediaries, Managers and Brokers Regulatory Association, the Association of Futures Brokers and Dealers Limited, the Investment Management Regulatory Organisation, and the Life Assurance and Unit Trust Regulatory Organisation. Those bodies are currently preparing their applications for recognition.

Goods and Services

48. **Mr. Dykes** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will discuss with his European Economic Community counterparts in consultation with the European Economic Community Commission's trade departments additional measures to augment trade in goods and services between the United Kingdom and other member states.

Mr. Alan Clark: All Member States are committed to the objective of completing the Community's internal market by 1992. The 1987 presidency action programme on the internal market lists over 130 individual measures for discussion by the Council this year with a view to their agreement. Copies of the programme are available in the Library of the House.

Lloyds Act 1982

51. **Mr. Wrigglesworth** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to monitor the operation of the Lloyds Act 1982.

Mr. Pattie: The operation of the Lloyd's Act 1982 was considered by the committee of inquiry into regulatory matters at Lloyd's, whose report was published on 22 January 1982 (Cm 59). I have had a preliminary discussion with the chairman of Lloyd's about the implementation of the recommendations and await a detailed timetable. Lloyd's has already announced acceptance of 13 recommendations affecting its constitution. I shall follow carefully progress in this matter and the future of investment and policyholder protection at Lloyd's.

Manufacturing and Service Industries

52. **Mr. Marlow** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his assessment of the relative benefits to the United Kingdom economy of manufacturing as against service industries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: Manufacturing and services are both essential parts of the economy. They both generate output, provide employment, and earn foreign currency. They are, moreover, mutually dependent.

In terms of their contribution to the balance of payments, trade in manufactured goods is approximately two and a half times as great as trade in services. The figures for 1985 (the latest available) are given in the table:

£ billion

	Exports[1]	*Imports*[1]
Manufactured goods	52·3	55·3
Services	24·3	18·4

[1] SITC basis.
Source: Tables 2.3 and 3.1, United Kingdom Balance of Payments (1986 edition).

Civil Protection

53. **Mr. Evennett** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures he is taking to encourage industry to create an effective civil protection capability.

Mr. Pattie: A study is in progress of the essential civil and military requirements for industrial products in time of crisis and war and industry's ability to meet them.

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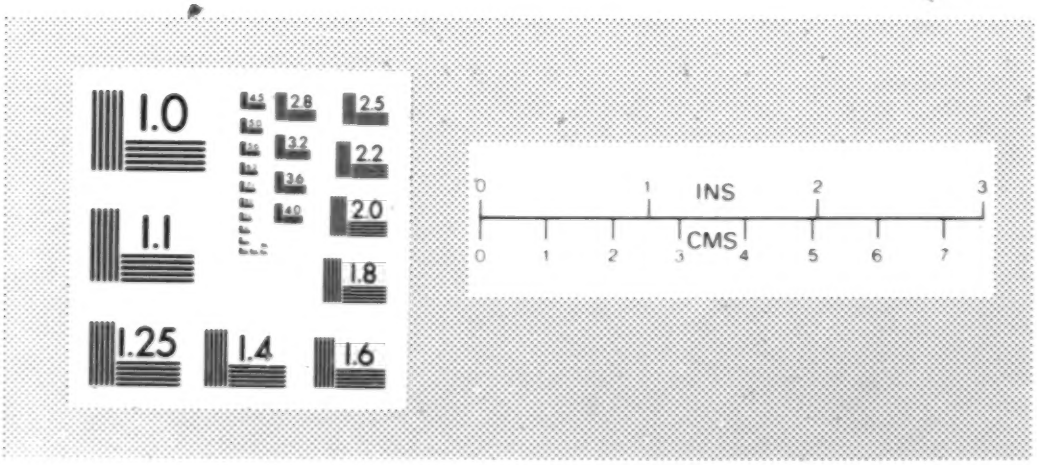

60. **Mr. Robert Banks** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what studies have been completed on the role of industry in civil protection planning; and when these will be published.

Mr. Pattie: Progress has been made with the study, but I am not yet able to say when it will be complete. The study will remain confidential.

British Sugar Corporation

54. **Mrs. McCurley** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he is yet in a position to say when he expects to reach a decision on the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report on the proposed bid for the British Sugar Corporation by Tate and Lyle and Ferruzzi; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: The report of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission (MMC) was published today (25 February). It concludes that the proposed acquisitions by Tate and Lyle plc of S and W Berisford plc and by Ferruzzi Finanziaria of Berisford's wholly-owned subsidiary, British Sugar plc, may be expected to operate against the public interest and should not be allowed. The MMC also concluded that Ferruzzi's existing shareholding in S and W Berisford may be expected to operate against the public interest and recommends that it should be reduced. In accordance with the advice of the Director General of Fair Trading, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has accepted those recommendations.

The Secretary of State has therefore asked the Director General of Fair Trading to consult Tate and Lyle and Ferruzzi with a view to obtaining undertakings not to proceed with their proposals to acquire S and W Berisford and British Sugar, respectively; and, in respect of Ferruzzi's existing shareholding in Berisford, to reduce that shareholding to 15 per cent. over two years, with a limitation on the exercise of voting rights in the interim period.

A copy of the report and the Secretary of State's decision has been placed in the Library of the House.

Inward Investment

56. **Mr. Bright** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the total figure for inward investment into the United Kingdom for 1986; and how many jobs were created as a result.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The latest figures available relate to the first three quarters of 1986. In that period direct investment in the United Kingdom by overseas residents totalled £4·5 billion. Separately, the Invest in Britain Bureau has recorded 225 investment decisions taken by overseas companies over the same period. From the information provided by the companies themselves, those decisions are expected to create over 10,500 new jobs. Figures for the full year will be available in the Invest in Britain Bureau's annual report which will be published in April.

Share Dealings

57. **Mr. Cohen** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received about current investigations by his Department's inspectors into share dealings.

62. **Mr. George Howarth** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received about current investigations by his Department's inspectors into share dealings.

Mr. Howard: My right hon. Friend and I have received a number of letters commenting upon various aspects of the matters under investigation.

Visible Trade Balance

58. **Mr. Ray Powell** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his latest estimate of the visible trade balance for 1987.

64. **Mr. Terry Lewis** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his latest estimate of the visible trade balance for 1987.

Mr. Alan Clark: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his autumn statement forecast a deficit of £10½ billion on the visible trade balance for 1987.

Exports (Inspection Standards)

59. **Mr. Amess** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on inspection standards for goods exported to other European Economic Community countries.

Mr. Alan Clark: I am unaware of any standards related to inspections carried out in the United Kingdom on goods exported from this country to others in the European Community. Should my hon. Friend know of a specific problem, I should be grateful if he would write to me with the details.

China

63. **Mr. Alexander** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on trading prospects with China.

Mr. Alan Clark: There are good prospects for a steady growth in our trade with China. 1986 saw a 35 per cent. increase in our exports compared with 1985. There continue to be opportunities for future growth.

Wakefield and Dewsbury

65. **Mr. O'Brien** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if, in the light of the decline of many of the traditional industries in the area, he will grant assisted area status to the newly formed Wakefield and Dewsbury travel-to-work area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: No. The assisted areas map was revised just over two years ago and on the basis of the objective criteria then used the Wakefield and Dewsbury travel-to-work area did not qualify for assisted area status. As I explained in a recent answer to my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins) on Tuesday 17 February at columns 526-27, I believe that to alter the map at this time would be to undermine the stability needed by firms in making sensible investment decisions.

Nationalised Industries

67. **Mr. Forth** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry by how much his Department has subsidised the losses of nationalised industries during the past year, and what was the comparable amount for 1978-79.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Of the nationalised industries now sponsored by the Department of Trade and Industry, only British Shipbuilders and the British Steel Corporation made losses in 1978-79, of £50 million and £357 million respectively. In 1985-86 (the most recent year for which information is available) only British Shipbuilders reported a loss, amounting to £125 million. The total external financing requirement of all the nationalised industries sponsored by the Department in the relevant years, including those making profits, reduced from £1,108 million in 1978-79 to £404 million in 1985-86.

Manufacturing Output

71. **Mr. Favell** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the increase in manufacturing output since June 1983.

Mr. Alan Clark: In the three and a half years since June 1983 manufacturing output has increased by nearly 12 per cent.; this represents an annual average growth rate of more than 3 per cent.

Redundant Textile and Clothing Workers

73. **Mr. Madden** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will introduce legislation to establish a severance pay scheme to assist redundant textile and clothing workers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to a similar question of his on 6 February [*Official Report*, c. *838*]. The Government have no plans to introduce legislation to establish a special severance pay scheme to assist redundant textile and clothing workers.

Shareholders (Statistics)

74. **Mr. Alan Howarth** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his latest estimate of the number of individual shareholders in the United Kingdom; and what was the equivalent figure eight years ago.

Mr. Howard: Statistics on the number of individual shareholders are not kept by this Department. But it is generally accepted that the number of individual share owners has approximately trebled since 1979.

Telecommunications Services

Mr. Neale asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has completed his review of the regulations affecting the installation, connection, inspection and designation of maintenance contractors of single line call routing apparatus.

Mr. Butcher: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I have given him today to his other question.

Mr. Neale asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to issue further licences liberalising telecommunication services and use.

Mr. Butcher: The Government have now concluded its extensive consultation with industry and users on the proposed telecommunication licences for the running of branch systems and for the provision of value added and data services. Our aim has been to ensure that the liberalisation of telecommunications continues to develop in a way which increases the choices available to users and the opportunities for the fast growing telecommunications sector, consistent with the policy announced in November 1983 that the Government do not intend to licence anyone other than BT or Mercury to run national public telecommunications networks until November 1990 at the earliest.

The Branch Systems General Licence

When the original branch systems general licence was issued in 1984, the Government made it clear that its operation would be reviewed in the light of experience.

The Director General of Telecommunicatons has conduted this review over the last year. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has accepted his advice that further relaxations are justified and is therefore revoking the existing branch systems general licence and replacing it with a more liberal licence. The new licence comes into force today. The main changes are:

(i) Companies will in future be allowed to carry public switched network traffic over leased lines anywhere within their own group. In order to ensure that the technical quality of telephone signals remains consistent with minimum international standards, companies wishing to take advantage of this relaxation will have to comply with the networking code of practice which has been developed by OFTEL in conjunction with the public telecommunicatons operators, industry and user organisations.

(ii) The present limit of 50 metres within which companies may use their own wiring to connect systems in different buildings is being increased to 200 metres. This will give companies greater freedom to make the commercial decision whether to install their own wiring or to lease a short private circuit from one of the public telecommunications operators.

(iii) Rules clarifying the permitted use of international leased lines. The original licence did not deal with this.

(iv) Single line apparatus will no longer be classified as call routing apparatus. This relaxation will relieve users of such apparatus from rules requiring hardwired connections, pre-connection inspection and maintenance. This will increase user choice and enable United Kingdom manufacturers to take advantage of a promising opportunity in home and export markets.

Opinion has been divided among suppliers and users about the notice period in contracts with designated maintainers. My right hon. Friend does not therefore propose to make any change in this area.

The standard and technical provisions of the old branch systems licence, which are now familar to businesses who have run branch systems since 1984, have been incorporated in a separate document. They will apply consistently to virtually all licences issued in future. This should provide greater certainty for users and suppliers of telecommunications apparatus and widen the adoption of good technical practice which has evolved since 1984.

The above changes take account of those operational needs of industry and commerce on which OFTEL has received most representations since 1984. They are designed to assist companies to improve the efficient and economic use of their corporate networks. It is also open

to operators licensed under the branch systems licence to provide value added services over their systems. When they do so, however, under the authority of the branch systems licence, they will remain subject to the limitations on resale contained in that licence. For operators who wish to take full advantage of the liberalisation on the resale of value added and data services, a class licence for value added and data services has now been finalised.

The Value Added and Data Services Class Licence

The consultations with industry and users on the class licence for value added and data services, issued in draft in July, have produced a number of helpful comments, which have been taken into account in the final version of the licence referred to below. Against this background the director general has today published parallel amendments to the licences of British Telecommunications plc, Mercury Communications Limited and Kingston upon Hull city council. These amendments, which have been agreed by those public telecommunications operators, are designed to place those PTOs on an equal competitive footing with other competitors in this newly liberalised market.

Although the provision of data services is being opened to full competition, it remains important that all forms of basic telecommunication services should continue to be made available by the PTOs on a nationwide basis and in a way which gives subscribers a choice of public networks. At present the PTOs have an obligation under their licences to provide basic telecommunication services. This obligation is not being amended and so basic data conveyance, including basic packet switched services will remain subject to the obligations to provide service and Interconnect contained in the PTOs' licences. I welcome the responsible approach that the PTOs have adopted in agreeing that this should remain the position.

The Telecommunications Act 1984 requires the director to give 28 days notice for representations before making the amendments to the PTO licences. My right hon. Friend intends, therefore, formally to issue the new value added and data services class licence at the end of that period unless the director has advised him that further changes need to be made to the PTOs' licences as a result of representations received during the consultation period. In the meantime, the Government have decided to make available the final text of the class licence, to assist the industry to prepare to introduce the new services.

Two significant changes from the July draft have been made in the final version of the class licence, in the light of industry comments. First, companies will be permitted to charge within their group for the conveyance of basic voice or basic telex traffic. This relaxation permits companies to make full use of corporate networks both to offer value added and data services, and to convey voice and telex traffic for ordinary business purposes. Where companies choose to convey basic voice or basic telex traffic they will of course remain subject to the limitations on resale contained in the branch systems general licence. This reflects stated Government policy that the extent of resale of voice and telex will be limited until at least July 1989.

Secondly, the Government recognise that companies will wish to offer a mix of charged services and services for the mutual business efficiency of non-telecommunication activities in an industrial sector but for which no charge is levied. The Government are concerned to promote the widest use of value added and data services, since these can improve the competitiveness of a wide range of industries. In these circumstances, the Government have decided to exempt such uncharged services from the conditions on fair trading and OSI standards contained in the class licence.

Some commentators have proposed that major providers of value added and data services should be obliged to interconnect with, and provide services to, any other operator. The Government have considered this carefully against the balance of views expressed during the consultation process and has concluded that the arrangements should remain as those set out in the statement made on 11 March by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Information Technology. Interconnection between different service providers should at this stage be for the market to decide. The Government will continue to play a catalytic role in encouraging such interconnections and the emergence of co-operative ventures within the industry, through the £1·25 million VANGUARD project which the Government launched in October.

The class licence will not be available to the PTOs, their groups or associates. The PTOs will be able to provide value added and data services under their main licences which are being comprehensively amended by the director to ensure that in terms of fair trading and OSI obligations, they provide value added and data services on an even competitive basis with other operators in the market. The Government has concluded that it would be unduly onerous, at this stage of the market's development, to require other members of PTO groups or PTO joint ventures with other operators, all to be licensed individually. My right hon. Friend will, therefore, be issuing a separate class licence for PTO associates. This will in most respects mirror exactly the provisions of the new value added and data services class licence and will come into force at the same time. It will, however, contain provisions which empower the Government to review and, if necessary, to revoke the PTO class licence from any joint venture arrangement where the PTO's partner has at the outset a worldwide turnover in computing or telecommunications in excess of £1 billion a year, or which subsequently exceeds that figure as a result of merger or acquisition.

The Government believe that the PTOs have a full and constructive role to play in the United Kingdom value added and data services market, both in their own right and through cooperative ventures with other operators. But it is equally important that there should be adequate safeguards to prevent the emergence of dominant ventures which could distort the market. The Government believe that users will best be served by a wide range of competing operators and therefore intends to exercise this power to review in line with its declared pro-competitive policy which has been pursued consistently during and since the decision on the JOVE proposal.

The Government have asked the director to keep a careful watch on developments once the licences are issued. It is of course open to him to propose licence modifications if experience showed that to be necessary.

The arrangements that I have outlined today should greatly increase the scope for the economic use of networks to improve business competitiveness, bring benefits to users of telecommunications and increase the

opportunities for service providers in a rapidly expanding sector of the economy. I am placing copies of the new licences in the Library of the House.

House of Fraser (Takeover)

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his reply of 2 February, *Official Report*, column *505*, when he expects to reach his conclusion on material submitted on behalf of Lonrho relating to the takeover of the House of Fraser by Mr. Al Fayed.

Mr. Howard: My right hon. Friend has not yet completed his consideration of the material in question and is not in a position to advise when he will do so.

European Steel Industry

Mr. Coleman asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has concerning the Eurofer proposals for an ordered restructuring of the European steel industry; what is his policy on proposals for further cuts in the British steel industry; and what action he proposes to take.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I understand that Eurofer will put proposals for further restructuring of the European steel industry to the Commission on 1 March for discussion by the Council of Ministers on 19 March. As far as the United Kingdom is concerned, any capacity reductions by BSC would have to be consistent with the three-year strategy agreed with the Government and announced in August 1985 and must not prejudice decisions on strategy thereafter.

Bankruptcies and Liquidations

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the totals of bankruptcies and company liquidations as at each January and July since July 1979.

Mr. Howard: The information requested is given in the table.

	England and Wales		*Scotland*	
	[1]Bankruptcies	*[2]Company liquidations*	*[1]Sequestrations*	*[2]Company liquidations*
July 1979	354	361	10	24
January 1980	262	527	20	19
July 1980	392	654	7	39
January 1981	428	946	11	28
July 1981	493	[3]	17	38
January 1982	429	947	23	28
July 1982	515	987	23	37
January 1983	542	1,167	18	54
July 1983	582	1,075	28	40
January 1984	707	1,278	24	50
July 1984	748	1,217	15	32
January 1985	641	1,430	27	46
July 1985	671	1,396	22	47
January 1986	670	1,318	21	25
July 1986	699	1,372	[5]44	38
January 1987[*]	555	1,443	55	35

[*] Provisional.
[1] Sequestrations are the Scottish equivalent of bankruptcies. Bankruptcy and sequestration totals include administration orders and deeds of arrangement and the total is the net number of cases administered after consolidations and rescissions.
[2] Includes compulsory and creditors' voluntary liquidations—the two types which involve insolvency.
[3] Monthly figure not available due to Civil Service strike.
[4] The remaining provisions of the Insolvency Act 1986 were brought into force on 29 December 1986. Proceedings for bankruptcy are changed under the new Act and receiving orders are replaced by bankruptcy orders. The new Act also introduced for the first time a deposit on petitions for compulsory liquidation. However, most of the insolvencies in January were petitioned under the previous legislation.
[5] Provisions of the Bankruptcy Scotland Act 1985 which came into force on 1 April 1986 provided for public funds to be made available to compensate trustees dealing with sequestrations with no assets.

Research and Development (EC Grants)

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the grants available from the European Economic Community to institutions and companies in the United Kingdom to fund industrial research and development; how much has been allocated in the United Kingdom under such grant schemes in each year since their inception; and who may make applications under each of the schemes.

Mr. Pattie: The European Economic Community programmes undertaking industrial research and development are listed in the table, together with the expected United Kingdom share of the average annual programme budget. Funding from these programmes is provided under confidential contracts between participants and the European Commission in Brussels and details of individual grants are not normally available to Government. There is no formal allocation to member states but United Kingdom organisations are active participants in all of these programmes and United Kingdom receipts are usually close to our share of the programme budget. The schemes listed in the table are open to private companies, public sector research organisations and academic institutions.

Programmes	Period	Expenditure[1] (£m)
ESPRIT (European Strategic Programme for Research and Development in Information Technology)	1984-88	21·0
RACE (Research and Development in Advanced Communications Technologies in Europe)	1985-86 (Definition phase)	1·4
BRITE (Basic Research in Industrial Technologies for Europe)	1985-88	4·4
Advanced Materials and Raw Materials	1986-89	2·0
Technical Reference Standards	1983-87	0·7
Biotechnology	1985-89	1·5

[1] Expected United Kingdom share of average annual programme budget.

FIMBRA

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received from small firms regarding the rules laid down for membership of FIMBRA; and if he is satisfied that allowance is being made for the level of resources available to those businesses.

Mr. Howard: As I indicated in my answer today to the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. McCrindle), about 50 right hon. and hon. Members have written to me concerning FIMBRA, and members of the public have also made representations. The rules of bodies intending to apply to become recognised self-regulating organisations under the Financial Services Act are a matter for them but it will not be possible for such a body to be recognised unless it meets the criteria for recognition and its rules contain no anti-competitive effects greater than is necessary for the protection of investors.

Manufacturing Trade Deficit

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his latest estimate of the deficit in manufacturing trade for 1986.

Mr. Alan Clark: In 1986 trade in manufactures was estimated to be in deficit by £5·9 billion.

Monopolies and Mergers Commission

Mr. Maclean asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the report of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission on the supply of steel wire fencing is to be published; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: The report is published today.

The commission found that a monopoly situation existed in favour of TWIL Limited and its subsidiaries, which in 1984 together supplied two thirds of the £42 million United Kingdom market for steel wire fencing (SWF), defined as comprising barbed wire, chain link, stock fencing, welded mesh, wire netting and plain wire fencing. the remaining third was supplied in roughly equal proportions by 19 other (independent) United Kingdom producers and by imports. SWF accounted for 25 to 30 per cent. of the wider fencing market.

The commission concluded that only one of TWIL's practices—that of paying secondary rebates to certain distributers—was a step taken to maintain its monopoly situation, but since this method of price discrimination has been discontinued the commission found that it did not operate against the public interest. The last matter apart, the commission did not find that there had been any action or omission on the part of TWIL which was attributable to the monopoly situation, nor any facts which operated or might have been expected to operate against the public interest.

The commission also concluded that in spite of its dominant position in the SWF market TWIL faced a significant degree of competition because of the availability of substitute products, persistent over-capacity, relatively easy entry into the market, and the incidence of imports.

Although they found no evidence that TWIL priced below its estimates of total costs, they found that TWIL seemed to have priced according to what the market would bear. This was reflected in its varying profit margins for the different reference products. The commission also found that TWIL had responded to rather than initiated price competition. One result of this was that it had experienced a significant loss of market share. The company had also experienced a decline in return on capital, from over 26 per cent. for SWF in the two years ended 31 July 1984, to 21·2 per cent. in the following year. This could not now, in the commission's view, be regarded as excessive. Having taken these matters into account the MMC considered that TWIL's pricing policy had not been a step taken to exploit the monopoly situation. It suggested, however, that it would be in the company's own interests to publish full details of its standard wholesale discounts and its rebates with its price lists.

The commission was disturbed by the weight of complaints about TWIL's commercial practices. The commission received and investigated 83 complaints from 38 firms, most significantly about difficulties in obtaining steel wire, aggravated by TWIL's alleged refusal to supply on reasonable terms; and about TWIL's pricing and marketing policies.

Problems over the supply of steel wire disappeared during the inquiry and the commission concluded that there is at present effective competition between TWIL and other steel wire suppliers. TWIL assured the commission of its willingness to supply the independent producers at reasonable prices. The commission attached great importance to this and said that the provisions of the Competition Act 1980 could be invoked if TWIL failed to supply steel wire on a satisfactory basis. The Director General of Fair Trading has indicated that he would be prepared to make full use of his powers under the competition legislation if these problems recurred.

The largest number of complaints which the commission received was to the effect that TWIL's policy was to deal directly only with a limited number of distributors. TWIL said that it was willing to deal on wholesale terms with any distributor which met its criteria. The commission believe that TWIL's stated criteria for selection of wholesalers are reasonable. Nevertheless, the commission suggested that TWIL should explain its reasons for refusing wholesale terms to potential customers, and TWIL has agreed to do this.

I accept the findings of the commission's report. Because the commission found that the monopoly situation under reference did not operate against the public interest, there is no statutory basis on which to take

further action. However, I attach importance to the assurance given by the company to the commission that it would supply steel wire to independent producers of steel wire fencing at reasonable prices. The commission also made some suggestions about TWIL's dealings with its wholesalers which I hope the company will adopt.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Accounting Records

75. **Mr. Cash** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer in what circumstances it is inteded to penalise traders trading within case I or case II of schedule D in respect of the maintenance of accounting records.

Mr. Ian Stewart: A recommendation that traders should be required to keep accounting records for tax purposes was made by the Keith committee, and a proposal to that effect is included in the consultative document "The Inland Revenue and the Taxpayer" published by the Inland Revenue in December 1986 in response to the committee's report. The proposal, on which comments have been invited, includes a financial penalty for failing to keep such records.

Denationalisation

76. **Mr. Michael Brown** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the progress of Her Majesty's Government's denationalisation programme since 1979.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The programme of privatisation continues to be highly successful. Fourteen major companies, including British Gas and British Airways, and around 600,000 employees have been transferred to the private sector since 1979. The privatisation programme is a key element in our strategy for widening share ownership and as a result we have succeeded in roughly trebling the number of people holding shares since 1979. By transferring these companies to the private sector we have also increased their incentives to greater efficiency and competitiveness, thus benefiting their employees, their shareholders and the economy as a whole.

Earnings

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish figures for 1970, 1980 and for the latest date available, for a married man with two chidren, earning average male manual earnings, showing the length of time, after taking into account income tax liability and national insurance contribution, necessary to pay for each of one pint of fresh milk, one pint of beer, 20 cigarettes per day, the weekly rent of a three bedroomed council house and the running cost of a medium-sized car.

Mr. MacGregor: The information is not available in quite the form requested. Table 6.9 in Social Trends 17 (a copy of which is in the Library of the House) gives figures for a married man on average male (not average male manual) earnings for a variety of commodities for 1971, 1981 and 1985. Data for 1980 are available in table 6.8 of Social Trends 16.

Comparable figures for the average weekly unrebated rent of a three bedroomed council house in England and Wales are : 3 hours 56 minutes in 1971, 3 hours 27 minutes in 1980, and 4 hours 32 minutes in 1985. Data for 1985 are based on average hourly earnings of all males on adult rates of pay, while data for earlier years are based on average hourly earnings of all males aged 21 and over.

VAT

Mr. Gregory asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will state the value added tax position in each European Community state relating to foreign language teaching.

Mr. Brooke: Under the EC sixth VAT directive, most education is exempt from VAT when provided by bodies governed by public law or by bodies with similar objects; in the latter case, the exemption may be subject to a condition that they do not systematically aim to make a profit.

Present information about the practices of member states is as follows:

Belgium: In general supervised teaching is exempt from VAT.

France: Teaching by language schools governed by the relevant public law is exempt.

Ireland: Teaching by an educational establishment —including profit making organisations—is exempt from VAT.

Portugal: Language schools approved by the Minister of Education are exempt from VAT.

Denmark, Italy, Netherlands: Language teaching provided by non-profit making establishments is exempt from VAT; otherwise it is liable to VAT at the standard rate.

Information is not currently available about Germany, Greece, Luxembourg or Spain.

In the United Kingdom, language teaching provided by a non-profit making establishment is exempt from VAT; otherwise it is liable to VAT at the standard rate.

Mr. Fisher asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the net value added tax gains from the sale of tickets for arts events.

Mr. Brooke: It is estimated that the revenue from VAT charged on admissions to theatres, concerts and similar live entertainment was of the order of £40 million in 1985-86.

Mr. Fisher asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the net value added tax gained from the expenditure of foreign tourists in the United Kingdom on the arts.

Mr. Brooke: I regret that information on which to base an estimate is not available.

Mr. Ottaway asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much value added tax receipts have risen in the period 1 October 1986 to 31 January 1987; what was the comparable rise in the same period of 1985-86; and how much of the increase is attributable to penalties for the late payment of value added tax.

Mr. Brooke [*pursuant to his reply*, 24 February 1987]: The information on value added tax receipts is as follows:

Period	*Net receipts £ million*	*Change*	
		£ million	*Per cent.*
October 1984—January 1985	6,959	—	—
October 1985—January 1986	6,893	−66	−0·9
October 1986—January 1987	[1]7,435	+542	+7·9

[1] Provisional.

Receipts in the period October 1984 to January 1985 include an estimated £1 billion attributable to the changes in arrangements for collecting VAT on imports.

In so far as the effects of the introduction of penalties for the late payment of tax are concerned, I regret that I cannot at this time add to the reply my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer gave to the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) on 18 December at column *668-69*.

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the total revenue from value added tax on fuel sales in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available; and what was the percentage change in such revenues on the preceding year in each case.

Mr. Brooke [*pursuant to his reply*, 24 February 1987]: Businesses registered for value added tax are not required to make returns of the tax charged on particular supplies of goods and services, and information of this kind is therefore not directly available. The figures are based on estimates of consumers' expenditure.

Year	*£ Million*	*Percentage change*
1976-77	325	—
1977-78	290	−10·8
1978-79	280	− 3·4
1979-80	425	51·8
1980-81	590	38·8
1981-82	725	22·9
1982-83	805	11·0
1983-84	880	9·3
1984-85	950	8·0
1985-86	1,020	7·4

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the total revenue from value added tax on vehicle service and repair in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available; and what was the percentage change in such revenues on the preceding year in each case.

Mr. Brooke [*pursuant to his reply*, 24 February 1987]: Businesses registered for value added tax are not required to make returns of the tax charged on particular supplies of goods and services, and information of this kind is therefore not directly available. The figures are based on estimates of consumers' expenditure.

Year	*£ Million*	*Percentage change*
1976-77	50	—
1977-78	60	20·0
1978-79	70	16·7
1979-80	110	57·1
1980-81	165	50·0
1981-82	185	12·1
1982-83	190	2·7
1983-84	220	15·8
1984-85	220	0·0
1985-86	225	2·3

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the total revenue from value added tax upon motor vehicle sales in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available; and what was the percentage change in such revenues in the preceding year in each case.

Mr. Brooke [*pursuant to his reply*, 24 February 1987]: Businesses registered for value added tax are not required to make returns of the tax charged on particular supplies of goods and services, and information of this kind is therefore not directly available. The figures are based on estimates of consumers' expenditure on new and used cars and motor cycles, and of business expenditure on cars (the VAT on which is non-deductible).

Year	*£ million*	*Percentage change*
1976-77	255	—
1977-78	315	23·5
1978-79	455	44·4
1979-80	805	76·9
1980-81	1,005	24·8
1981-82	1,035	3·0
1982-83	1,180	14·0
1983-84	1,335	13·1
1984-85	1,410	5·6
1985-86	1,650	17·0

Departmental Computers

Dr. Hampson asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer to which firms his Department has awarded contracts for computer hardware for each year since 1984; and what was the value of each contract.

Mr. Brooke: The following list contains the names of companies with which the Treasury has spent more than £10,000 on computer hardware, in either of the years 1985-86 or 1986-87, with a broad indication of the amounts involved. For reasons of commercial confidentiality, I am not prepared to give details of individual contracts.

Amounts spent				
1985-86				
Over	£1,500,000			ICL
Between	£50,000	and	£150,000	Apollo Computers Limited Comart Computers Limited IBM UK Limited Systime Limited
Between	£25,000	and	£50,000	British Telecom

Amounts spent				
Between	£10,000	and	£25,000	Apricot UK Limited Casu Electronics Harrison Comp Serv. Lexi Systems Logica ROCC Computers Winslow Zygal Dynamics plc
1986-87				
Between	£500,000	and	£1,000,000	ICL
Between	£50,000	and	£150,000	Compel plc Systime Limited
Between	£25,000	and	£50,000	British Telecom IBM UK Limited Logica Micronology Limited
Between	£10,000	and	£25,000	Apollo Computers Limited Cooper Armer Limited Harrison Comp Serv. Sensory INF Systems Winslow

The Treasury also purchased computer hardware worth between £25,000 and £50,000 from HMSO in 1986-87.

Dr. Hampson asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his Department has spent on *(a)* computer hardware and *(b)* computer software for each year since 1984; and what the projected expenditure is for 1987.

Mr. Brooke: The figures for the Treasury are:

Financial Year	*Hardware*	*Software*
	£	£
1985-86	1,942,000	428,000
1986-87[1]	3,000,000	322,000

[1] estimate.

In 1987-88 the Treasury is planning some £5 million capital expenditure on computer systems. It is not possible in advance to split this planned expenditure between hardware and software.

Fuel Excise Duties

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the total revenue from fuel excise duties in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available; and what was the percentage change in such revenues on the preceding year in each case.

Mr. Brooke [*pursuant to his reply* 24 February 1987]: The information is as follows:

Year	*£ million*	*Percentage change*
1976-77	1,964·1	—
1977-78	2,208·0	12·4
1978-79	2,213·2	0·2
1979-80	2,667·4	20·5
1980-81	3,338·0	25·1
1981-82	4,425·3	32·6
1982-83	5,030·3	13·7
1983-84	5,413·8	7·6
1984-85	5,870·5	8·4
1985-86	6,252·8	6·5

Motoring Taxes

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the total revenue from car tax in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available; and what was the percentage change in such revenues on the preceding year in each case.

Mr. Brooke [*pursuant to his reply*, 24 February 1987]: The information is as follows:

Year	*£ million*	*Percentage change*
1976-77	218·0	—
1977-78	285·8	31·1
1978-79	380·6	33·2
1979-80	516·9	35·8
1980-81	483·8	−6·4
1981-82	507·4	4·9
1982-83	597·8	17·8
1983-84	702·8	17·6
1984-85	744·7	6·0
1985-86	863·9	16·0

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the total revenue from all motoring taxes in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available; and what was the percentage change in such revenues on the preceding year in each case.

Mr. Brooke [*pursuant to his reply*, 24 February 1987]: Estimates are as follows:

Year	*£ million*	*Percentage change*
1976-77	3,675·1	—
1977-78	4,267·8	16·1
1978-79	4,557·8	6·8
1979-80	5,812·3	27·5
1980-81	7,133·8	22·7
1981-82	8,708·7	22·1
1982-83	9,867·1	13·3
1983-84	10,782·6	9·3
1984-85	11,690·2	8·4
1985-86	12,684·7	8·5

The figures cover all the main indirect taxes on the purchase and use of motor vehicles—vehicle excise duty,

car tax, excise duty on petrol and derv, and estimated value added tax on new and used cars and motor cycles, petrol and other motoring expenses.

THE ARTS

Foreign Earnings

Mr. Fisher asked the Minister for the Arts (1) what is his estimate of foreign earnings achieved by the arts in the latest financial year for which statistics are available;

(2) whether he will undertake a study to assess the amount of foreign earnings attributable to the arts.

Mr. Luce: This will be covered in the study of the economic importance of the arts which is being carried out by the Policy Studies Institute. Its results are expected to be available later this year.

Arts Council Grant

Mr. Fisher asked the Minister for the Arts whether he will undertake a study of the economic payback which may result from the nominal value of the Arts Council grant.

Mr. Luce: I understand that the Arts Council has commissioned some work on this subject and that a draft report is being considered.

EMPLOYMENT

Venture Capital

77. **Mr. Alex Carlile** asked the Paymaster General what measures he has taken to encourage provision of venture capital for small and growing enterprises; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: The Government's economic policies have created a climate in which enterprise is encouraged and rewarded and people are willing to invest in the wide range of commercial opportunities that now exists. The venture capital market in the United Kingdom has expanded rapidly since 1979. The establishment of the unlisted securities market, the over-the-counter market and the third market have provided easier access to equity capital for small and growing companies.

Specific Government measures to facilitate the supply of finance include the business expansion scheme which offers tax relief to individuals investing in unquoted companies. The venture capital scheme enables income or corporation tax relief to be claimed on losses incurred on disposal of new shares issued by unquoted companies. My Department and the Department of Trade and Industry have also provided support for seminars, conferences and other activities to promote the supply of finance to small and growing enterprises. The small firms merit award for research and technology (SMART) run by the Department of Trade and Industry has assisted small firms to develop projects, and seminars are to be run to enhance their prospects for venture capital investment.

Manufacturing Industry

Mr. Strang asked the Paymaster General how many people are employed in manufacturing industry; and what was the comparable figure seven years ago.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: In December 1986 (the latest date for which figures are available), there were 5,363,000 employees in employment and self employed people in the manufacturing industries in Great Britain. In December 1979 the figure was 7,206,000.

Some of the decrease in the figures will be the result of the re-classification of jobs such as industrial cleaning, catering, computer services and road haulage, previously done by manufacturers' own employees and now done by subcontractors. This developing feature of our economy has the effect of exaggerating the extent of the move from manufacturing to service sector employment.

Enterprise Agencies (West Midlands)

Mr. John Mark Taylor asked the Paymaster General what representations he has received concerning the success of enterprise agencies in the west midlands.

Mr. Trippier: There is increasing recognition of the widening role that local enterprise agencies are playing in the west midlands in encouraging small firm growth and job creation.

The region is well served by a network of 16 agencies. Most recently, agencies have been formed in Cannock and Burntwood, Stafford and Solihull, with impressive support from established local companies.

I am aware of the personal contribution that my hon. Friend has made to the development of the new agency in Solihull. I welcome his involvement and feel sure the agency will provide a significant contribution to the health of the local economic community.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Dubs asked the Paymaster General how many people in London are unemployed; and how many have been without work for over a year.

Mr. Lee: The following information is in the Library. On 8 January 1987, the number of unemployed claimants in the Greater London area was 398,833 of whom 156,988 had been unemployed for over one year.

Mr. Watts asked the Paymaster General how many young people under the age of 18 years are currently registered as unemployed.

Mr. Lee: On 8 January 1987 the number of unemployed claimants aged under 18 years in the United Kingdom was 162,241.

Mr. Mason asked the Paymaster General if he will give the total numbers of men and women employed in Yorkshire and Humberside, South Yorkshire and Barnsley travel-to-work area in 1979, and each succeeding year to date.

Mr. Lee [*pursuant to his reply*, 24 February 1987]: The figures for Yorkshire and Humberside can be given, but employment statistics for counties and smaller areas are available only for those dates when censuses of employment are taken.

The table gives the available information from censuses taken in June 1978, September 1981, September 1984. As results of the 1978 census are not available for the new ward based travel-to-work areas, the figure for Barnsley relate to the area as defined before the 1984 review.

Employees in employment

(thousands)

	June 1978			*September 1981*			*September 1984*		
	Males	*Females*	*All*	*Males*	*Females*	*All*	*Males*	*Females*	*All*
Yorkshire & Humberside	1,186·9	800·5	1,987·4	1,077·4	765·3	1,842·8	1,004·8	769·0	1,773·8
South Yorkshire	339·5	212·9	552·4	303·6	200·4	504·0	not yet available		
Barnsley travel-to-work area	47·5	29·9	77·5	43·8	28·7	72·5	not yet available		

Between censuses, employment statistics are based on small scale sample inquiries which cannot produce reliable results for areas smaller than the standard economic regions. The estimates for the Yorkshire and Humberside region are recorded on page 31 of the supplement published with the February edition of "Employment Gazette."

Mr. Mason asked the Paymaster General what is the up-to-date average unemployment figure for each of the travel-to-work areas in the United Kingdom, specifiying the male, female, long-term unemployed and youth unemployed, separately.

Mr. Lee [*pursuant to his reply*, 24 February 1987]: I am sending the right hon. Member the information requested which is also available from the Library. The information relates to the total numbers of unemployed male and female claimants, the numbers of claimants who had been unemployed for over 12 months and the numbers of unemployed claimants aged under 25 years in each travel-to-work area of the United Kingdom on 8 January 1987.

Mr. Duffy asked the Paymaster General if he will give the total number of men and women employed in Yorkshire, Humberside, South Yorkshire and the Sheffield travel-to-work area in 1979 and each succeeding year to date.

Mr. Lee [*pursuant to his reply*, 24 February 1987, c. *193*]: The figures for the Yorkshire and Humberside region can be given but employment statistics for counties and smaller areas are available only for those dates when censuses of employment are taken.

The table gives the available information from censuses taken in June 1978, September 1981 and September 1984. As results of the 1978 census are not available for the new ward based travel-to-work areas, the figures for Sheffield relate to the area as defined before the 1984 review.

Employees in Employment

Thousands

	June 1978			*September 1981*			*September 1984*		
	Males	*Females*	*All*	*Males*	*Females*	*All*	*Males*	*Females*	*All*
Yorkshire and Humberside	1,186·9	800·5	1,987·4	1,077·4	765·3	1,842·8	1,004·8	759·0	1,773·8
South Yorkshire	339·5	212·9	552·4	303·6	200·4	504·0	not yet available		
Sheffield travel-to-work-area	171·8	110·5	282·3	151·7	104·8	256·5	not yet available		

Between censuses, employment statistics are based on small scale sample inquiries which cannot produce reliable results for areas smaller than the standard economic regions. The estimates for the Yorkshire and Humberside region are recorded on page 31 of the supplement published with the February edition of "Employment Gazette".

Mr. Cash asked the Paymaster General (1) what comparisons are available to him of employment growth within the European Economic Community in the United States of America and Japan;

(2) what comparisons are available to him of the growth in self-employment within the European Economic Community in the United States of America and Japan.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The best comparisons available to me are published by the OECD in "Labour Force Statistics 1964-1984", a copy of which is available in the Library, but all such international comparisons must be treated with care as it is difficult to obtain a consistent basis for the data from each country.

Women Employees (Burnley and Pendle)

Mr. Pike asked the Paymaster General (1) how many women in *(a)* Burnley and *(b)* Pendle are employed in firms with fewer than 10 employees;

(2) how many women in *(a)* Burnley and *(b)* Pendle are employed for less than 20 hours per week;

(3) how many women in *(a)* Burnley and *(b)* Pendle are in employment; and how many began new jobs on or after 1 June 1985.

Mr. Lee: The precise information requested is not available.

Employment statistics for local areas are obtained from censuses of employment and the most recent are for September 1981; the September 1984 census estimates are not yet available for areas smaller than the standard economic regions. Analyses by size of firm or actual numbers of hours worked are not available but, at September 1981, there were 17,400 women employed in the Burnley travel-to-work area (1984 definition) of which 6,400 were working part-time and 11,600 in the Pendle travel-to-work area of which 4,400 were working part-time. Part-time workers are defined as those working not more than 30 hours a week. My Department has no information about the numbers taking up new jobs.

Youth Training

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Paymaster General if he will publish by local area the rates for YTS youngsters getting jobs and the rates for ITeC, YTS, youngsters getting jobs; and whether the Government now intend to reduce the ITeC, YTS, places.

Mr. Trippier: The results of the Manpower Services Commission's regular surveys of young people leaving YTS (including those who leave from ITeC schemes) are placed in the Library of the House each month. I refer the hon. Member to these documents. The Commission is planning to contract for approximately 6,800 first-year and single-year places in ITeCs in 1987-88 (the same number as in 1986-87) and to provide sufficient places for all 1986-87 eligible entrants to complete their second year's training in 1987-88.

Training Scheme Courses (North-East London)

Mr. Leighton asked the Paymaster General if he will make a statement on the Manpower Services Commission's support for training opportunities programme scheme/adult training scheme courses in north-east London and in particular printing courses at the Barking college of technology.

Mr. Trippier: The Government expect the Manpower Services Commission to spend almost £5 million on helping to train around 5,000 individuals through various adult training schemes in North East London in 1986-87. The outlay on fees and allowances for the provision at Barking college, which is only one of the options open to unemployed print workers seeking retraining, is expected to be around £19,000.

Community Programme

Mr. Thurnham asked the Paymaster General if he will provide an estimate of those currently employed in the community programme.

Mr. Lee: On 30 January 1987, the latest date for which statistics are available, there were 248,255 people employed on the community programme.

Earnings

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Paymaster General (1) whether he will publish in the *Official Report*, a table showing the increase in adult male earnings in the manufacturing and non-manufacturing sectors since 1979 and 1973; and if he will give a breakdown by industry for the manufacturing sector;

(2) whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the increase in adult male earnings of skilled and unskilled workers in engineering since 1957, 1967 and 1977, or the nearest available dates on the nearest comparable basis, compared to adult male earnings generally.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Restart

Mr. George Howarth asked the Paymaster general how many people in Merseyside have been interviewed under the restart programme; and of those, how many have since *(a)* obtained jobs, *(b)* joined the community programme, *(c)* joined job clubs, *(d)* taken part in the enterprise allowance scheme, *(e)* undertaken restart courses, *(f)* undergone training, *(g)* taken part in voluntary projects, and *(h)* remained unemployed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Youth Training Scheme

Ms. Clare Short asked the Paymaster General if, pursuant to the reply of 17 February, *Official Report*, column 528, he will specify the basis of the figure of 5 per cent. in relation to the number of YTS entrants with contracts of employment; and if he will give the scope and nature of the sample survey used.

Mr. Trippier: The YTS start certificate, completed for every young person at the outset of a YTS training programme, records whether he or she has a contract of employment. That information, together with other details from the certificate, is recorded in the Manpower Services Commission YTS management information system. The figure of around 5 per cent. for the proportion of entrants with contracts of employment refers to the period April-December 1985.

SOCIAL SERVICES

District Health Authorities

Mr. Forman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will introduce arrangements to enable district health authorities to be fully recompensed without delay for patients whom they treat from outside their areas; and if he will take steps to ensure that these transactions are made on the basis of the average cost per patient.

Mr. Newton: The calculation of regional health authorities' target shares of the available resources already takes account of patients flows from other areas, costed at national average specialty cost per case. These calculations in turn influence allocations year by year. Regions follow the same approach in allocating resources to their districts, but are free to adapt the formula to reflect local circumstances.

Health authorities are also free to reach formal agreements in cases where one provides an agreed level of service to another's patients at an agreed cost and with direct transfer of funds. The National Health Service management board's report on resource allocation recommends further experiments of this sort and my right hon. Friend accepts this recommendation.

Special funding arrangements exist at national or regional level for the most complex forms of treatment, provided in a small number of centres serving a wide population.

Hospital Beds

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he is satisfied with the progress being made in the provision of hospital beds and reductions in the hospital waiting lists in the National Health Service in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: Information on Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

It is the number of cases treated not the number of hospital beds which matters and 983,500 more in-patient cases were treated in 1985 than in 1978. Hospital waiting lists in England are now 79,000 lower than in March 1979. Nevertheless excessive waiting remains a problem in some

areas and for some specialties. All regional health authorities are therefore implementing extensive plans for further progress. Over 100,000 additional patients from in-patient waiting lists will be treated in the coming year from the first year's allocations of the £50 million waiting list fund. Health Service provision is kept under constant scrutiny through the National Health Service planning and review process.

Nurses

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish the number of vacancies of over three months in nursing posts in the National Health Service indicating vacancies by grade and specialty for each of the last three years; and which bodies are responsible for the collection and publication of figures on nursing staff vacancies at national, regional and district level.

Mr. Newton: I regret that detailed information of this nature is not collected centrally. It is a matter for individual health authorities to decide how to record information on vacancies and whether to publish it. However, I am aware of the annual survey of a limited sample of health authorities conducted by the regional health authority chairmen for the Review Body for Nursing Staff, Midwives and Health Visitors. This is not a formal statistical survey but is intended to give a broad indication of the scale and incidence of vacancies. The 1984 and 1985 survey results for specific grades and specialties are given in the tables. Information for the 1986 survey is still being validated.

Proportion of vacancies of more than three months at 31 March to funded posts (WTE)

	Percentage
1984	
Acute[1]	1·8
Mental illness[2]	3·2
Mental handicap[3]	4·5
Maternity[4]	4·1
Community[5]	1·4
1985	
Acute[1]	2·0
Mental illness[2]	2·9
Mental handicap[3]	3·0
Maternity[4]	3·1
Community[5]	2·4

[1] General, geriatric and paediatric areas of work.
[2] Includes community psychiatric nursing staff posts.
[3] Includes community mental handicap nursing staff posts.
[4] Relates to nursing and midwifery staff posts in the hospital and community services.
[5] Relates to nursing staff posts only.

Proportion of vacancies in specific grades within specific specialties

Percentage

	Acute[1]	Mental illness[2]	Mental handicap[3]	Maternity[4]	Community[5]
1984					
Health Visitor	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	20·0
District Nurse	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	23·0
Nursing Sister/Charge Nurse II	16·0	10·0	33·0	18·0	10·0
Staff Nurse	43·0	50·0	29·0	[6]64·0	9·0
Enrolled Nurse[7]	18·0	18·0	30·0	2·0	6·0
Nursing Auxiliaries	14·0	14·0	5·0	8·0	19·0
1985					
Health Visitor	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	9·0
District Nurse	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	49·0
Nursing Sister/Charge Nurse II	15·0	9·0	14·0	27·0	6·0
Staff Nurse	52·0	52·0	47·0	[6]60·0	[8]
Enrolled Nurse[7]	15·0	26·0	24·0	4·0	18·0
Nursing Auxiliaries	13·0	6·0	1·0	3·0	8·0

[1] Relates to posts in general, geriatric and paediatric areas of work.
[2] Includes community psychiatric nursing staff posts.
[3] Includes community mental handicap nursing staff posts.
[4] Relates to nursing and midwifery staff posts in the hospital and community services.
[5] Relates to nursing staff posts only.
[6] Includes a small number of staff nurse posts.
[7] Includes senior enrolled nurse posts.
[8] Insignificant.
n.a. = not applicable.
The percentages have been calculated on unrounded figures and then rounded to the nearest 1·0 per cent.
The information for 1984 and 1985 is not strictly comparable and therefore it would be inadvisable to attempt any comparisons between the two years information shown.

Mr. Simon Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Social Services, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey of 30 January, *Official Report*, column *440*, if he will provide for information about the number of nurses leaving National Health Service employment in the current and in future years to be collected centrally; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: With the implementation of the recommendations of the Körner steering group on health services information, information about the number of nurses leaving National Health Service employment and their destination on leaving will be first collected during the year ending 31 March 1988. Arrangements for the processing and publication of this information are still being finalised.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many health authorities have contracted treatment of patients out to the private sector by using the additional financial resources made available to reduce hospital waiting lists.

Mr. Newton: Fourteen regional or district health authorities have firm proposals to make use of allocations from the waiting list fund for 17 projects involving the private sector. A further five projects are still under consideration.

Local Office Staff

Ms. Harman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what effect the movement of staff from the Camberwell Department of Health and Social Security office at Blenheim grove to premises at London bridge has had upon dealing with urgent needs payments.

Mr. Lyell: Accommodation problems at Blenheim grove have led to the movement of the majority of staff to premises at London bridge. The caller service reopened at Blenheim grove from 28 January 1987. Where it is essential to make urgent payments on the same day these are in the form of food vouchers and small sums of cash. All giro payments are by post from London bridge.

Local Office (Camberwell)

Ms. Harman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when the Camberwell Department of Health and Social Security office at Blenheim grove will have giro writing facilities.

Mr. Lyell: The Department's office at Blenheim grove will have giro writing facilities as soon as refurbishment there is undertaken. The project has been placed at the top of the region's priority list for work in 1987-88. In the meantime, claimants with particularly urgent needs are handed food vouchers and small sums of cash and sent a subsequent giro payment by post.

Ms. Harman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services, what are the most recent figures for the amount of post at the Camberwell office of his Department in Blenheim grove not yet associated with files, outstanding postal claims, single payment claims and other assessment work.

Mr. Lyell: For the four week period ended 10 February 1987 the figures for Camberwell, Blenheim grove, office were as follows:

	Number
Unlinked post	5,293
Outstanding claims	650
Cases with single payment claims outstanding	528
Other assessment work outstanding	923

(A separate figure for postal claims outstanding is not available).

Schizophrenia (Exhibition)

Mr. David Atkinson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if his Department has considered an application for an exhibition relating to schizophrenia to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Services Committee, arrangements have been made with the authorities of the House for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from 2 March to 6 March 1987. My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State has agreed to open the exhibition which is designed to increase hon. Members' awareness of schizophrenia and to introduce them to a newly emerged charity in this field, SANE (Schizophrenia—A National Emergency).

Abortions

Mr. David Atkinson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has as to the maximum number of weeks pregnancy by which an abortion may be carried out in each of the member states of the European Community.

Mr. Newton: I understand that abortion may be carried out in each of the member states of the European Community as follows:

Belgium
The law forbids abortion at any gestational age.

Denmark
1. On request up to 12 weeks.
2. On medical, socio-economic and eugenic grounds after 12 weeks.

Eire
The law forbids abortion at any gestational age.

France
On request up to 10th week of pregnancy.

Germany (Federal Republic of)
1. On medical grounds irrespective of the duration of the pregnancy.
2. On eugenic grounds up to 22 weeks.
3. On social/psychological grounds up to 12 weeks.

Greece
1. Up to 12 weeks in cases of risk to mental health. Up to 20 weeks for eugenic reasons.
Note: legislation to allow abortions on request is pending.

Italy
On medical and socio-economic grounds up to 12 weeks of pregnancy.

Luxembourg
Up to 12 weeks of pregnancy on eugenic, medical and ethical grounds.

Netherlands
On request prior to viability of fetus.

Portugal
On eugenic, medical and ethical grounds up to 12 weeks of pregnancy.

Spain
1. To save the life of the woman or for her psychological wellbeing.
2. If pregnancy is due to rape.
3. If fetus is not of human form, provided the abortion takes place within 22 weeks of gestation.

Benefits

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many claimants received payment for

additional requirements at Brighton and Leicester local offices, respectively, in 1986; and what was the average payment made.

Mr. Lyell: I regret that this information is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the average weekly payment of supplementary benefit made to claimants under the age of 25 years in Brighton, Leicester and in Britain, respectively.

Mr. Lyell: The average weekly payment of supplementary benefit made to claimants under the age of 25 years in Great Britain in December 1984—the latest figures available — was £27·72. Similar information is not available for Brighton or Leicester.

Source: Supplementary Benefit Annual Statistical Enquiry —December 1984.

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the total amount paid to social security claimants in Brighton and Leicester, respectively, for additional requirements in each year since 1979.

Mr. Lyell: I regret that this information is not available.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) whether the supplementary benefit board and lodging allowance for people living in residential care homes includes a specific allocation towards each of the following (i) day care, (ii) purchase of clothing and (iii) holidays;

(2) if he is planning to introduce any extra financial help to people receiving supplementary board and lodging allowance in residential care homes;

(3) how any specific allocations within the supplementary benefit board and lodging allowance for people living in residential care homes are determined;

(4) when he is planning to announce the next increase in supplementary benefit board and lodging allowance for people living in residential care homes.

Mr. Major: The supplementary benefit board and lodging allowance for people in residential care homes contains no specific allocations for particular items of expenditure.

Proposals for increases in benefits for people in homes were announced in my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) on 12 February at column *362*.

Local Office, Birmingham (Notepaper)

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when his local office at Walsall road, Birmingham expects to exhaust the supplies of incorrectly spelt A4-size headed notepaper.

Mr. Lyell: The present stock of headed notepaper is near exhaustion, having lasted six months. A new supply with the correct office address has been ordered.

Homeless People (Health Care)

Mr. Irving asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what steps the Government are taking to ensure that regional health authorities are made accountable for the planning of health care services for homeless people;

(2) what steps he is taking to ensure that his Department co-ordinates and plans health services for single homeless people;

(3) what steps the Government are taking to give attention to the health needs of homeless women;

(4) what steps the Government are taking to ensure that district health authorities, local authorities, social services and family practitioner committees through joint planning will work with voluntary agencies to develop appropriate admission, discharge and aftercare policies to ensure that *(a)* a homeless person will only be discharged after adequate provision has been made for convalescence and after-care, *(b)* a homeless person without a general practitioner will be assigned one and given appropriate information and *(c)* priority will be given to assessing the housing needs of this person;

(5) what steps the Government are taking to make it mandatory for family practitioners' committees to provide primary health care for all sections of the community and to ensure that single homeless people are on registers permanently with general practitioners.

Mrs. Currie: District health authorities are responsible under the Health Services Acts for planning and providing hospital and community health services for their local populations, including homeless people, and are accountable to regional health authorities for doing so. They are required to collaborate with local authorities, the family practitioner service, and voluntary organisations. The Department does not issue guidance centrally to health and local authorities on services specifically for the single homeless. Authorities are expected to plan according to their local needs and circumstances.

Family practitioner committees are responsible for providing primary health care for everyone within their area, and single homeless people are entitled to use the statutory services in the same way as everyone else. However, FPCs are asked to give special attention to those who have difficulties in obtaining general medical services. In addition, the Department is currently supporting research projects which are looking at ways of providing primary health care for vulnerable groups, and also funds a number of voluntary organisations which provide services for single homeless people. The assessment of housing needs is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. If my hon. Friend has any specific cases in mind, I would be grateful if he could write to me about them.

Allowances

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the median average period during which individual recipients are in receipt of: *(a)* attendance allowance and *(b)* mobility allowance.

Mr. Major: I regret that information is not available in the form requested. The latest available information about the periods for which attendance allowance and mobility allowance are awarded is set out in the tables.

(a) Awards of attendance allowance made during 1986

Duration of awards (years)	*Number at higher rate*	*Number at lower rate*
less than 1	547	781
1 and over but less than 2	7,312	11,943
2 and over but less than 3	12,601	19,162

Duration of awards (years)	Number at higher rate	Number at lower rate
3 and over but less than 4	4,905	6,921
4 and over but less than 5	1,641	2,632
5 and over	5,427	9,640
For life	63,955	96,425

(b) Awards of mobility allowance current at 13 February 1987

Duration of award (years)	Number
1	13,180
Over 1 and up to and including 2	24,600
Over 2 and up to and including 3	5,430
Over 3 and up to and including 4	640
Over 4 but not up to age 75	17,310
Up to age 75	379,340
For life under the Mobility Allowance (Vehicle Scheme Beneficiaries) Regulations 1977	25,300

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he proposes to seek to alter present criteria governing rules for *(a)* attendance allowance and *(b)* mobility allowance.

Mr. Major: We have no plans to do so.

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many are in receipt of *(a)* mobility allowance and *(b)* attendance allowance; how many mobility allowance and attendance allowance recipients receive supplementary benefit or are dependants of someone receiving supplementary benefit: and what is his estimate as to the proportion of such people who either recieve a higher rate heating addition for themselves or have one paid to the head of the household on their account for the latest available year.

Mr. Major [*pursuant to his reply*, 4 February 1987, c. 696]: The latest available information is as follows:

1. Number of recipients (thousands)
   (a) Mobility allowance 466 February 1987
   (b) Attendance allowance 585 March 1986

2. Number of supplementary benefit recipients (thousands) with:
   (a) Mobility allowance 37 December 1984
   (b) Attendance allowance 154 December 1984

3. Percentage with supplementary benefit higher rate heating addition
   (a) Mobility allowance 91·7 December 1984
   (b) Attendance allowance 81·3 December 1984

Maternity Payments

Mr. Raynsford asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in Fulham claimed the maternity grant in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: Information on the number of claimants to maternity grant is not available in the precise form requested.

The Fulham constituency is covered by the Department's offices at Chelsea and Kensington although their boundaries are not conterminous with the constituency. Claims for these offices are dealt with at Aldershot out-station. A total of 3,085 maternity grant claims were dealt with at that office during the 1986 calendar year but this number includes claims proper to other offices.

Mr. Raynsford asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in Hertfordshire, West received maternity allowance in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: Information is not available in the form requested, but in the 12 months ending April 1986, the latest year for which figures are available, 1,135 claims to maternity allowance were made at Hemel Hempstead, the Department's office which covers the constituency, although the boundaries are not conterminous.

Mr. Ray Powell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in the Ogmore constituency claimed the maternity grant in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: Information on the number of claimants to maternity grant is not available in the precise form requested.

The Ogmore constituency is covered by the Department's local offices at Bridgend and Rhondda West and their boundaries are not conterminous with the constituency. The number of claims for maternity grant received at those local offices during the 1986 calendar year was as follows:

	Number
Bridgend	1,787
Rhondda West	860

Mr. Ray Powell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in the Ogmore constituency received maternity allowance in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: Information is not available in the form requested, but in the 12 months ending April 1986, the latest year for which figures are available, 1,217 claims to maternity allowance were made at Bridgend and 434 claims at Rhondda West, the Department's offices which cover the constituency, although the boundaries are not conterminous.

Mr. Flannery asked the Secretary of State for Social Services which of the items previously included as essential under the single payment regulations will not be included in the new maternity payment.

Mr. Major: No items are specifically excluded. Recipients of the new maternity payment will be free to spend the money as they wish.

Mr. Ashton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in Bassetlaw constituency claimed maternity grant in the last year for which figures are available; and how many women are expected to qualify for a maternity payment from the Social Fund after April 1987, assuming that the number of births remains constant.

Mr. Major: Information on the number of claimants to maternity grant is not available in the precise form requested.

The Bassetlaw constituency is covered by the Department's local office at Worksop, although its boundaries are not conterminous with the constituency. The number of claims for maternity grant received at the Worksop local office during the 1986 calendar year was 1,476.

It is not possible to predict how many women will qualify for a maternity payment from the Social Fund after April 1987.

Mr. Ashton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in the Lincoln constituency claimed maternity grant in the last year for which figures are available; and how many women are expected to qualify for maternity payment from the Social Fund after April 1987, assuming that the number of births remains constant.

Mr. Major: Information on the number of claimants to maternity grant is not available in the precise form requested.

The Lincoln constituency is covered by the Department's local offices at Lincoln (Orchard Street) and Lincoln (Newland), although their boundaries are not conterminous with the constituency. The numbers of claims for maternity grant received at the 2 Lincoln local offices during the 1986 calendar year were as follows:

	Number
Lincoln (Orchard Street)	2,004
Lincoln (Newland)	1,254

It is not possible to predict how many women will qualify for a maternity payment from the Social Fund after April 1987.

Mr. Ashton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in Nottingham claimed maternity grant in the last year for which figures are available; and how many women are expected to qualify for a maternity payment from the Social Fund after April 1987, assuming that the number of births remains constant.

Mr. Major: Information on the number of claimants to maternity grant is not available in the precise form requested.

However, the number of claims for maternity grant received at the Department's four Nottingham local offices during the 1986 calendar year were as follows:

	Number
Nottingham (Castle Gate)	1,486
Nottingham (David Lane)	1,749
Nottingham (Shakespeare Street)	1,830
Nottingham (Station Street)	2,340

It is not possible to predict how many women will qualify for a maternity payment from the Social Fund after April 1987.

Dr. Gilbert asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in Dudley received maternity allowance in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: Information is not available in the form requested, but in the 12 months ending April 1986, the latest year for which figures are available, 1,593 claims to maternity allowance were made at Dudley North and 1,057 claims at Dudley South, the Department's offices which cover Dudley, although the boundaries are not conterminous.

Dr. Gilbert asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in Dudley claimed the maternity grant in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: Information on the number of claimants to maternity grant is not available in the precise form requested.

However, the number of claims for maternity grant received at the Department's Dudley local offices during the 1986 calendar year was as follows:

	Number
Dudley North	2,555
Dudley South	1,616

Cervical Cancer

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what percentage of the total budget of his Department is used for cervical cancer testing.

Mrs. Currie: Expenditure on cervical cancer screening is not separately identified in health authority accounts. It is estimated that the current costs to the National Health Service in England is in the range of £20-£30 milllion per year. This represents between 0·13 and 0·19 per cent. of the total annual expenditure on the NHS in England, and between 0·04 and 0·06 per cent. of the total budgets for which the Department is responsible in England.

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what is the number of women of those screened for cervical cancer in the last four months in the North East Thames regional health authority, who were found to have cervical dysplasia;

(2) what is the number of women, of those screened for cervical cancer in the last four months in the North East Thames regional health authority, who were found to have cervical carcinoma in situ;

(3) what is the number of women, of those screened for cervical cancer in the last four months in Islington district health authority, who were found to have cervical dysplasia;

(4) what is the number of women, of those screened for cervical cancer in the last four months in Islington district health authority, who were found to have cervical carcinoma in situ;

(5) what is the number of women screened for cervical cancer in Islington district health authority in the last four months;

(6) what is the number of women screened for cervical cancer in the North East Thames regional health authority in the last four months.

Mrs. Currie: Information for this period is not available centrally. The hon. Member may wish to write to the health authorities concerned.

AIDS

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will now provide extra funding for sexually transmitted diseases clinics in response to AIDS.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 February 1987, c. *512-15*]: We have provided £4·4 million to the three health regions where 76 per cent. of AIDS cases have been reported, as additional funding in respect of AIDS for 1987-88. Our plans for that year provide for an increase in overall allocations to health authorities in England of £626 million, which is 2·2 per cent. above forecast general inflation. Authorities will also retain the benefit of cash

released through their cost improvement programmes, which are planned to achieve £150 million in the current year. Health authorities are expected, when allocating these resources, to have regard to any pressures on STD clinics arising from AIDS. On 23 December my right hon. Friend wrote to all district health authority chairmen telling them of the importance we attach to the provision of adequate resources for these services.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what account has been and will be taken of AIDS in determing the size and distribution of joint finance.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 February 1987, c. *512-13*]: Allocations to regions of joint finance are made on the basis of populations weighted to take account of the elderly, mentally ill and mentally handicapped. A bias is also given towards inner cities. AIDS is not at present taken into account in determining the size and distribution of joint finance, but the Government will keep under review the means of funding services for AIDS patients in the future, in the light of further discussion about the most appropriate pattern of care including care in the community.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the 10 health authorities which have experienced the most demand on their services from AIDS patients; and if he will give for each the total revenue expenditure in 1982-83 and 1985-86 and the revenue budget for 1986-87 and 1987-88.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 February 1987, c. *512-13*]: Information is not available at district level, which is presumably what the hon. Member had in mind. The table sets out the regional distribution of AIDS cases and the corresponding figures for revenue spending, or allocations for all regional health authorities in England. For the reasons given in the notes to the table, the expenditure and allocation figures are not directly comparable.

Region	*Number of cases reported to communicable disease surveillance centre*[1]	*Total revenue expenditure on hospital and community health services*[2] *(£ thousands)*		*Initial revenue cash limits*[3] *(£ thousands)*	
		1982-83	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*
Northern	20	520,838	620,085	658,469	699,786
Yorkshire	7	583,406	699,526	739,814	786,599
Trent	10	696,747	843,155	906,746	970,216
East Anglian	5	288,951	358,247	381,174	411,602
North West Thames	337	633,215	728,848	757,300	786,508
North East Thames	127	800,677	914,188	955,859	996,092
South East Thames	56	700,421	807,525	836,239	874,233
South West Thames	15	530,393	608,276	636,615	710,025
Wessex	16	418,407	506,941	542,455	580,446
Oxford	6	334,669	402,374	425,349	454,746
South Western	9	507,281	603,266	649,376	688,642
West Midlands	15	809,722	973,915	1,038,509	1,114,355
Mersey	10	436,241	507,924	533,750	564,742
North Western	26	729,550	860,336	903,633	959,886
Total All Regions	659	7,990,517	9,434,607	9,965,288	10,597,878

[1] Up to end January 1987.
[2] Expenditure figures are taken from regional health authorities annual income and expenditure accounts.
[3] The revenue cash limits shown are the initial allocations notified to regional health authorities. They can fluctuate significantly throughout the financial year (eg due to revenue to capital transfers, inter authority transfers, central adjustments) and therefore are not comparable with outturn expenditure figures.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what financial support has been made available by his Department to the Terrence Higgins trust;

(2) what is his Department's total grant sought by and given to the Terrence Higgins trust in each year since the trust's formation.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 February 1987, c. *512-13*]: The Department's grants to the Terrence Higgins trust totalled £35,500 in 1985-86 and £118,610 for 1986-87.

For 1985-86, the first year for which the trust sought a grant, its application was met in full. For 1986-87, the trust initially submitted a provisional application for over £600,000. The level of grant subsequently awarded was agreed following detailed discussions with the trust on the areas which could be supported within the Department's grant-making powers. We are currently considering the appropriate level of grant for 1987-88.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what consultation took place with the Terrence Higgins trust before its telephone number was put on the AIDS leaflet.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 February 1987, c. *512*]: I regret that no consultations were held with the Terrence Higgins trust before including its telephone number in the national AIDS leaflet. However, discussions were held with the trust in December about the increasing pressure on its telephone lines as a result of greater public concern about AIDS due to the Government's public education campaign. As a result we have agreed to meet in full the costs of new telephone lines and equipment for the trust.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many health authorities have drawn up action plans on AIDS; if he will list them; and if he will place the action plans in the Library.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 February 1987, c. *512-13*]: Every district health authority has submitted a plan of action for combatting AIDS to the Department in response to our request in January of last year. These are not intended for publication, but the hon. Member will be aware that the AIDS Control Bill currently before the House provides for publication of annual reports by health authorities concerning their work in this field.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement about the circumstances in which two nurses carrying the AIDS virus have been reinstated following their earlier dismissal; what is the general practice with regard to the employment of nurses carrying the AIDS virus; how many such cases are currently known to him; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 February 1987, c. *512*]: Information about the health of individual employees is confidential between that employee and the employing health authority.

Health authorities are expected to follow the advice in the leaflet "AIDS and Employment", issued by the Department of Employment and the Health and Safety Executive, in connection with the employment of staff who are infected with the human immunodeficiency virus.

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what role Her Majesty's Government envisage for general practitioners in combating the spread of AIDS; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: The educative role of the general medical practitioner in containing the disease by counselling his patients is an important part of the fight against AIDS. The greater part of the care of the patient who is HIV positive will be provided in the community. The Department is organising a conference on community care for AIDS sufferers to be held next month and informal discussions have been taking place with representatives of the medical profession on the contribution that general medical practitioners can make.

Life Expectancies

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the current life expectancies at birth by social class on a regional basis; and what were the comparative figures in 1977 and 1967.

Mrs. Currie: I regret that the information requested is not available.

Elderly People (Wessex)

Mr. Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what account he proposes to take in reviewing resource allocations for the Wessex area of the proportion of elderly people in Wessex in general and East Dorset in particular, in relation to the national average, and of the continuing migration of retired people to this area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: The Resource Allocation Working Party (RAWP) formula, used to calculate each region's target share of the available resources, is based on each region's projected population for the year of allocation. This population is weighted to reflect the use made by different age-sex groups of different health services (and a number of further adjustments are then made). The existing arrangements therefore already reflect the circumstances of regions such as Wessex, with a higher than average proportion of elderly people in their populations. The recent report on the review of the RAWP formula recommends that the arrangements be further refined by the introduction of a separate age-band in the formula for people aged 85 and over.

The allocation of resources to district health authorities is a matter for regions, which are expected to follow the same principles as the national RAWP formula. My hon. Friend may like to contact the chairman of the Wessex regional health authority about resource allocations to East Dorset.

Unanswered Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to provide substantive replies to the questions from the hon. Member for Oldham, West of 4 February on National Health Service hospital beds, 26 January on exceptionally severe weather payments, 4 February on mobility and attendance allowances, 4 February on National Health Service treatment statistics, 30 January on community care expenditure, 21 January on death statistics, 15 January on health expenditure, international comparisons, and 12 January on National Health Service expenditure.

Mr. Newton: For the replies to the hon. Member's questions about National Health Service expenditure on 12 January, exceptionally cold weather payments on 26 January, National Health Service treatment statistics on 4 February, I refer him to the replies given to him on Monday 23 February and Tuesday 24 February.

For the replies to his questions about death statistics on 21 January, community care expenditure on 30 January, mobility and attendance allowances on 4 February, I refer him to the replies given to him today.

I regret that I cannot yet give the hon. Member full replies to his other questions about expenditure on contract services on 12 January, certain international comparisons on 15 January, and on NHS beds on 4 February. These will be provided as soon as possible.

Patents (Amendment) Bill

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what commitment has been entered into by Her Majesty's Government in relation to the passage of the Patents (Amendment) Bill, currently in Committee in the House of Lords.

Mr. Pattie: I have been asked to reply.

In April last year the Government announced their decision to remove pharmaceutical patents from the scope of the licence of right provisions in schedule 1 of the Patents Act 1977. Following an offer by Lord Northfield in November to introduce a Bill with this aim, the Government undertook to provide drafting assistance.

Mortality Statistics

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the number of actual deaths in each week from 1 January to 31 March each year since 1979,

what was the expected number of deaths for each of those weeks based on historical experience, and what was the percentage difference between the two.

Mrs. Currie [*pursuant to her reply*, 21 January 1987, c. *623*]: Monitoring of weekly deaths using the current method began in January 1983, and figures from that date are shown in the tables. I shall let the hon. Member have a further reply giving figures for the earlier years when the calculations have been completed. An explanation of the methods used to calculate the expected numbers of deaths is given in "Population Trends No. 34", a copy of which is in the Library.

Number of deaths at age 1 year and over registered each week (actual deaths), expected deaths based on experience of previous ten years and percentage differences week 1 to week 13 1983-1987
England and Wales
Weekly deaths 1983—Aged 1 year and over

Week number	Week ending	Actual deaths (a)	Expected deaths (b)	Percentage difference[1]
1[2]	January 7	13,237	12,541	5·55
2	January 14	13,744	13,882	−0·99
3	January 21	12,513	13,244	−5·52
4	January 28	12,522	12,982	−3·54
5	February 4	12,389	12,720	−2·60
6	February 11	13,601	12,556	0·36
7	February 18	13,435	12,868	4·41
8	February 25	13,737	13,212	3·97
9	March 4	13,966	13,240	5·48
10	March 11	13,117	13,026	0·70
11	March 18	12,051	12,652	−4·75
12	March 25	11,348	12,437	−8·76
13[2]	April 1	11,110	12,152	−8·57

[1] $\frac{(a)-(b)}{(b)} \times 100$

[2] Because of Christmas, new year and easter, these weeks have been averaged.

Weekly deaths 1984—Aged 1 year and over

Week number	Week ending	Actual deaths (a)	Expected deaths (b)	Percentage difference[1]
1[2]	January 6	11,909	12,542·3	− 5·05
2	January 13	12,184	13,883·6	−12·24
3	January 20	12,106	13,244·8	− 8·60
4	January 27	12,439	12,982·9	− 4·19
5	February 3	12,205	12,721·3	− 4·06
6	February 10	11,791	12,557·0	− 6·10
7	February 17	11,488	12,869·1	−10·73
8	February 24	11,803	13,213·0	−10·67
9	March 2	12,203	13,241·1	− 7·84
10	March 9	12,266	13,027·1	− 5·84
11	March 16	11,749	12,652·8	− 7·14
12	March 23	11,996	12,306·9	− 2·53
13	March 30	12,211	12,341·8	− 1·06

[1] $\frac{(a)-(b)}{(b)} \times 100$

[2] Because of Christmas, new year, this weeks has been averaged.

Weekly deaths 1985—Aged 1 year and over

Week number	Week ending	Actual deaths (a)	Expected deaths (b)	Percentage difference[1]
1[2]	January 4	11,759	12,325·7	−4·60
2	January 11	13,578	13,698·7	−0·88
3	January 18	13,716	13,047·6	5·12
4	January 25	14,635	12,832·7	14·04
5	February 1	13,730	12,673·2	8·34
6	February 8	12,533	12,589·0	−0·44
7	February 15	12,890	13,012·0	−0·94
8	February 22	13,905	13,338·6	4·25
9	March 1	14,330	13,400·6	6·94
10	March 8	13,964	13,103·0	6·57
11	March 15	13,103	12,653·7	3·55
12	March 22	13,329	12,373·6	7·72
13	March 29	13,202	12,298·1	7·35

[1] $\frac{(a)-(b)}{(b)} \times 100$

[2] Because of Christmas and new year, this week has been averaged.

Weekly deaths 1986—Aged 1 year and over

Week number	Week ending	Actual deaths (a)	Expected deaths (b)	Percentage difference[1]
1[2]	January 3	11,627	12,287·5	− 5·38
2	January 10	14,368	13,597·6	5·67
3	January 17	13,700	12,981·6	5·53
4	January 24	13,411	12,903·9	3·93
5	January 31	12,986	12,724·2	2·06
6	February 7	12,915	12,588·1	2·60
7	February 14	13,551	12,911·7	4·95
8	February 21	14,612	13,284·6	9·99
9	February 28	14,773	13,424·5	10·05
10	March 7	15,555	13,072·8	18·99
11	March 14	13,698	12,510·1	9·50
12	March 21	12,855	12,226·0	5·14
13[2]	March 28	11,418	12,218·2	− 6·55

[1] $\frac{(a)-(b)}{(b)} \times 100$

[2] Because of Christmas, new year and easter, these weeks have been averaged.

Weekly deaths 1987—Aged 1 year and over

Week number	Week ending	Actual deaths (a)	Expected deaths (b)	Percentage difference[1]
1[2]	January 9	11,658	12,139·9	−3·97

[1] $\frac{(a)-(b)}{(b)} \times 100$

[2] Because of Christmas, new year and easter, these weeks have been averaged.

Community Care

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list total expenditure on community care by (i) each district health authority, and (ii) each local authority social service department for each year since 1979, showing separately expenditure on private residential and nursing care.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 30 January 1987, c. *441*]: Tables giving the available information have been placed in the Library.

Hepatitis

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has as to which European Economic Community countries test blood for the HIV (human immunodeficiency) virus.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 9 February 1987, c. *129*]: In the United Kingdom every blood donation is tested for antibodies to the human immunodeficiency

virus. The World Health Organisation has advised that all countries in the European Community have taken measures to test all blood donations for HIV.

Expenditure

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give the per capita spending on health and personal social services in cash terms and at 1986-87 prices each year since 1979 to the latest available date for *(a)* all ages, *(b)* births, *(c)* 0 to 4 years, *(d)* 5 to 15 years *(e)* 16 to 65 years, *(f)* 65 to 70 years and *(g)* 75 years and over giving the amount spent on (i) personal social services, (ii) family practitioner services, (iii) hospital and community health services and (iv) total in England.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 4 February 1987, c. *700*]: Estimates of gross current expenditure per head of population on health and personal social services, in cash and at 1986-87 prices, for each year between 1979-80 and 1984-85, the latest year for which these estimates are available are given in the table. I regret that the age breakdown which is routinely available does not exactly match that requested.

These figures are derived through successive estimations starting with the Department's programme budget analysis, details of which are provided annually to the Social Services Committee and are published by the committee in minutes of evidence associated with its report on public expenditure on the social services. Expenditure on each of the services identified is then apportioned to different age groups on the basis of usage statistics derived from a variety of sources. For the earlier years, in the absence of suitable data, the apportionments for some services were based on assumptions which were subsequently revised in the light of new information.

Estimated gross current expenditure per head of population (England)

£ (cash)

	All age groups	*Births*	*0-4*	*5-15*	*16-64*	*65-74*	*75+*
Personal Social Services							
1979-80	35	15	45	45	10	55	210
1980-81	40	15	55	55	15	60	260
1981-82	45	20	60	65	15	65	275
1982-83	50	20	65	70	15	65	305
1983-84	55	20	70	75	20	75	330
1984-85	60	25	75	75	20	80	345
Family Practitioner Services							
1979-80	35	40	30	25	35	45	85
1980-81	45	50	40	30	40	60	105
1981-82	50	60	50	40	45	65	115
1982-83	60	65	55	50	50	75	125
1983-84	65	70	60	55	55	85	135
1984-85	70	80	70	60	60	100	159
Hospital and Community Health Services							
1979-80	115	625	120	50	65	220	545
1980-81	145	790	145	60	80	290	710
1981-82	160	915	150	70	85	325	770
1982-83	175	1,005	160	75	90	340	840
1983-84	185	1,025	160	75	95	370	875
1984-85	195	1,075	175	80	100	395	925
Total for above services							
1979-80	185	680	195	120	110	320	840
1980-81	230	855	240	145	135	410	1,075
1981-82	255	995	260	175	145	455	1,160
1982-83	285	1,090	280	195	155	480	1,270
1983-84	305	1,115	290	205	170	530	1,340
1984-85	325	1,180	320	215	180	575	1,420

Estimated gross current expenditure per head of population (England)

£ (1986-87 prices[1])

	All age groups	*Births*	*0-4*	*5-15*	*16-64*	*65-74*	*75+*
Personal Social Services							
1979-80	55	25	75	75	20	90	345
1980-81	60	25	80	80	20	80	365
1981-82	60	25	80	80	20	85	350
1982-83	60	25	80	85	20	80	365
1983-84	65	25	80	85	20	85	375
1984-85	65	25	80	85	20	85	375
Family Practitioner Services							
1979-80	60	65	50	40	55	75	140
1980-81	65	70	55	45	60	80	145
1981-82	65	75	60	55	60	85	150

	All age groups	Births	0-4	5-15	16-64	65-74	75+
1982-83	70	80	70	60	60	90	145
1983-84	75	80	70	65	65	100	150
1984-85	80	90	75	70	65	110	165
Hospital and Community Health Services							
1979-80	190	1,035	195	80	105	365	910
1980-81	205	1,110	205	85	115	405	1,000
1981-82	205	1,170	190	90	110	415	985
1982-83	205	1,200	190	85	110	405	1,000
1983-84	210	1,170	185	85	110	420	1,000
1984-85	210	1,175	190	90	110	430	1,010
Total for above services							
1979-80	305	1,125	320	195	180	530	1,395
1980-81	330	1,205	340	210	195	565	1,510
1981-82	330	1,270	330	225	190	585	1,485
1982-83	335	1,305	340	230	190	575	1,510
1983-84	350	1,275	335	235	195	605	1,525
1984-85	355	1,290	345	245	195	625	1,550

[1] Adjusted in line with the GDP deflator at market prices.

Royal Liverpool Hospital

Mr. Loyden asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what plans he has to seek to reduce the waiting list for patients awaiting treatment at the Royal Liverpool hospital.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 February 1987, c. *510*]: Liverpool district health authority is to receive £252,000 from the Mersey region's allocation from the waiting list fund for 1987-88. This will mean that 970 extra patients will be treated at the Royal Liverpool hospital, along with 80 at Broadgreen hospital and some 70 at Alder Hey children's hospital. The projects funded include the provision of a new ward and additional theatre sessions in urology and the elimination of the waiting list for paediatric spinal disorders.

Blood Products

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his Department's assessment of the total cost to date attributable to heat-treating imported blood products; if he will list the hospitals where these costs have been incurred giving in each case the costs incurred; how much of the total costs have been met by *(a)* district health authorities, *(b)* regional health authorities and *(c)* special allocations from his Department.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 February 1987, c. *510*]: Imported factor VIII for haemophiliacs is heat-treated during manufacture. It is not possible to estimate reliably the proportion of the cost of factor VIII which is attributable to heat treatment. Estimation is made difficult because the unheated product is no longer available to provide a comparison and because regional health authorities negotiate different prices for the different products available. Our broad estimate is that heat treatment has added an additional £2 million to the cost of factor VIII purchased in 1986-87.

Health authorities are responsible for the provision of care for haemophiliacs through a national network of haemophilia centres, six of which are designated reference centres and have each received an additional allocation of £60,000 specifically for AIDS counselling. A further £280,000 has been allotted for distribution in 1987-88. Information on individual centre's costs is not held centrally.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 26 February 1987

TRANSPORT

Highway Routes (Inquiries)

Mr. Cash asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will amend the existing planning regulations so that *(a)* his decision in relation to inquiries affecting highway routes and related matters should be accompanied by reasons and *(b)* the inspector's decision should be accompanied by reasons; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The regulations governing highways inquiries procedures are the Highways (Inquiries Procedure) Rules 1976 (SI 1976 No. 721).

Under these rules, the Secretary of State is required to notify objectors and others of his decision and the reasons for it. The rules also require the inspector to report to the Secretary of State his conclusions and recommendations, if any, or his reasons for not making any recommendations. In practice, the inspector's conclusions amount to the reasons for his recommendations.

There are no plans to amend these rules.

If my hon. Friend has a particular case in mind, perhaps he will write to me.

Sunderland-Carlisle Road

Mr. Clay asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will *(a)* list the proposed completion date of each section of the Sunderland-Carlisle trunk road, *(b)* indicate the local authority areas in which each section is situated and *(c)* state the amount and type of funding received from the European Community for each section.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The information requested for the A69 Carlisle-Tyneside trunk road (formerly the Carlisle-Sunderland trunk road) is as follows. The schemes listed are those recently completed; under construction; or in preparation.

(a) *Scheme*	*(b)* *Completion Date*	*(c)* *Local Authority Area*	*(d)* *Amount of EEC Grant Received*	*(e)* *Type of Grant*
A69 Kingsway Flyover Junction	November 1985	Gateshead MBC	£1·02M	ERDF
A69 Cross Lane Junction	March 1986	Gateshead MBC	£0·67M	ERDF
A69 Eighteen Lodge Improvement	November 1987	Gateshead MBC	[1]—	—
Newcastle Western Bypass	October 1990	City of Newcastle	[1]—	—
A69 Norsley-Corbridge Improvement Scheme	December 1988	Tynedale DC	This scheme does not qualify for ERDF because it is not in an Assisted Area	
A69 Warwick Bridge Bypass	Mid 1990	City of Carlisle	These schemes do not qualify for ERDF because they are not in an Assisted Area	
A69 Haltwhistle Relief Road	1992	Tynedale DC		
A69 Brampton Bypass	1992-93	City of Carlisle		

[1] ERDF aid for these schemes has been sought, but grant is not payable until the work has been completed.

Drink-Driving (Campaign)

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give the latest statistics on the effectiveness of his drink-driving advertising programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Complete statistics on the level of drinking and driving and casualties over the Christmas period are not yet available. A full analysis will be included in "Road Accidents in Great Britain 1986: The Casualty Report" to be published later this year.

Stansted Airport

Mr. Bowen Wells asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give the numbers of passenger and aircraft movements at Stansted airport over the last 10 years to date.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The information is as follows:

Stansted airport

	Terminal passengers[1]	*Aircraft movements*[1]
1976-77	290,951	3,879
1977-78	291,818	4,179
1978-79	329,521	4,691
1979-80	344,351	4,937
1980-81	261,307	3,229
1981-82	273,463	6,155
1982-83	298,637	7,733
1983-84	357,180	8,593
1984-85	546,776	12,773
1985-86	504,368	14,155

[1] Source: BAA Annual Report and Accounts.

Harbours (Dangerous Substances)

Sir Bernard Braine asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is the current position concerning the draft Dangerous Substances in Harbour Areas Regulations.

Mr. Spicer: I have laid these regulations before Parliament today. They will come into force, for the most part, on 1 June 1987.

The regulations and associated code of practice will replace nearly 300 sets of byelaws made under the Explosives Act 1875 and the Petroleum (Consolidation) Act 1928 and the whole or parts of some other harbour byelaws or local Acts.

They will, along with current Merchant Shipping legislation, provide comprehensive controls over the carriage, loading and unloading of all dangerous substances in harbours and harbour areas.

Slow-moving Vehicles

Mr. Michael Brown asked the Secretary of State for Transport what measures he proposes to lessen the hazard of slow-moving vehicles using high speed roads.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: This is a problem that has caused concern especially on major roads. The Department will shortly be consulting interested organisations on a proposed amendment to the lighting regulations to require slow moving vehicles to use amber warning beacons when travelling on unrestricted dual carriageway roads.

EMPLOYMENT

Pay Rates

Mr. Dalyell asked the Paymaster General what representations he has received about differential pay rates in different parts of Britain.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have received a number of letters on this issue since giving my lecture at the City university and business school on 11 February.

Trade Union Reform

Mr. Evans asked the Paymaster General when he intends to publish his latest proposals for trade union and industrial relations reform.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I refer the hon. Member to the statement I made to the House on Tuesday 24 February at column 146.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Forth asked the Paymaster General if he will give the percentage unemployment figure for the constituency of Mid-Worcestershire for June 1983 and January 1987.

Mr. Lee: Unemployment rates are only calculated by the Department for self-contained labour market areas. The smallest such areas are travel-to-work areas.

Mr. Bermingham asked the Paymaster General what is the total number of people registered as unemployed and available for work in St. Helens, South at the latest date available.

Mr. Lee: The following information is in the Library. On 8 January 1987, the number of unemployed people claiming unemployment benefit, supplementary benefit or national insurance credits in the St. Helens, South constituency was 7,642. Availability for work is a condition for receipt of these benefits and credits.

Mr. Bermingham asked the Paymaster General what is the total number of people who have been unemployed for over 12 months in St. Helens, South at the latest date available.

Mr. Lee: The following information is in the Library. On 8 January 1987, the number of claimants who had been unemployed for over one year in the St. Helens, South constituency was 3,798.

Mr. Bermingham asked the Paymaster General what is the total number of people who are presently on the Government's special employment and training schemes in St. Helens, South at the latest date available.

Mr. Lee: It is not possible to give a precise total figure for the St. Helens, South constituency because of the various bases on which local information is collected. At the latest available date, the number of people participating in the employment, training and enterprise measures in the St. Helens area were:

	Number	*Date*
Community Programme	1231	(January)
Community Industry	83	(January)
Enterprise Allowance Scheme	821	(February)
Job Release Schemes	73	(January)
New Workers Scheme[1]	1,484	(February)
Young Workers Scheme	45	(February)
Job Splitting Scheme	5	(February)
Voluntary Projects Programme	382	(December)
Adult Training Programmes	307	(February)
YTS	2,023	(February)

[1] The New Workers Scheme figures are for Lancashire.

Mr. Sheerman asked the Paymaster General if he will publish in the *Official Report* the numbers of 16 to 25-year-olds in Leicestershire participating in November 1986 in *(a)* the YTS, *(b)* the community programme, *(c)* the new workers scheme and *(d)* the enterprise allowance scheme.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: On 30 November 1986 the number of 16 to 25-year-olds in Leicestershire participating in YTS and the enterprise allowance scheme was 4,892 and 237 respectively. On 28 November 1986 there were 2,292 participants in the community programme in Leicestershire. Information is not available on how many of these were under 25; they were all aged 18 or over.

On 30 November 1986 there were 551 participants in the new workers scheme aged 18 and 19 in Leicestershire and Northampton. Separate figures are not available for Leicestershire.

Mr. Robert C. Brown asked the Paymaster General how many persons resident in Newcastle upon Tyne, North constituency are at present employed on a Government scheme.

Mr. Lee: The Government operate over 30 employment, enterprise and training measures which are available to people in the Newcastle area. It is not possible to give a precise figure for the Newcastle upon Tyne, North constituency because of the various bases on which local information is collected. The schemes which people participate as employees are as follows together with the numbers on the schemes in the Newcastle area at the latest available date.

	Number	*Date*
Community Programme	2,386	January
Community Industry	157	January
New Workers Scheme[1]	579	February
Young Workers Scheme	138	February
Job Splitting Scheme	39	February

[1] The new workers scheme figures are for Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland.

Restart

Dr. Godman asked the Paymaster General what is the latest estimate of the cost of the restart scheme in *(a)* Great Britain, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Strathclyde region and *(d)* Greenock and Port Glasgow.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Mr. Sheerman asked the Paymaster General if he will publish in the *Official Report* the list of restart menu options that will be offered to unemployed 18 to 25-year-olds when the job training scheme is extended outside the current 10 pilot areas.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Industrial Disputes

Mr. Favell asked the Paymaster General how many days were lost through industrial disputes in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available in *(a)* the public sector and *(b)* the private sector.

Mr. Lee: The statistics are as follows

Working days lost through industrial disputes
United Kingdom: Thousand

Year	Public sector	Private sector	Total
1977	2,087	8,055	10,142
1978	1,433	7,972	9,405
1979	5,052	24,423	29,474
1980	9,825	2,139	11,964
1981	1,866	2,400	4,266
1982	3,378	1,935	5,313
1983	1,831	1,923	3,754
1984	23,866	3,270	27,135
1985	5,591	810	6,402
1986[1]	874	977	1,852

[1] Figures for 1986 are provisional.
Disputes are classified by sector as at the time of that occurrence.

Skillcentres

Mr. Pike asked the Paymaster General if he will list in the *Official Report* the skillcentres in Lancashire in June 1979 and at present, and the number of places provided at each centre for both dates.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Earnings

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Paymaster General whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the increase in adult male earnings in the manufacturing and non-manufacturing sectors since 1979 and 1973; and if he will give a breakdown by industry for the manufacturing sector.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to his reply*, 25 February 1987]: Estimates from the new earnings survey for manufacturing and non-manufacturing industries are as follows:

Percentage change in average gross weekly earnings for full-time adult male employees whose earnings were not affected by absence
GB April

	1973-86	1979-86
Manufacturing[1]	+400·7	+104·1
Non-manufacturing[2]	+404·4	+110·5

[1] Divisions 2-4 of the 1980 Standard Industrial Classification.
[2] Divisions 0, 1 and 5-9 of the 1980 Standard Industrial Classification.

Because of the change from Standard Industrial Classification 1968 (SIC 1968) to the Revised Standard Industrial Classification 1980 (SIC(R) 1980) adopted for the 1983 New Earnings Survey, figures for individual industries are not available on a comparable basis for the years requested. Part C of the New Earnings Survey Reports for 1973, 1979 and 1986 contain tables giving details of earnings within individual industries according to the prevailing industrial classifications. Additionally, the 1983 Report presents the 1982 results for individual industries on the SIC(R) 1980 basis. Copies of these reports are available in the Library.

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Paymaster General whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the increase in adult male earnings of skilled and unskilled workers in engineering since 1957, 1967 and 1977, or the nearest available dates on the nearest comparable basis, compared to adult male earnings generally.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to his reply*, 25 February 1987]: I have used a variety of sources to endeavour to produce a worthwhile reply as no one source is available which covers all the information requested. The resulting discontinuities in data sources over the period in question means that any comparisons can only provide a broad indication of trends. However, estimates from the information available are set out in the table:

Percentage change in gross weekly earnings of full-time adult[1] male manual workers

	1963-85	1967-85	1977-85
Engineering (GB)[2]			
All skilled employees	+819	+632	+133
All labourers	+842	+663	+120
All manufacturing[3] (UK)	+886	+679	+132

[1] Men aged 21 and over 1963, 1967 and 1977. Males on adult rates of pay 1985.
[2] Figures for 1963, 1967 and 1977 are derived from the survey into earnings by occupation in Engineering and relate to June. Figures for 1985 are based on the New Earnings Survey.
[3] Figures relate to October for all years shown.

Notes:
1963, 1967 figures cover orders III-XVI of the 1958 Standard Industrial Classification.
1977 figures covers orders III-XIX of the 1968 Standard Industrial Classification.
1985 figures covers divisions 2-4 of the 1980 Standard Industrial Classification.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Crimes of Violence

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the average figures served for life sentences imposed for offences of murder in the years 1960, 1970, 1975 and each year from 1980 to 1985.

Mr. Mellor: I shall reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the median average sentences imposed for mugging offences in each of the past 10 years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: Statistics do not separately distinguish offences of "mugging", a term which has no legal definition; most offences of the type often referred to as "mugging" are recorded as robbery. The most frequent sentence given to those convicted of robbery has been immediate imprisonment. Information about the distribution of the lengths of such sentences is published annually in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales, Supplementary Tables Volume 2" (in table 2.4 of the 1985 volume under offence classification 34). In each of the years 1976 to 1985 the median sentence of unsuspended imprisonment for offences of robbery was about 2½ years.

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has as to how many offenders found guilty of crimes of violence against the person, including murder, in each of the past 10 years were unemployed at the time the offence was committed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: The information collected centrally on court proceedings does not include the employment status of the offender.

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has as to how many offenders found guilty of crimes of violence, including sexual offences, relate their crimes to motivation stimulated by television programmes.

Mr. Mellor: Such information is not available. However, the Home Office research and planning unit recently published a paper, "Television Violence: A Note on Recent Research" (Research Bulletin 22/1986, a copy of which is in the Library) which reviews the studies undertaken in recent years on the relationship of television violence to aggression.

Social Security Fraud

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many offenders found guilty of social security fraud during each of the past 10 years were immigrants from *(a)* the West Indies, *(b)* India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, *(c)* South Africa, *(d)* Eire, *(e)* the United States of America and *(f)* European Economic Community countries.

Mr. Mellor: It is not possible from the records of the results of court proceedings to distinguish the nationality or place of birth of offenders.

Autocrime

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of cars reported stolen in each of the last three years in *(a)* Lancashire, *(b)* Greater Manchester, *(c)* Merseyside and *(d)* Cheshire.

Mr. Mellor: Numbers of recorded offences of theft or unauthorised taking of a motor vehicle in each police force area are published annually in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales, Supplementary Tables" (Table S.3.1 in volume 3 of the issue for 1985).

Private Prisons

Mr. Amess asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy towards the possibility of introducing a system of private prisons in Britain.

Mr. Mellor: The Government are awaiting the views of the Home Affairs Select Committee, which I understand has looked at private prisons in the United States as part of its wider inquiry into prisons and penal reform. Before finalising our policy we shall consider those views together with evidence from other countries.

Prison Officers

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the number of extra prison officers needed to be able to reduce to zero the average 16 hours overtime worked at present per week by prison officers.

Mr. Mellor: A straight mathematical calculation is not possible since it would have to take account not only of the effectiveness or otherwise of the working arrangements in force but also of the work at present not done in establishments. Under the group working arrangements in the Department's fresh start proposals, we envisage being able to maintain and even extend existing regimes for prisoners with existing numbers of staff working a substantially reduced average working week, with the prospect of further efficiency improvements once the new systems are in place.

Police Computers

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what evidence he has of abuses of the police national computer by private detection agencies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney General informs me that the inquiries to which he referred in his reply to the hon. Member on 30 January (*Official Report*, c. *406*) are continuing. We are not aware of any other allegations of abuse of information held on the police national computer by private detection agencies.

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria underline the Government's decision to provide for the non accessible retention of computer fingerprint records rather than their destruction; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Automatic fingerprint recognition systems rely for their efficacy on being able to search automatically a database of fingerprint images held on optical discs or other storage media. There are serious technical difficulties in trying to destroy an image held on such a database without adversely affecting adjacent images. The only practical way of ensuring that a particular fingerprint image is not accessible by an operator is by destroying the reference to it in the index to the database and this is what is proposed in clause 112 of the Criminal Justice Bill.

Fraud Investigation Squad

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria he uses to assess the value for

money provided by the activities of the fraud investigation squad of the Metropolitan police in the absence of information about the number of investigations which result in conviction.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: This is an operational matter for the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis. For the kind of information collected to indicate how effectively the Metropolitan and City police company fraud branch is performing I refer the hon. Member to page 45 of the report of the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis for 1985 (Cmnd. 9790). The number of convictions is not necessarily a useful indicator because of the length of time between charge or summons and conviction.

Traffic Police (Privatisation)

Mr. Nicholas Baker asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will bring forward proposals to put out to private contractors the enforcement under police supervision of traffic speed limits on motorways; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No. The responsibility for enforcement of speed limits is, and should remain, a matter for the police service.

Police (Freemasonry)

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will initiate an inquiry into the incidence of freemasonry within the police force and its implications for the efficiency of the police; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend has no plans to do so.

Fire Service

Mr. Simon Hughes asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any proposals to extend participation of retained firemen in the fire service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Audit Commission Occasional Paper No. 1 about value for money in the fire service addressed issues relevant to the retained fire service. These, together with other issues raised by the paper, are being considered by the Department. The local authority associations, as the representatives of the employers, and the fire service trade unions will also be looking closely at the recommendations.

Police (Numbers)

Mr. Hirst asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the number of serving police officers in England and Wales at the latest available date; and what was the comparable number in May 1979.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: There were 121,550 police officers in England and Wales on 31 December 1986 and 111,493 in May 1979. This is an increase of 10,057 since May 1979.

Government Data Network

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what financial, technological and service improvements attachment of his Department's computer systems to the Government data network will bring to his Department.

Mr. Hurd: The proposed Government data network would be a technological improvement, which would lead to both financial and service benefits to my Department. The cost of the network will not be known until tenders have been evaluated later this year. Economies of scale in the development, implementation and running of a shared network are expected, compared with the costs that would be incurred if each Department used public services or developed a network for its own needs.

Police Forces (Control)

Mr. Stern asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received in favour of placing police forces under the operational control of local authority nominees; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Our attention has been drawn on a number of occasions to proposals for giving local authorities control of police operations. We believe that the present arrangements provide best for effective policing and for the protection and freedom of the citizen.

Racial Incidents

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of reported cases of racial incidents in the London borough of Waltham Forest in 1986; in how many cases arrests were made; in how many cases charges were brought; and how many convictions were secured.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I am informed that 66 racial incidents were reported to the police in the London borough of Waltham Forest (including that part of Epping forest in the Chingford division) during 1986. In eight of these cases arrests were made.

Further details could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Detoxification Centres

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy, following his discontinuation of funding for the experimental detoxification centres in Leeds, Birmingham and Aberdeen, on establishing similar detoxification centres; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: The Government remain committed to the policy of diverting drunkenness offenders from the criminal justice system. The establishment of detoxification centres or overnight shelters at Government expense has not been found a cost-effective means to this end; but we do not exclude the possibility of approving under section 34 of the Criminal Justice Act 1972 treatment centres funded from other sources.

Alcohol and Drug Abuse

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give the figures on expenditure on alcohol abuse and on drug abuse for each of the last 10 years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: I regret that information is not available in the form requested since in such areas as enforcement and treatment much expenditure on alcohol and drug misuse is not separately identified.

Drink Driving Offences

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to combat the incidence of drink driving offences other than the annual advertising campaign; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The enforcement of the law on drinking and driving is a matter for the police. They appreciate the importance of effective enforcement throughout the year. The Home Office maintains regular contact with the Department of Transport about publicity and other preventive measures which complement police enforcement and is represented on the road traffic law review chaired by Dr. Peter North which is examining, inter alia, various aspects of the law relating to drinking and driving.

Missing Children

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish in tabular form, by police force area, such information as is available to him on the number of children under 17 years who were reported as missing in each of the past five years, and to date; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The only information readily available is that from the Metropolitan police missing persons bureau. Their records are not comprehensive because cases are normally reported to the bureau only when the person has been missing for at least 48 hours and because other forces do not report cases to the bureau as a matter of course. However, I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the number of children aged 17 or under reported to the bureau as missing for each of the past five years was as follows:

	Sex	*Metropolitan Police*	*Provincial police and Interpol*	*Total*
1982	Boys	1,550	135	1,685
	Girls	1,823	141	1,964
1983	Boys	1,340	147	1,487
	Girls	1,534	174	1,708
1984	Boys	1,416	138	1,554
	Girls	1,733	153	1,886
1985	Boys	1,283	115	1,398
	Girls	1,699	121	1,820
1986	Boys	1,291	147	1,438
	Girls	1,586	142	1,728

Information by police force area is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Police Forces (Civilianisation)

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from chief constables on the civilianisation initiatives in each of the police force areas, the number of posts so far civilianised, the number of further posts expected to be civilianised in the current year and the number of posts earmarked for civilianisation after the current year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: It is estimated that in provincial forces in England and Wales civilianisation resulted in the release of about 500 police officers for operational work in 1985 and about 580 in 1986. As my right hon. Friend stated on 20 May 1986 in reply to a question from the hon. Member for Westminster, North (Mr. Wheeler) *Official Report*, columns *124-25*, following a review by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary of the manpower needs of provincial forces, we expect to see phased increases in civilian staff of approximately 1,350 over the next few years resulting in the release of at least 650 police officers to operational duty.

In the Metropolitan police in the financial year 1985-86 civilianisation resulted in the release of 162 police officers to operational duties. The estimated number for 1986-87 is 108 and for 1987-88 the estimate is 160.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list the three police authority areas with the highest murder and attempted murder rates in each of the last three years;

(2) if he will list in the *Official Report* the three police authority areas with the highest rate of rape incidents in each of the last three years.

Mr. Mellor: I shall reply as soon as possible.

Theft

Mr. Maclennan asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his latest information on the incidence of theft from farm houses and buildings; and what information he has about the comparable position in 1983.

Mr. Mellor: This information is not collected centrally.

News International Plant, Wapping

Mr. Benn asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis as to what chemical substances were used by the police at the News International plant at Wapping on 24 January; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Commissioner informs me that when demonstrators attempted to set fire to a lorry some police officers used halon fire extinguishers. No other chemical substances were carried or used by his officers.

Police Officers (Ethnic Minority Recruitment)

Mr. Nicholls asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress is being made in encouraging the recruitment of higher numbers of black and Asian police officers; and what initiatives he is taking to stimulate further ethnic minority recruitment.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: All police forces with substantial minority communities are anxious to increase the number of ethnic minority police officers and a variety of new initiatives have recently been taken to improve recruitment. As a result, the number of ethnic minority police

officers in England and Wales increased from 386 in June 1982 to 761 in December 1985 and to 898 in December 1986. A conference of the officers in charge of recruitment in all police forces in England and Wales was held in October 1986 to consider what more might be done and this produced some useful ideas, which we are taking forward. An additional staff officer to Her Majesty's chief inspector of constabulary has also been appointed, with specific responsibility for co-ordinating the efforts of forces and for following up the conclusions of the conference.

Neighbourhood Watch Schemes

Mr. Thurnham asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many neighbourhood watch schemes are currently operating in the north-west; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: There are more than 9,500 neighbourhood or home watch schemes in the Cheshire, Cumbria, greater Manchester, Lancashire and Merseyside police force areas, the number having more than doubled over the past 12 months. This increase in the number of schemes indicates the increasing public awareness of the part they can play in preventing crime. Neighbourhood or home watch schemes provide a focus for action for those who wish to work against crime.

Electoral Register

Mr. Michael Cocks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what evidence he has that the electoral register is being used by criminals to identify potential victims such as women on their own.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are aware of suggestions that some criminals may use the electoral register as one of a number of possible sources of information about householders, but have not received specific information to suggest this has happened, except in two cases which have occurred in the Bristol area where the police think that the electoral register was used in this way.

Mr. Michael Cocks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will seek to amend the Representation of the People Regulations 1986 so that people wishing to consult the electoral register should do so in the presence of the custodian;

(2) if he will seek to amend the Representation of the People Regulations 1986 so that whilst the electoral register must be freely available to the general public, people who wish to consult it should be asked for their name and address and proof of identity.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are not persuaded that such amendments should be made. Such restrictions could discourage members of the public from inspecting the electoral register, which provides an important check on its accuracy.

Rape

Sir George Young asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has on recent trends in sentencing in rape cases.

Mr. Hurd: Court sentencing figures for 1986 are not yet complete but more recent information is available on the effective length of all the sentences (including consecutive sentences) of persons received into prison for the principal offence of rape. It suggests a lengthening of sentences since the Lord Chief Justice's guideline judgment of 21 February 1986 in R v. Billam: in March-September 1986, about 45 per cent. of those entering prison under sentence for rape or attempted rape had an effective sentence length of more than five years; in the corresponding period a year earlier, the proportion was about 20 per cent.

Draize Eye Irritancy Test

Mr. Gale asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will issue guidance on the minimisation of animal suffering in the conduct of the Draize eye irritancy test.

Mr. Hurd: Guidelines on this subject have been prepared and recently issued to establishments where this testing is carried out. Copies of the guidelines have been placed in the Library.

Because of the importance of the eye, and its vulnerability to damage, safety testing of substances which may come into contact with the eye is essential and to date no satisfactory replacement for the Draize eye test exists. None the less, there is much which can be done to minimise the use of animals in the test and any suffering which may occur. The guidelines will ensure the adoption of best practice, covering the use of prior screening in vitro and with a single animal, use of reduced doses and dilution of test materials, inspection and withdrawal of animals from study and the use of analgesics. I am sure that the guidelines—which have been endorsed by the Advisory Committee on Animal Experiments—will result in the improvement of animal welfare whilst allowing essential safety testing to continue.

Police (Wrongful Acts)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the amounts paid in out of court settlements of claims arising from the wrongful arrests by metropolitan police officers in 1986; what were the amounts paid under awards made by courts in 1986; and the number of cases concluded in 1986.

Mr. Douglas Hogg [*pursuant to his reply*, 11 February 1987, c. *218*]: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that a total of £330,332·50p was paid in settlements out of court arising from allegations of wrongful acts by Metropolitan police officers. In 1986, 126 civil actions were concluded of which 52 were settled out of court, 41 dealt with at court, 22 struck out and 11 discontinued.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for 1986 the cases involving Metropolitan police officers where civil damages have been awarded and where, following the conclusion of the case, details of the court's findings have been forwarded to the Director of Public Prosecutions for further action.

Mr. Douglas Hogg [*pursuant to his reply*, 11 February 1987, c. *218*]: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that of 41 civil actions dealt with at court in 1986 damages were awarded against the Metropolitan police for wrongful acts by police officers in 10 cases as follows:

Wrongful arrest	*Damages awarded (£)*
1. Assault	26,000
2. Unlawful imprisonment	11,000
3. Assault	3,500
4. Assault and false imprisonment	2,000
5. Assault and false imprisonment	1,836
6. Assault, false imprisonment, malicious prosecution	1,400
7. Assault and false imprisonment	750
8. Assault	200
9. Assault	100
10. Unlawful imprisonment	50

None of these cases was referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions for further action.

Mrs. Cynthia Payne

Mr. Clay asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis as to the total expenditure on the investigation of the case of Mrs. Cynthia Payne; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg [*pursuant to his reply*, 23 February 1987, c. *28*]: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the overtime and other additional costs to the Metropolitan police of the investigation of the case of Miss Cynthia Payne was £2,300

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Ministerial Meeting (Bonn)

Mr. Maclennan asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the subjects discussed during his ministerial meeting in Bonn on 25 February.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend's meetings with the Federal German Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Agriculture covered a number of topics of mutual interest in European Community and International affairs. Details of such discussions are confidential.

WALES

Welsh Language

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales how soon after 31 March he hopes to be able to make the outcome of his consultations on new Welsh language legislation available to hon. Members.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: I do not expect to be in a position to make any statement on this matter before the autumn at the earliest.

Energy Conservation

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many people in Wales are employed full-time in jobs directly connected to conservation of energy; and what was the number in each of the last seven years.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: This information is not available.

Football Stadiums

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make available extra funding to enable Welsh football clubs playing in the English League to meet the costs of converting 50 per cent. of stadium capacity to member-only enclosures.

Mr. Mark Robinson: Football league clubs in Wales as well as England will be expected to introduce membership schemes for at least 50 per cent. of each ground's capacity at their own cost. A team of representatives comprising the League, the Football Association, the Football Trust and independent advisers will be available to help and assist those clubs in need of guidance.

Welsh Health Promotion Authority

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will now announce the chairman of the Welsh Health Promotion Authority.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: I have asked Dr. Simon Smail, the current chairman of the Health Education Advisory Committee for Wales, to become the Chairman of the new authority when it is established. Dr. Smail has agreed. I expect to announce the membership of the authority shortly.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Sixth Form Students

Mr. Evennett asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proportion of sixth form students study at (i) state schools, (ii) independent schools and (iii) state sixth form colleges.

Mr. Dunn: The numbers and proportions of pupils aged 16 and over in school studying at maintained secondary schools, independent schools and sixth form colleges in England in January 1986 were:

	Number of pupils aged 16 and over[1]	*As a percentage of total*
Maintained Secondary Schools[2]	240,426	65
Independent Schools	66,634	18
Sixth Form Colleges	64,231	17
Total	371,291	100

[1] Ages at previous 31 August.
[2] Excluding Sixth form Colleges.

Students (Full-time Education)

Mr. Evennett asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) how many pupils study for GCE A-levels; and what proportion of their year group they represent;

(2) what proportion of pupils remain in full-time education over the age of 16 years; how many enter the sixth form; and how many enter further education or non advanced further education.

Mr. Dunn: The number and proportion aged 16, 17 and 18 remaining in full-time education in schools and further education colleges and those studying for GCE A-levels are as follows:

Full-time pupils/students in England, 1985-86

Numbers (thousands) aged[1]	*On 'A' level courses*		*On all courses*	
	School[2]	*F & HE*[3]	*School*[4]	*F & HE*[3]
16	140	17	218	129
17	131	20	140	97
18	17	13	20	110
as percentage of population aged:				
16	19	2	30	18
17	18	3	19	13
18	2	2	3	14

[1] Ages at 31 August 1985.
[2] The age breakdown of the number of pupils on 'A' level courses in maintained secondary and independent schools has been estimated.
[3] Full-time students on non advanced and advanced courses in further education colleges and universities. Includes those YTS trainees on full time courses on the day of the count and for a significant part of their courses; and sandwich students in further education.
[4] Numbers of pupils of these ages in maintained secondary, independent and special schools.

Local Education Authorities (Reception Classes)

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list those local education authorities which staff reception classes with a teacher and a nursery nurse or ancillary and those which staff such classes with a teacher only.

Mr. Dunn: Information on the staffing of reception classes is not collected centrally.

GCSE

Mr. Hardy asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will report on the progress with the first general certificate of secondary education examinations; what consultation he is having on this matter; and what action he is taking to respond to representations made.

Mrs. Rumbold: Last September some 600,000 pupils started courses which will lead to the first GCSE examinations in summer 1988. Direct Government funding has provided:

(i) for books and equipment, £20 million in 1986-87 and £10 million in 1987-88; and

(ii) for in-service teacher training, £9·5 million in 1986-87 and £15 million in 1987-88.

The Government's plans for the financial year 1987-88 provide for specific expenditure on GCSE non-teaching costs of £100 million.

Discussions are being held with GCSE examining groups, LEAs and teachers' associations, and the information gained will help to determine future resource needs and policy developments.

Mr. Hardy asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list those regions and those subjects in which assessment structures for general certificate of secondary education examinations were not in operation by the end of 1986.

Mrs. Rumbold: None. All GCSE syllabuses give details of the associated schemes of assessment and examination structure, and mode 1 syllabuses in all subjects were distributed to schools before the end of 1986.

Mr. Hardy asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will request Her Majesty's Inspectors to carry out an immediate review of the operation of the general certificate of secondary education courses in secondary schools.

Mrs. Rumbold: HMI has four main strategies for monitoring the implementation of the GCSE:

(i) through the normal programme of school visits;

(ii) through specialist subject visits;

(iii) through termly discussions with LEA officers, inspectors and advisers; and

(iv) through the annual analysis of LEAs' expenditure policies

In addition HMI is evaluating GCSE in-service teacher training.

Her Majesty's Inspectors

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Yeovil on 11 February, *Official Report*, column *219*, concerning a review of procedures regarding publication of reports by Her Majesty's Inspectors, what changes have been made since December 1985 concerning ways of accelerating procedures; what are the present procedures; when he expects the current review of procedures to be completed; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: Her Majesty's Inspectorate has asked a firm of management consultants to undertake a review of their procedures for the processing of inspection reports. Although some small changes have recently been introduced, and individual reports are given priority where appropriate, the procedures remain largely what they were in December 1985. The consultancy should be completed shortly after Easter. It will cover, and make recommendations about, arrangements for the preparation and clearance of reports as well as their printing and distribution.

Science Budget

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science, pursuant to his answer of 18 February, *Official Report*, columns *660-61*, to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conway (Mr. Thomas), if he will indicate the proportion of the total amount allocated from his Department's science budget to universities in each year since 1979 which is represented by the amount allocated to the constituent colleges of the university of Wales.

Mr. Walden: The Research Councils have been asked for this information. I shall reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science, pursuant to his answer of 18 February, *Official Report*, columns *660-61*, to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Thomas), if he will indicate the proportion of the total amount allocated from

his Department's science budget to institutions other than universities in each year since 1979 which is represented by the amount allocated to such institutions in Wales.

Mr. Walden: The research councils have been asked for this information. I shall reply as soon as possible.

Alzheimer's Disease

Mr. Beith asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) whether the Medical Research Council is currently sponsoring any research project involving the injection of foetal cells into sufferers of Alzheimer's disease or related conditions;

(2) whether the Medical Reearch Council is aware of any existing or proposed project within the United Kingdom which involves the injection of foetal cells into sufferers of Alzheimer's disease or related conditions.

Mr. Walden: I understand that the Medical Research Council is not currently sponsoring any such research, nor is the Council aware of any existing project within the United Kingdom. However the MRC is aware that a number of United Kingdom research workers are discussing the possibility of collaborating with a Swedish group which proposes to graft foetal cells into patients suffering from Parkinson's Disease.

School Librarians

Mr. Fisher asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many chartered librarians are employed as school librarians in England; what is the percentage of school librarians in England possessimg chartered status; and what is the equivalent figure in Scotland.

Mrs. Rumbold: I understand that in Scotland some 160 chartered librarians are employed in school libraries and about 70 per cent. of school librarians possess chartered status. Equivalent figures for England are not available. However the report of the Working Party on School Library Services, "School Libraries: The Foundations of the Curriculum" (published in 1984), estimates for England and Wales that some 600 chartered librarians work in primary and secondary schools and that 7 per cent. of secondary schools have chartered librarians.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Aid-trade Expenditure

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list in the *Official Report* the proportion of overseas aid expenditure from each Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development member state routed through aid-trade provisions or similar arrangements for the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Chris Patten: The debate within OECD over aid for commercial purposes has focused on mixed credits and less concessional tied aid loans (those with a grant element of less than 50 per cent.). Figures for these transactions by OECD countries are available on a commitment but not an expenditure basis. The figures below are an annual average for 1982-85: as commitment figures vary considerably from year to year, depending on the timing of contract and aid agreement signatures, the figures for any one year may not give a representative picture.

Aid used in mixed credits and less concessional tied aid loans as a percentage of gross bilateral aid commitments

Country	*Per cent.*
United States	2·5
Canada	5·5
Germany	9·0
France	19·0
Italy	39·0
Japan	11·0
United Kingdom	17·0

Source: Development Assistance Committee of the OECD.
Notes:
(1) a mixed credit is a combination of aid and commercial finance (usually export credit).
(2) tied aid includes any aid that is in effect tied to procurement of goods and services from the donor country, or from the donor country and a restricted number of other countries.

"Women and Development"

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what respresentations he has had regarding the Overseas Development Agency's booklet, "Women and Development".

Mr. Chris Patten: None. Most of the few comments we have had have been favourable.

Nicaragua

Mr. Ground asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has anything to add to the answer from the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Wallasey (Mrs. Chalker) of 10 February, *Official Report*, column *172*, regarding the award of aid to Nicaragua; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten: I regret that the reply by my hon. Friend was incorrect in respect of the aid provided by the European Community to Nicaragua. The figures should read:

	£
1981	5,010,000
1982	4,150,000
1983	4,520,000
1984	10,990,000
1985	9,760,000

Gibrepair Shipyard, Gibraltar

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much money has been paid to the Gibraltar Government for the purposes of refurbishing and maintaining the Gibrepair shipyard in Gibraltar; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten: So far we have paid £29,845,175 to the Gibraltar Government out of the £30·4 million development aid grant for the conversion of the former naval dockyard into Gibrepair Ltd.

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if, in view of the report by Price Waterhouse on Gibrepair Ltd., it is his intention to provide some of the additional finance required to retain this shipyard as the major employer in the dependent territory; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten: The Price Waterhouse report on Gibrepair Ltd. was commissioned and financed by the

Gibraltar Government who are responsible for any follow up action on it. As I told the House on 3 November 1986 at column 685, we agreed in 1983 to provide up to £28 million towards the establishment and initial working capital of Gibrepair Ltd. In 1986 we agreed to allocate a further £2·4 million for increased capital costs as a final contribution to the project. This position is unchanged by the Price Waterhouse report.

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much money has been paid out of Her Majesty's Government's funds to Appledore Ltd., managing agents at Gibrepair Ltd. shipyard in Gibraltar, since July 1983; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten: Fees payable under the management contract between Appledore International Ltd. and Gibrepair Ltd. are not financed from Government funds. The costs of previous and separate consultancy arrangements since July 1983 between the Government and Appledore for the necessary groundwork before commercialisation of the shipyard are a matter of commercial confidence.

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) whether, during the recent meeting in London with Sir Joshua Hassar, Chief Minister of Gibraltar, he discussed the financial difficulties of Gibrepair; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what discussions he has had with the Gibraltar Government on the future funding of Gibrepair Ltd.; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten: My right hon. and learned Friend did not discuss this matter during the recent meetings in London with the Chief Minister of Gibraltar. The future funding of Gibrepair Ltd. is a matter for the Gibraltar Government, the owners.

Palestine Police Force (Pensions)

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the number of retired members of the former British Mandate Palestine Police Force currently in receipt of pensions from Her Majesty's Government; how many widows of former Palestine policemen are receiving a pension; what is the current level of such widow's pension; and what steps have been taken to maintain its level.

Mr. Chris Patten: There are at present 700 overseas officers and 747 local officers in receipt of a Palestine pension. The number who served in the police force could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Seven widows of former Palestine policemen are in receipt of a pension. The current level of these pensions ranges from £367 to £1,928; they are uprated in accordance with the provisions of the United Kingdom pension increase legislation.

Expatriate Public Servants (Pensions)

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the number of former expatriate public servants currently in receipt of pension under the Sierra Leone Order 1960 (S.I. 2415); how many of them are in receipt of indexation; and in how many cases are discretionary payments to individuals envisaged in schedule 1(1) being made under the instructions of the former governor.

Mr. Chris Patten: 131 expatriate officers are in receipt of a pension under the Sierra Leone Order 1960 (S.I. 2415). All but two are in receipt of an index-linked supplementary pension. It is not known how many, if any, of these pensions were awarded in accordance with the discretionary provision of schedule 1(1) of the scheme. The information could be retrieved only at disproportionate cost.

DEFENCE

DROPS

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment was made by his Department's demountable rack off-loading pick-up system selection team in 1983 about the effect on the size of storage areas of the ability to stack loaded flatracks; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: None.

Departmental Computers

Dr. Hampson asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what his Department has spent on *(a)* computer hardware ad *(b)* computer software for each year since 1984; and what is the projected expenditure for 1987;

(2) to which firms his Department has awarded contracts for computer hardware for each year since 1984; and what was the value of each contract.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Information is not kept in the form requested. Many computer purchases form part of larger Defence projects, and are not separately identifiable. In addition, software is frequently included in what are essentially hardware procurements. Details of individual contract values are commercial in confidence.

Territorial Army

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Ynys Môn of 5 February, *Official Report*, column *798*, what percentage reductions in vehicle holdings and the use of ammunition are being considered in his Department's review.

Mr. Freeman: It is not normal practice to reveal detailed changes which may be made to our vehicle and ammunition holdings as a result of regular reviews designed to make the most cost-effective use of available resources.

Winston and Ritchie Camps

Mr. Bill Walker asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of Winston camp, Larnark, and Ritchie camp, Kirknewton.

Mr. Freeman: We have recently agreed in principle to make these sites available to the United States forces for use as peacetime medical storage facilities and as hospitals which would be activated in the event of war.

Exports

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 18 February, *Official Report*, columns *686-7*, if he will give the corresponding figures for the number of jobs estimated to be supported by United Kingdom defence exports for each year since 1978.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The numbers of jobs estimated to be supported by United Kindom defence exports are as follows:

	Number
1978	130,000
1979	120,000
1980	140,000
1981	140,000
1982	140,000
1983	[illegible],000
1984	120,000
1985	110,000

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 18 February, *Official Report*, columns *686-7*, if he will give *(a)* a regional breakdown and *(b)* a breakdown by type of job of the jobs estimated to be supported by United Kingdom defence exports.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is not possible to break down the figures in the ways requested.

Gibrepair Limited

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list in the *Official Report* the type of contract and the individual value of such contracts awarded to Gibrepair Limited of Gibraltar since July 1983, listing each contract individually.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Gibraltar Shiprepair Limited did not come into being until 1 January 1985. Since that time, contracts have been awarded for the following Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessel refits: RFA Sir Lancelot, RFA Sir Caradoc, RFA Engadine, RFA Bayleaf, RFA Appleleaf, RFA Brambeleaf and RFA Blue Rover.

It is not our practice to detail individual contract prices which are commercial in confidence. However, the total value of this work amounts to over £11·5 million.

In addition, period contracts have been awarded since 1 January 1985, the first for 15 months and the second for 12 months, each valued at about £1 million, for work on small naval support craft based at Gibraltar. The current contract expires on 31 March and it is expected that it will be renewed.

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) whether Gibrepair in Gibraltar has sufficient skilled labour to carry out its 1987 programme of frigate modernisation; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will consider placing the 1987 frigate modernisation programme work with British shipyards; if he will consider Gibrepair Limited for the 1988 programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Modernisation of warships (including frigates) is undertaken continuously as a minor part of their refit programmes. It is not practicable to undertake modernisations as a separate entity as this would involve an increase in non-operational time. All warship refit work is planned to be undertaken at Devonport and Rosyth and it is not intended to place any of it with Gibraltar Shiprepair Limited.

Libya (Raid)

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration Her Majesty's Government gave, when examining the United States request for the use of United Kingdom bases for the raid on Libya in April 1986, to the capability of the United States of America to carry out the raid from aircraft carriers.

Mr. Stanley: I have nothing to add to what was said by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in her statement on 15 April 1986 at columns *729-30*.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Michael Brown asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will specify the options being studied for the disposal of low, intermediate and high level nuclear waste arising from the dismantling of redundant submarines;

(2) if he will list those parliamentary constituencies within which options for the disposal of low, intermediate and high level nuclear waste arising from the dismantling of redundant submarines are being studied.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I will write to the hon. Member.

War Medals

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current delay between application for, and award of, 1939 to 1945 war medals.

Mr. Freeman: The celebration of world war 2 anniversaries in 1984 and 1985 resulted in greatly increased public interest in claiming world war 2 campaign medals. Currently the period between application and award of medals normally varies between 12 and 16 months.

Ulster Defence Regiment

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many soldiers were on guard duty when the Coleraine Ulster Defence Regiment base was raided during the weekend of 21 to 23 February;

(2) whether guard dogs patrol the Ulster Defence Regiment barracks at Coleraine;

(3) whether closed circuit television is used on the perimeter fence of the Ulster Defence Regiment base at Coleraine;

(4) whether any regular soldiers supervise or are employed in guarding the Ulster Defence Regiment base at Coleraine;

(5) whether alarm systems are used at Coleraine barracks to prevent unauthorised opening of the armoury;

(6) whether closed circuit television is used to observe the armoury at Coleraine Ulster Defence Regiment base.

Mr. Stanley: It is not our practice to disclose details of security arrangements at particular military establishments.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence what measures he intends to take to improve security at Ulster Defence Regiment establishments.

Mr. Stanley: Security procedures at military establishments in the Province are regularly assessed. A review of security measures at all UDR bases is now taking place and appropriate action is being, and will be, taken as necessary.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement concerning the theft of arms and ammunition from the Ulster Defence Regiment base at Coleraine.

Mr. Stanley: During the early hours of 22 February a number of armed and masked men gained access to the 5 UDR base at Coleraine. They overpowered the guards and stole a large quantity of arms and ammunition from the armoury. Shortly after they made their escape in a military Transit van. The alarm was raised and the vehicle was later stopped by a police patrol on the M2 motorway near Templepatrick. The RUC arrested the driver and recovered all the stolen weapons and ammunition. Seven other men were also later arrested by the RUC. One was subsequently released. Further police investigations are in hand. A military board of inquiry has been established.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many soldiers were at Coleraine Ulster Defence Regiment barracks at the time it was raided during the weekend of 21 to 23 February.

Mr. Stanley: For security reasons I cannot disclose numbers of the security forces personnel at given locations.

Trident

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will estimate the level of Trident spending in each year up to 1985-86 using 1986-87 prices and the exchange rates involved in the payments in question.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 23 February 1987]: The level of Trident spending in each year up to 1985-86, using 1986-87 prices and the exchange rates involved in the payments in question, is as follows:

	£ million
1980-81	4
1981-82	41
1982-83	88
1983-84	112
1984-85	184
1985-86	285

United States Forces

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those military installations used by United States forces in the United Kingdom at which there is no Royal Air Force station commander.

Mr. Stanley [*pursuant to his reply*, 23 February 1987]: There is an RAF station commander responsible for every military installation made available to the United States forces in this country with the exception of the Holy Loch, which falls within the sea area controlled by Commodore Clyde, and the NATO armament depots at Glen Douglas and Broughton Moor.

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the functions of the Royal Air Force station commanders at United States bases in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Stanley [*pursuant to his reply*, 23 February 1987]: The primary duties of the RAF station commander and liaison officer at an RAF station made available to the United States forces are as follows:

a. The RAF commander is the senior RAF representative at the station and has the status, powers and responsibilities of a commanding officer under Queen's regulations for the Royal Air Force in respect of all RAF personnel and in respect of civilians except members of the Ministry of Defence police.

b. The RAF commander advises the United States commander on all RAF matters and maintains close liaison with all British

authorities, including local government, Service and civilian authorities and with local residents generally. He also maintains regular contact with the senior RAF liaison officer at HQ Third Air Force.

c. The RAF commander attends United States staff meetings and keeps himself informed of any major changes in the base task or organisation as well as major building programmes and future building plans. He makes arrangements where necessary for the transfer or demolition of surplus RAF buildings, convening and presiding over siting and takeover boards.

d. The RAF commander is responsible for authorising the use and control of buildings housing hazardous substances. He advises the United States commander on RAF regulations governing the handling, storage and transportation of explosives within the United Kingdom.

e. The RAF commander provides guidance and all possible assistance to the community relations adviser and resolves with the United States commander any difficulties that the community relations adviser may encounter. He is responsible for receiving, investigating and replying to all complaints from British civilian sources.

f. The RAF commander is responsible for seeking security assistance if required at the station and ensuring that measures to secure the station are closely coordinated with the United States commander.

g. Where the United States commander is responsible for subsidiary stations, the authority and responsibility of the RAF commander at the station extend to those stations.

PRIME MINISTER

Official Secrets Act

90. **Mr. Dalyell** asked the Prime Minister if she will set up an inquiry into the guidelines to be followed by Law Officers in consulting ministerial colleagues about the basis for warrants and prosecutions under the Official Secrets Act.

The Prime Minister: No.

Teaching Company Scheme

97. **Mr. Rathbone** asked the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on co-ordination between the Departments of Trade and Industry, the Department of Education and Science, and the Treasury regarding the funding of the teaching company scheme; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Government funding for the very successful teaching company scheme is provided through the budgets of the Department of Trade and Industry, the Science and Engineering Research Council, the Economic and Social Research Council and the Northern Ireland Office. Each is responsible for determining its overall financial commitment, whilst approval of individual programmes is co-ordinated by the teaching company management committee within the Science and Engineering Research Council. The Treasury is not directly involved in the co-ordination of funding for the scheme.

Engagements

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 26 February.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 26 February.

Mr. Leigh asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 26 February.

Mr. Pike asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 26 February.

Mr. Greenway asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 26 February.

Mr. Janner asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 26 February.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House I shall be having further meetings later today.

Vegetable Oilseeds and Oils

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Prime Minister whether she will make it her policy to veto the European Commission's proposal to impose a tax on vegetable oilseeds and oils; if she will publish in the *Official Report* an assessment of the effect of such a tax on public health, the nourishment of those on social security, and on output and employment in (i) agriculture and (ii) the rest of the economy including the effect on imports from and exports to non-European Economic Community countries, and on the seed-growing, seed crushing and margarine industries.

The Prime Minister: We have made no detailed forecasts of the dietary or trade effects of the Commission's latest proposal for an oils and fats tax. The Government remain firmly opposed to the principle of solving the budgetary problems of the oils and fats sector by taxing consumers and exacerbating problems of international trade.

Libya (Air Raid)

Mr. George Robertson asked the Prime Minister what information she received, prior to the United States air raid on Libya in April 1986, about the precise targets of the United States planes.

The Prime Minister: As I made clear in my statement to the House on 15 April 1986, we supported action directed against specific Libyan targets demonstrably involved in the conduct and support of terrorist activities.

Mr. George Robertson asked the Prime Minister if she has received any further information from the American Administration since she gave clearance for F1-11 bombers to fly from United Kingdom bases to Libya in April 1986; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: We remain in regular contact with the United States authorities about Libyan involvement in terrorism.

Mr. George Robertson asked the Prime Minister what information was made available to her by the United States Administration as to the whereabouts of Colonel Gaddafi at the time of the United States air raid on Libya of April 1986.

The Prime Minister: None.

ENERGY

Departmental Computers

Dr. Hampson asked the Secretary of State for Energy what his Department has spent on *(a)* computer hardware and *(b)* computer software for each year since 1984; and what is the projected expenditure for 1987.

Mr. Peter Walker: Expenditure recorded by financial years is as follows:

	Hardware inc. maintenance £000	*Software* £000
1985-86	603	192
1986-87[1]	490	190

[1] Estimate.

Provisional plans for 1987-88 envisage expenditure of £800,000 on hardware and £180,000 on software. Supply Estimates for 1987-88 will be presented to Parliament in due course.

Dr. Hampson asked the Secretary of State for Energy to which firms his Department has awarded contracts for computer hardware for each year since 1984; and what was the value of each contract.

Mr. Peter Walker: My Department has awarded contracts of £10,000 or more for computer hardware to the following companies:

Financial year 1985-86:
Apricot Computers PLC
Case Communications Limited
Hewlett Packard
IBM United Kingdom Limited
Memorex United Kingdom Limited
Prime Computers (UK) Limited.

Financial year 1986-87:
Apricot Computers PLC
Case Communications Limited
DPCE Products Limited
Equinox Computer Systems Limited
IBM United Kingdom Limited
Prime Computers (UK) Limited

For reasons of commercial confidentiality I am unable to disclose the value of individual contracts.

British Coal (Houses)

Mr. Patchett asked the Secretary of State for Energy (1) if he will list the number of British Coal house properties sold since 1979 to other than sitting tenants, local authorities or housing associations; and if he will list the purchasers of these properties;

(2) if he will list the number of British Coal house properties sold since 1979 to local authorities; and if he will list the purchasers in each case;

(3) if he will list the number of British Coal house properties sold since 1979 to housing associations; and if he will list the purchasers in each case.

Mr. David Hunt: This is a management matter for British Coal. I am asking the chairman to write to the hon. Member.

Coal Liquefaction

Mr. Raffan asked the Secretary of State for Energy if the Government has yet been able to attract private investment for the Point of Ayr coal-to-oil liquefaction project.

Mr. David Hunt: I understand that British Coal is making good progress in finding private sector participation in this important project and I hope to make an announcement shortly. I welcome the considerable progress already made in the construction of the plant. The Department stands by its commitment to meet the £2.5 million balance of its contribution on condition that a suitable private sector participant is found.

National Energy Management Conference

Mr. Baldry asked the Secretary of State for Energy whether he plans to hold a national energy management conference in 1987.

Mr. Peter Walker: I have today announced that following the tremendous success of the national energy management conference and exhibition in 1986, we have decided to organise a major international exhibition and conference at the national exhibition centre in Birmingham on 28-30 June 1988. This will be the largest event of this nature ever planned in this country and will afford an excellent opportunity to exchange expertise in energy efficiency with other countries. The conference will include top level international speakers and we will aim to attract delegates from throughout the world. The exhibition will provide a major new platform for British Industry, enabling our companies to put their world-leading energy efficiency products and services before an international audience.

During 1987 there will be an extensive programme of regional energy conferences and exhibitions. We will ensure that the message of energy efficiency reaches every corner of this country in 1987 as in 1986, and build on this programme for the major new event—Energy Efficiency International—in 1988.

ENVIRONMENT

Electricity Generation

63. **Mr. Speller** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will remove the impost of rateable value from wind generators and water-powered generators of electricity for industrial and domestic use.

Mr. Chope: I have nothing to add to the answer that I gave my hon. Friend on 17 December 1986 at column *579*.

London Residuary Body (Transfer of Assets)

Mr. Evennett asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a further statement concerning the transfer of assets from the London Residuary Body to Thamesmead Town Limited.

Mr. Chope: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright) on 3 February.

Crown Suppliers

Mr. Straw asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to introduce legislation to privatise the Crown Suppliers.

Mr. Chope: The feasibility of privatising the Crown Suppliers, in whole or in part, is still being examined by consultants who will report soon.

Mr. Straw asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what decisions he has reached concerning the future of the Crown Suppliers; and if he will place a copy of the report of the central unit on purchasing in the Library.

Mr. Chope: I have reached no decisions concerning the future of the Crown Suppliers; I await the consultants' report mentioned to the hon. Member today in another answer. As the former Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) stated in reply to the hon. Member for Thurrock (Dr. McDonald) on 21 July 1986 the report of the central unit on purchasing is not in a form suitable for publication.

Mr. Straw asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultations he has had with the Property Services Agency trade union side on the future of the Crown Suppliers.

Mr. Chope: The trade union side has made representations to the controller of the Crown Suppliers and to the consultants who are considering the feasibility of privatisation.

Local Government Act 1974

Mr. Hardy asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will review the provisions of section 21 of the Local Government Act 1974 which prevent an amendment of valuation where an increase would be less than £30.

Mr. Chope: No. We have announced our intention of abolishing domestic rates, and section 21 with them.

Forestry Commission

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will be making a formal response to the Forestry Commission's report "Forest Health and Air Pollution."

Mr. Waldegrave: I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 11 February to the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), *Official Report*, c. *234*. A formal response would not be appropriate in view of the continuing discussions on further work between my Department, the Forestry Commission and other interested bodies.

Housing (Hampshire)

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many houses are planned to be built by local authorities in each Hampshire district in 1987-88, based on information contained in the housing investment programmes.

Mr. Tracey: In their housing investment programmes submitted to the Department in July 1986 district councils in Hampshire listed 1,187 dwellings which they planned to start in 1987-88 if resources were available. Of these, 679 were to be specially designed for the elderly or disabled. The figures for each district are given in the table:

Authority	*Dwellings for the elderly and disabled*	*Other dwellings*	*Total*
Basingstoke and Deane	42	16	58
East Hampshire	27	93	120
Eastleigh	0	30	30
Fareham	55	12	67
Gosport	32	60	92
Hart	40	0	40
Havant	0	30	30
New Forest	22	58	80
Portsmouth	60	18	78
Rushmoor	0	40	40
Southampton	215	56	271
Test Valley	93	77	170
Winchester	93	18	111

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list, for each local authority district in Hampshire, the number of council homes sold in the last two years.

Mr. Tracey: The numbers of council house sales in the first half of 1986-87 reported by the local authorities, are as follows:

	Number
Basingstoke and Deane	177
East Hampshire	91
Eastleigh	65
Fareham	52
Gosport	72
Hart	22
Havant	94
New Forest	99
Portsmouth	253
Rushmoor	86
Southampton	248
Test Valley	97
Winchester	117

For the 1984-85 and 1985-86 figures, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing, Urban Affairs and Construction, on 18 December 1986 at column *683*.

Regional Development (North-West)

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will now publish the regional development plans for the north-west of England.

Mr. Tracey: I will answer this question shortly.

Local Government Act 1986

Mr. Fisher asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) whether he will make it his policy in the proposed code of practice under the Local Government Act 1986 to draw a distinction between the impartial supply of political materials by public libraries and the promotion of political viewpoints by local authorities;

(2) what steps he is taking to consult public library interests concerning the possible effect of the proposed code of practice under the Local Government Act 1986 in order to ensure that the Act and the code do not impede the provision of a comprehensive supply of political materials by public libraries.

Mr. Chope: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Arts on 18 February at column *673*.

Water Authorities

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to introduce legislation in respect of uniform connection charges by water authorities.

Mr. John Patten: I will answer this question shortly.

Local Authorities (Housing Subsidy)

Mrs. Roe asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has decided what deemed rent increase, and what increase in reckonable expenditure on management and maintenance, should be used in calculating the entitlement of local authorities to housing subsidy in 1987-88.

Mr. John Patten: We have considered carefully the views of the local authority associations on the consultation papers about calculation of entitlement to housing subsidy for 1987-88 which were sent to them in October.

My right hon. Friend has decided, jointly with the Secretary of State for Wales, that the increase in the local contribution for 1987-88 should be 65p per dwelling per week. The purpose of this figure is to determine entitlement to housing subsidy on a common basis. It is for local authorities to decide how large a rent increase they need to apply in order to meet their requirements for expenditure. It has been decided to increase the notional allowance for management and maintenance by 3¼ per cent. over the level assumed for 1986-87. As I announced on 17 February in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones), the calculation of subsidy entitlement will be based on an authority's actual relevant expenditure on management and maintenance in 1987-88, rather than the notional amount referred to above, if the authority's actual relevant expenditure is lower than the notional amount.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Police Inquiries (Seized Material)

Mr. Cohen asked the Attorney-General what is the practice of the police, when submitting to the Director of Public Prosecutions papers on a case concerning possible criminal offences, towards the inclusion amongst such papers of material, or copies of material, seized as a result of search warrants granted to the police during the course of their inquiries into those offences; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I have been asked to reply.

When submitting a case to the Crown Prosecution Service the police practice is to forward all statements and documentary evidence obtained by them in the course of their investigation. This would include material, or copies of material, seized by them as a result of executing a search warrant.

CIVIL SERVICE

Relocation

Mr. Favell asked the Minister for the Civil Service how many civil servants have been relocated outside Greater London since May 1979.

Mr. Luce: Under the dispersal programme and location policy, more than 6,000 posts have been moved outside Greater London since May 1979 of which about half have involved the transfer of civil servants.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Wheat Prices

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will state the average ex-farm selling price of wheat in the United Kingdom for each of the years 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985 and 1986 and also at constant prices, showing the 1979 price as 100.

Mr. Gummer: The information is as follows:

	Ex-farm price of home-grown wheat[1] *(£ per tonne)*	*Price index in real terms*[2] *(1979 = 100)*
1979	95·92	100·0
1980	99·30	86·4
1981	108·92	85·0
1982	113·74	82·3
1983	124·80	86·1
1984	114·58	75·9
1985	112·23	70·3
1986	[3]112·18	67·4

[1] Weighted average price at first point of sale. (*Source:* Annual Review of Agriculture).
[2] Deflated by price deflator of GDP at market prices.
[3] Forecast.

Beef and Butter (Bradford)

Mr. Madden asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he is satisfied with the arrangements in Bradford to distribute free beef and butter; how many needy people, to date, in Bradford have received beef and butter; what guidance was issued for the distribution of beef and butter in Bradford; what complaints he has received about the distribution of beef and butter in Bradford; what improvements or changes in the procedures for distributing beef and butter in Bradford have been introduced; how many officials in his Department were responsible for the arrangements for distributing beef and butter in Bradford; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what information he has as to what arrangements have been made to distribute free beef and butter to needy people in Bradford; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: As I made clear on 29 January in my reply to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), distribution of these products is for the charitable organisations concerned, who are making the appropriate arrangements in individual areas.

I know of no complaints relating to Bradford, nor have I received any requests from the organisations for changes in the overall arrangements. Figures of individual recipients either nationally or in individual geographical areas are not recorded.

THE ARTS

Children's Librarians

Mr. Fisher asked the Minister for the Arts how many specialist children's librarians are employed by public library services in England; and what steps he is taking to ensure more specialist support to combat illiteracy.

Mr. Luce: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Personal Equity Plans

5. **Mr. Lawrence** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the most recent evidence he has of the latest response to personal equity plans.

31. **Mr. Stevens** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the most recent evidence he has of the response to personal equity plans.

Mr. Lawson: The response to the new personal equity plans has been most encouraging. Latest available figures suggest that in the first month of the scheme, people invested in personal equity plans at the rate of over 2,000 a day.

Public Expenditure

16. **Mr. Couchman** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will make a further statement on the value for money achieved in public expenditure by local and central Government.

38. **Dr. Michael Clark** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will make a statement on the value for money achieved in public expenditure by local and central Government.

Mr. MacGregor: We must continue to get better value for taxpayers' and ratepayers' money. The public expenditure White Paper illustrated the substantial savings made so far through better management and efficiency in Government Departments.

27. **Mr. Ottaway** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the amount of planned public expenditure accounted for by local authorities in the year 1987-88.

52. **Mr. Michael Forsyth** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the amount of planned public expenditure accounted for by local authorities in the year 1987-88.

Mr. MacGregor: The planned amount for public expenditure by local authorities in 1987-88 in Great Britain is £39,520 million. This is shown in Table 4.1 of the Public Expenditure White Paper (Cmd. 56). It is 3·9 per cent. more than the estimated outturn for 1986-87 given in the White Paper and 4·6 per cent. more than the latest estimate of outturn for 1986-87.

29. **Mr. Soames** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what further correspondence he has had with political parties about proposals for increased public expenditure.

54. **Mr. Charles Wardle** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has had any further correspondence with political parties on proposals for increases in public expenditure.

Mr. MacGregor: I refer my hon. Friends to the reply I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend)

41. **Mr. Andrew MacKay** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about the level of public expenditure.

42. **Mr. Merchant** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about the level of public expenditure.

58. **Mr. Terlezki** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about the level of public expenditure.

Mr. MacGregor: None directly. But there has been a number of comments.

53. **Mr. McLoughlin** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to ensure improved value for money in public sector expenditure.

Mr. MacGregor: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 19 February to my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, South-West (Mrs. Bottomley).

25. **Mr. Hind** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of the amount of public expenditure accounted for by local authorities in the current financial year.

59. **Mr. Brandon-Bravo** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the latest estimate of the amount of planned public expenditure accounted for by local authorities in the current financial year.

Mr. MacGregor: The current estimate for total public expenditure in 1986-87 by local authorities in Great Britain is £37·8 billion. This is an increase of 9 per cent. upon 1985-86 but a slight reduction from the estimate given in Table 4.1 of the Government's Public Expenditure White Paper as estimates of capital receipts have been increased.

Mr. Watts asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what further correspondence he has had with political parties about proposed increases in public expenditure.

Mr. MacGregor: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) earlier today.

British Airways

18. **Mr. Norman Atkinson** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the effect on the public sector borrowing requirement of the revenue raised by the sale of British Airways.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Proceeds from the sale of British Airways will reduce the public sector borrowing requirement by approximately £415 million in 1986-87 and by £410 million in 1987-88.

Married Man's Allowance

19. **Mr. Michie** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received seeking the abolition of the married man's allowance.

Mr. MacGregor: I have received a number of representations about the married man's allowance from organisations and individuals.

European Monetary System

20. **Mr. Knox** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he next proposes to have discussions with the European Community Council of Ministers about the European monetary system.

Mr. Ian Stewart: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor discusses aspects of the European monetary system with European colleagues from time to time.

Balance of Payments

21. **Mr. Weetch** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are his latest projections for the balance of payments in 1987.

Mr. Brooke: The next forecast for the current account of the balance of payments will be published at the time of the Budget.

Earnings Statistics

23. **Mr. Gregory** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many hours work it took a worker on average industrial earnings to earn sufficient to purchase basic foodstuffs in 1979 and 1986.

Mr. MacGregor: Figures for the amount of time at work needed to purchase a selection of foodstuffs in recent years are shown in table 6.9 of the 1987 edition of "Social Trends".

37. **Mr. Willie W. Hamilton** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what study his Department has conducted on the effect of wages and earnings increases which exceed the rate of inflation on employment prospects.

Mr. MacGregor: A review by Treasury officials entitled "The Relationship between Employment and Wages" was published in January 1985. Copies are available in the House of Commons Library.

56. **Mr. Ashley** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the increase since 1979 in earnings after tax, in real terms, for *(a)* the top decile of earners and *(b)* the bottom decile of earners.

Mr. Lawson: The increases, from April 1979 to April 1986, in real earnings after income tax for the highest and lowest decile of male earners are estimated at 26 per cent. and 6·8 per cent. respectively. Comparable figures for the period April 1973 to April 1979 are 0·8 per cent. and 3·6 per cent. for the highest and lowest deciles respectively. The calculations are based on a married man in full time work paid at adult rates with pay unaffected by absence whose only tax relief is the married man's allowance and apply the tax regimes of 1973-74, April 1979 and 1986-87.

World Debt

24. **Mr. Skinner** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions he has had with other Finance Ministers regarding world debt; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: World debt was among the matters discussed at the annual meetings of the IMF and World Bank in Washington last September in which my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer took part.

Latin America

26. **Mr. Kirkwood** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy to alleviate the financial burden of debt interest borne by countries in Latin America.

Mr. Stewart: We are continuing to work constructively with other Governments to reduce international interest rates and with international financial institutions on the provision of additional resources to countries in Latin America in support of adjustment. Together these will help to alleviate the interest cost on external indebtness owed by Latin American countries.

Pay Variations

28. **Mr. Eastham** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect of pay variations on the United Kingdom economy.

Mr. MacGregor: The Treasury paper "The Relationship between Employment and Wages" published in January 1985, indicates that a reduction of 1 per cent. in the rate of growth of real earnings would lead in time to between 110,000 and 220,000 new jobs.

Copies of this paper are available in the House of Commons Library.

Asset Sales

30. **Mr. Cabora** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give his latest estimate of the total revenue that will be raised from special asset sales by the end of 1987.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Since 1979, privatisation proceeds accruing directly to the Exchequer have been over £11 billion. No forecasts are made for calendar years. The central estimate for 1987-88 is £5 billion.

Privatised Companies

32. **Mr. Bellingham** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has on the extent of employee participation in privatised companies.

39. **Mr. Lawler** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has on the extent of employee participation in privatised companies.

43. **Mr. Ward** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has on the extent of employee share ownership in privatised companies.

Mr. Norman Lamont: About 90 per cent. of employees in privatised companies floated on the stock market have become shareholders.

Mr. Amess asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will outline the further proposals of the Government's privatisation policy in this Parliament.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Preparations are now well in hand for the privatisation of Rolls-Royce, Royal Ordnance and BAA (formerly the British Airports Authority). The National Bus Company's programme to dispose of its subsidiaries will also continue.

Public Sector Borrowing Requirement

33. **Mr. Kenneth Carlisle** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate for the public sector borrowing requirement for the current financial year.

Mr. MacGregor: Both the 1986 "Financial Statement and Budget Report" and the "Autumn Statement" (Cm 14) envisaged a PSBR for 1986-87 of around £7 billion. It is now clear that the PSBR will undershoot this figure. A further estimate will be published next month in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report".

Share Ownership

34. **Mrs. Roe** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will make a statement on the current extent of direct share ownership by individuals.

40. **Mr. Leigh** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will make a statement on the current extent of direct share ownership by individuals.

44. **Mr. Gale** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will make a statement on the current extent of direct share ownership by individuals.

50. **Mr. Wood** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will make a statement on the latest estimate of the scale of direct share ownership by individuals.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Our stategy of widening shareownership through employee share schemes, privatisation, and now personal eqity plans, has reversed the previous trend away from direct shareownership by individuals, with the result that the number of individual shareowners may now have roughly trebled since 1979.

Banks (Supervision)

35. **Mr. Dykes** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he next plans to meet representatives of the Bank of England to discuss official supervision procedures for authorised banks operating in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply which I gave the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) on 17 February at columns 545.

Interest Rates

36. **Mr. Redmond** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the present level of interest rates.

45. **Mr. Latham** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will make a further statement on the current level of interest rates.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I refer to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth).

Retired People

46. **Mr. Hirst** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the number of retired people who are paying income tax on incomes which amount to less than half the average national wage.

Mr. Norman Lamont: It is estimated that in 1986-87 about 950,000 single people and married couples aged 65 or over pay income tax on total income for income tax purposes of less than half average male full time earnings.

Value Added Tax

47. **Mr. Straw** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received regarding a rise in the rates of value added tax.

57. **Dr. Marek** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received regarding a widening of the base of value added tax.

Mr. Brooke: A few.

62. **Mr. Amess** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about the late payment of value added tax from small businesses.

Mr. Brooke: A number, mainly in conjunction with complaints about delays on the part of business customers in settling accounts and the default surcharge on persistent late payment of VAT which was introduced on 1 October 1986. As announced in "Building Businesses . . . Not Barriers" (Cmnd. 9793) there will be a full review of the operation of the surcharge, in the light of a full year's experience before the 1988 Budget.

Mr. Evans asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the current estimate of revenue to be raised this financial year from value added tax.

Mr. Brooke: The next forecast for VAT revenue in 1986-87 will be made at the time of the Budget.

Economic Policy Co-ordination

48. **Mr. Duffy** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will initiate an early meeting of the Group of Five Finance Ministers with a view to greater economic policy co-ordination among the leading industrial countries.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The Finance Ministers of the group of Five nations meet from time to time to discuss a range of international economic issues.

Economic Growth

49. **Dr. Godman** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he next plans to meet his colleagues on the National Economic Development Council to discuss the prospects for growth in the economy.

Mr. MacGregor: The next meeting of the national Economic Development Council is on Wednesday 4 March. The prospects for economic growth are regularly discussed in the Council.

Budget

51. **Mr. Canavan** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many representations he has now received about his forthcoming Budget statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont: My right hon. Friend has received a large number of representations.

Tobacco Duty

55. **Mr. Roger King** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many representations he has received concerning the level of tobacco duty.

Mr. Brooke: My right hon. Friend has received numerous representations from a wide range of bodies and individuals, which will be carefully considered.

Manufactured Goods

60. **Mr. Strang** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of the likely balance of trade in manufacture of goods for the current year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: The next forecast for the balance of trade in manufactures will be published at Budget time.

Higher Rate Income Tax

61. **Mr. Maples** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the increase in real terms in the yield from higher rate income tax between 1978-79 and 1985-86.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The total tax liability resulting from the difference between the higher rates of income tax and the basic rate rose by about 30 per cent. in real terms between 1978-79 and 1985-86. The increase in real terms has been calculated by reference to the movement in the retail prices index.

FIMBRA

Mr. Hardy asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his policy on the participation of building societies in FIMBRA; and if he will review the minimum capital requirement for membership of this regulatory body.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Building societies which wish to undertake investment business will have to be authorised to do so under the Financial Services Act. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has received the Securities and Investment Board's request for the transfer to it of powers under the Act. If powers are transferred, it will be for the board to decide what self regulatory organisations are to be recognised. The rules of SROs are a matter for the bodies concerned, not for me.

Unemployment (Cost)

Mr. Haynes asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if, further to his answer of 29 January, *Official Report*, column *376*, he will take steps to prepare estimates of the cost to the Exchequer of the recent level of unemployment in the east midlands.

Mr. Stan Thorne asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if, further to his answer of 29 January, *Official Report*, column *376*, he will take steps to prepare estimates of the cost to the Exchequer of the current level of unemployment in the north-west.

Mr. Dixon asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if, further to his answer of 29 January, *Official Report*, column *376*, he will take steps to procure estimates of the cost to the Exchequer of the current level of unemployment in the northern region.

Mr. Boyes asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if, further to his answer of 29 January, *Official Report*, column *376*, he will take steps to procure estimates of the cost to the Exchequer of the current level of unemployment in the northern region.

Mr. O'Neill asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if, further to his answer of 29 January, *Official Report*, column *376*, he will take steps to prepare estimates of the cost to the Exchequer of the current level of unemployment in Scotland.

Mr. MacGregor: I refer the hon. Members to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) earlier today.

Output Statistics

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the output per head of the working population, excluding the extraction of oil and gas from both the numerator and the denominator, in each year since 1972.

Mr. MacGregor: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing total output in the production industries less the extraction of oil and gas in each year since 1980 divided by the working population in manufacturing, including the unemployed.

Mr. MacGregor: I regret that it is not possible to compile estimates in the way requested.

Land and Buildings (Sales)

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the total amount raised by the sale of land and buildings since May 1979.

Mr. MacGregor: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) on 27 January 1987 (*Official Report*, c. *229-30*).

Mortgage Interest Relief

Mr. Christopher Hawkins asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what is the cost to the Exchequer of mortgage interest relief claimed in respect of marginal rates of income tax above the basic rate;

(2) if he will estimate the cost to the Exchequer of raising the limit for mortgage interest relief by steps of £1,000 from £30,000 to £40,000 in respect of relief at basic rate only.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Meacher asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if, pursuant to his answer of 19 December, *Official Report*, column *748*, concerning transferable allowances, he will set out the numbers gaining and losing by income level, and the average gain and loss per individual or tax unit at each income level.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I refer the hon. Member to Annex 4 of the Green Paper "The Reform of Personal Taxation", in particular table 5.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Defence Exports

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Thomas) of 18 February, *Official Report*, column *631*, if he will give the corresponding percentage for each year since 1978 of total visible exports accounted for by defence exports.

Mr. Alan Clark: The information is as follows:

Defence exports as a percentage of United Kingdom total visible exports

Years	*Percentage*
1978	1·1
1979	0·9
1980	1·1
1981	1·2

Years	Percentage
1982	1·6
1983	1·5
1984	1·2
1985	1·0

Regional Aid

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list, by region, the amount granted in regional selective assistance under section 7 of the Industrial Development Act 1982 *(a)* in each financial year since the scheme's inception and *(b)* planned expenditure to 1989-90, providing figures for each at current and outturn prices.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The information requested by region for the years 1972-73 to 1986-87 is as follows:

	Scotland	Wales	North East	North West	Yorkshire/ Humberside	East Midlands	West Midlands	South West	Great Britain
At current prices (£ million)									
1972-73	0·1	—	0·2	—	0·1	—	—	—	0·4
1973-74	5·0	4·5	2·8	5·2	3·4	0·6	—	0·2	21·7
1974-75	5·1	7·3	4·0	13·8	3·6	0·4	—	0·7	34·9
1975-76	25·0	10·3	3·3	20·1	3·6	0·9	—	1·3	64·5
1976-77	11·8	6·9	10·7	6·1	6·5	0·8	—	0·9	43·7
1977-78	11·9	6·3	5·5	13·5	4·5	0·6	—	1·0	43·3
1978-79	12·4	30·4	9·3	41·5	5·2	1·0	—	2·4	102·2
1979-80	15·0	18·8	10·8	24·0	6·8	1·0	—	2·7	79·1
1980-81	22·2	10·7	14·2	20·8	6·6	1·0	—	2·5	78·0
1981-82	19·4	9·2	20·7	16·6	6·9	1·0	—	1·7	75·5
1982-83	19·7	14·4	19·8	19·6	10·3	4·2	—	2·5	90·5
1983-84	23·7	15·3	13·8	15·2	8·4	8·7	—	2·0	87·1
1984-85	32·0	19·1	14·4	14·4	9·5	6·4	—	1·9	97·7
1985-86	48·0	22·5	15·4	13·3	7·6	3·9	4·8	2·3	117·8
1986-87[1]	21·0	18·5	11·0	10·6	6·3	1·2	6·0	1·0	75·6
At 1986 prices (£ million) [2]									
1972-73	0·4	—	0·9	—	0·4	—	—	—	1·7
1973-74	20·6	18·5	11·5	21·4	14·0	2·5	—	0·8	89·3
1974-75	17·6	25·2	13·8	47·6	12·4	1·4	—	2·4	120·4
1975-76	68·8	28·3	9·1	55·2	9·9	2·5	—	3·6	177·4
1976-77	28·7	16·7	26·0	14·8	15·8	1·9	—	2·2	106·1
1977-78	25·4	13·4	11·7	28·7	9·6	1·3	—	2·1	92·2
1978-79	23·8	58·5	17·9	79·8	10·0	1·3	—	4·7	196·0
1979-80	24·7	30·9	17·8	39·5	11·1	1·5	—	4·4	129·9
1980-81	30·8	14·8	19·6	28·9	9·2	1·0	—	3·5	107·8
1981-82	24·5	11·6	26·1	21·0	8·7	1·3	—	2·1	95·3
1982-83	23·2	17·0	23·3	23·1	12·2	4·9	—	3·0	106·7
1983-84	26·8	17·3	15·5	17·1	9·5	9·9	—	2·2	98·3
1984-85	34·6	20·7	15·6	15·6	10·3	6·9	—	2·0	105·7
1985-86	48·9	22·9	15·7	13·5	7·8	4·0	4·9	2·3	120·0
1986-87[1]	21·0	18·5	11·0	10·6	6·2	1·2	6·0	1·0	75·5

[1] 1986-87 data is provisional and for the first three quarters of the year only.
[2] Expenditure on a 1986 price basis for each year is calculated by applying the appropriate deflator to expenditure at current prices.

The figures for 1972-73 to 1986-87 exclude expenditure on the exchange risk guarantee scheme and aid for small and medium-sized firms under specific European regional development fund non-quota measures, as it is not possible to provide a breakdown of these items by English region.

For 1987-88 to 1989-90 it is not possible to provide a breakdown by English region as estimates of regional assistance are produced for England as a whole. The provision for regional selective assistance in England, Scotland and Wales, as incorporated in the public expenditure White Paper, is as follows:

	England	Scotland	Wales	Great Britain
At current prices (£ million)				
1987-88	124	53	45	222
1988-89	145	54	46	245
1989-90	126	44	47	217
At 1986 prices (£ million) [1]				
1987-88	118	50	43	211
1988-89	133	50	42	225
1989-90	113	39	42	194

[1] Expenditure on a 1986 price basis for each year is calculated by applying the appropriate deflator to expenditure at current prices.

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the changes which have been made in the regulations regarding his Department's expenditure on regional aid to industry since 1979.

Mr. Giles Shaw [*pursuant to his reply*, 25 February 1987]: The information is as follows:

Date	Change	Authority
12 March 1979	A change in the status of an Assisted Area	SI 269/1979
13 June 1979	Payments of Regional Development Grant (RDG) deferred for four months on new applications	Announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Budget Speech of 12 June 1979.
18 July 1979	Two additional criteria introduced in the Regional Selective Assistance (RSA) scheme: a requirement to demonstrate a need for assistance (additionality) and an assessment of the net economic benefit likely to be derived from such assistance.	Announced by the Secretary of State for Industry in a written answer on 17 July 1979.
18 July 1979	Various changes to the status of Assisted Areas.	SI 837/1979
18 July 1979	Availability of RDG in Intermediate Areas discontinued subject to transitional provisions.	Written answer of 17 July 1979 (see above); Industry Act 1980.
31 July 1979	Rate of RDG reduced from 20 to 15 per cent., subject to transitional provisions.	SI 975/1979
12 December 1979	Various changes to the status of Assisted Areas.	SI 1642/1979
1 April 1980	In-Plant Training Scheme introduced as a new form of RSA.	Announced by the Secretary of State for Industry in the budget debate of 1 April 1980.
1 August 1980	Various changes to the status of Assisted Areas.	SI 1110/1980
1 January 1982	Variations in the criteria for eligibility of plant and machinery for RDG.	Announced in a written answer by the Secretary of State for Industry on 23 December 1981.
1 August 1982	Various changes to the status of Assisted Areas.	SI 934/82
9 November 1982	Four-month deferment on RDG payments lifted.	Announced by the Secretary of State for Industry on 9 November 1982 in the debate on the Queen's Speech.
29 November 1984	Responsibility for administering RDG in Scotland and Wales transferred from DTI to the Scottish and Welsh Offices.	Announced in a written answer by the Prime Minister on 28 November 1984.
29 November 1984	Various amendments to the status of Assisted Areas, including the abolition of Special Development Areas.	Co-operative Development Agency and Industrial Development Act 1984.
29 November 1984	RDG scheme discontinued, subject to transitional provisions. A new RDG scheme introduced with grants based on the provision of assets and jobs in approved projects in Development Areas; eligibility extended to certain service sector activities.	and: SI 1843/1984 1844/1984 1845/1984 1846/1984
29 November 1984	Office and Service Industries Scheme (part of RSA) discontinued. Parity given to manufacturing and service industries in RSA project grants. Relocation projects with no net increase in jobs normally to be excluded from RSA.	Statement by Minister of State for Industry on 28 November 1984.
18 January 1985	Payments of old RDG deferred for four months on new applications.	Announced by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in a regional policy debate on 17 January 1985.
15 January 1987	Payments of new RDG deferred for two months on new applications.	Announced by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in a written answer on 14 January 1987.

Date	Change	Authority
17 February 1987	Simplified procedures and applications forms announced for RSA applications of £25,000 or under.	Announced by the Minister of State for Industry in a written answer on 17 February 1987.

Note:
Changes resulting from European Community regulations are not included.

Foreign Consignee Status

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if, pursuant to his answer of 19 February, he will list the foreign countries operating a system based on foreign consignee status.

Mr. Alan Clark: I am not aware of any country other than the United States which operates a system of export licensing involving foreign consignee status for some companies.

Securities and Investment Board

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will publish the statement of assumptions on which the Securities and Investment Board based chapter 7 of its draft rules, and the Securities and Investment Board paper intituled "Proposals for Charging Fees"; and whether he will extend the time for investment counselling practitioners to comment to him upon the draft rules until they shall have had reasonable time to consider the assumptions on which the draft rules are based.

Mr. Howard: The paper entitled "Proposals for Charging Fees" outlines the assumptions on which the board's fees proposals are based. It was made publicly available in December and comments were invited. The board took the comments it received into account before submitting its application to the Secretary of State to become the designated agency. I do not consider that it is necessary to extend the time for investment counselling practitioners to comment to the Secretary of State on the draft rules.

Leyland-DAF

Mr. Fallon asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many employees of Rover Group and its subsidiaries will become employees of the proposed Leyland-DAF joint venture.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Approximately 7,000 United Kingdom employees of Rover Group and its subsidiaries will become employees of the proposed Leyland-DAF joint venture.

Mr. Fallon asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the value of the assets of Rover Group to be transferred to the Leyland-DAF joint venture.

Mr. Giles Shaw: It is envisaged that net assets valued at £179 millions will be transferred to the Leyland-DAF joint venture on completion.

Mr. Fallon asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many directors of the Leyland-DAF joint venture will be appointed by Leyland and how many by DAF.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I refer to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr. Davies) on Monday 23 February 1987 at column 14.

Mr. Fallon asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will deposit a draft of the proposed Leyland-DAF joint venture agreement in the Library.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The essential elements of the proposed Leyland-DAF joint venture were given to the House in my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's statement on 19 February 1987 at columns 1059-73. The detailed contractual negotiations are commercially confidential and therefore I am unable to place a document in the Library.

Internal Market Council

Sir Philip Holland asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will report on the Internal Market Council held on 24 February.

Mr. Alan Clark: The Internal Market Council, at which I represented the United Kingdom, discussed directives on a general system for the recognition of higher education diplomas for the purposes of professional qualifications, on a right of residence for EC nationals in the Territory of another member state, and on controls and formalities applicable to EC nationals when crossing intra-Community borders; a Council Decision on extending the Community's programme for the Transnational development of the supporting infrastructure for innovation (the SPRINT Programme); and the entry into force of the Community Patent Convention.

Extraterritoriality

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list in the *Official Report* each occasion on which he has made an order or given directions under the Protection of Trading Interests Act 1980; if he will specify in each case the section or sections of the Act under which the order was made or the directions were given, the person or persons to whom they applied, and their purpose and their effect; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark [*pursuant to his reply*, 20 February 1987; c. *879*]: The information requested is as follows:

On 3 March 1981 a section 2 direction was issued to a United Kingdom company to prohibit compliance with a demand by the United States Commodity Futures Trading Commission to provide it with commercial information located outside the United States.

On 30 June 1982, a section 1(1) Order, (S.I 1982 No. 885) was applied to the United States West Siberian pipeline re-export controls. Such an Order brings into operation the Secretary of State's powers under sections 1(2), 1(3) and 2 of the Act.

On 2 August 1982 section 1(3) directions were issued to AFF Ltd., Baker Oil Tools (United Kingdom) Ltd., John

Brown Engineering Ltd., and Smith International (North Sea) Ltd., to prohibit compliance with the United States West Siberian pipeline re-export controls.

On 10 September 1982 section 1(3) directions were issued to Andrew Corporation and the Walter Kidde Company Ltd., to prohibit compliance with the United States West Siberian pipeline re-export controls.

On 2 November, 1982 a section 1(3) direction was issued to Seaco Sales and Services (North Sea) Ltd. to prohibit compliance with the United States West Siberian pipeline controls.

On 23 June 1982 a section 1(1) Order, (S.I. 1983 No. 900) was applied to sections 1 and 2 of the United States Sherman Act and sections 4 and 4A of the United States Clayton Act in cases where United Kingdom airlines designated under the Bermuda 2 Agreement concerning air services are parties to agreements, or other acts, concerning tariffs or which otherwise relate to the operation of an air service athorised under the Bermuda 2 agreement.

On 23 June 1983 a section 1(3) general direction was issued prohibiting any person in the United Kingdom carrying on business from complying with the United States anti-trust measures in relation to the cases described in the section 1(1) order of 23 June 1983.

On 23 June 1983 a section 2 general direction was issued prohibiting any person in the United Kingdom from complying with any requirement from the United States Department of Justice or the grand jury to produce commercial documents located in the United Kingdom or any information concerning possible violations of sections 1 and 2 of the Sherman Act by United Kingdom designated airlines. The direction also applied to any requirement from the United States District Court of Columbia concerning similar matters, which were subject to civil anti-trust proceedings.

On 1 July 1983 a further section 2 general direction was made to clarify the scope of the section 2 general direction issued on 23 June 1983.

On 16 July 1984 a general direction under section 2 was issued prohibiting any person in the United Kingdom from complying with any requirement from the United States District Court of Columbia to produce commercial documents in the United Kingdom, or any commercial information in respect of further United States civil anti-trust proceedings against United Kingdom designated airlines.

On 29 March 1986 a general direction under section 2 was issued prohibiting any person in the United Kingdom from complying with any requirement from the United States District Court of Columbia to produce commercial documents in the United Kingdom, or any commercial information, in respect of further United States civil anti-trust proceedings against United Kingdom designated airlines.

Machinery Investment

Mr. Nellist asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give figures to show how much was invested in new machinery per worker in 1975, 1980, 1985 and at the latest available date; and what comparative information he has for the United States of America, Germany, France, Japan and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development average for the same years.

Mr. Alan Clark [*pursuant to his reply*, 24 February 1987]: Data on new investment in plant and machinery are not readily available for all countries. The available information on investment in machinery and transport equipment is given in the following table:

Investment in machinery and transport equipment per worker[1]

	United Kingdom	*United States*	*Federal Republic of Germany*	*France*	*Japan*	*OECD*[2]
	£	$	DM	FF	Y thousand	$
1975	383	1,375	3,583	7,017	666	3,173
1980	851	2,321	5,498	11,106	947	5,232
1984	1,230	2,935	6,291	15,554	1,073	6,582
1985	1,393	3,108	n/a	n/a	1,118	n/a

[1] Employees in employment, except:
Japan—includes military forces.
OECD—includes self-employed and unpaid workers.
[2] Gross Fixed Capital Formation, including buildings.
n/a = Not available.

Sources:
Investment — Eurostat National Accounts (France and FR Germany).
OECD National Accounts (USA, Japan, and OECD).
United Kingdom National Accounts.
Employment — OECD Labour Force Statistics.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Restart Programme

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the restart programme in Northern Ireland, indicating how many people have been interviewed and giving a breakdown on how these interviews have been followed up.

Mr. Viggers: By 8 January 1987 34,523 people had received a counselling interview under the restart programme in Northern Ireland, 2,376 subsequently ceased to claim benefits as unemployed but we have no means of knowing how many of them found jobs or training places; 83 per cent. of those interviewed received offers of available opportunities. The immediate outcome of these offers was:

304 were placed directly into jobs.
311 were placed into training.
120 were placed directly on the Enterprise Allowance Scheme and so became self-employed.
1,342 were placed on Restart Courses.
85 were placed in Jobclubs.
127 were placed in voluntary work.
4,684 were referred to other specialists and services.

The above figures for placing reflect only those arising directly from referrals made during the Restart interview. They do not reflect people who later find jobs, or other solutions to their unemployment, wholly or partly as a result of advice given by counselling staff or Restart

Courses. The Department of Economic Development does not follow the progress of individuals once they have been counselled under Restart.

Invalid Care Allowance

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what advertising or public information proposals there are to ensure that people in Northern Ireland are aware that the backdated claims for invalid care allowance by married women can be made up until August 1987 in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: The announcement on 19 January 1987 about the extension of the deadline to 31 August 1987 for backdating claims for invalid care allowance by married women received widespread coverage in the media. A notice giving details of the extension is being issued with each ICA leaflet and claim form and further publicity will be given to the extension by means of press advertisements during the spring and early summer. All persons receiving attendance allowance were supplied in September 1986 with a notice informing their carers that they might be eligible to receive ICA and since that date a similar notice has been issued to each new attendance allowance beneficiary.

Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what were the proposals on the draft Public Orders (Northern Ireland) Orders 1986 and the Flags and Emblems (Display) Act (Northern Ireland) 1954 put forward by the Irish side of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference at its meeting in Belfast on 8 December 1986; and what response was made by the British side.

Mr. Tom King: I shall reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Remands

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many persons were remanded in custody before trial for scheduled, non-scheduled offences and both together in 1986;

(2) how many prisoners were remanded in custody prior to trial for scheduled and non-scheduled offences, respectively, in 1986.

Mr. Scott [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 February 1987, c. *462*]: In 1986, 1,214 persons were remanded-in-custody for scheduled offences and 779 for non-scheduled offences.

SCOTLAND

Schoolchildren (Learning Difficulties)

Mr. Henderson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many children there are in primary and secondary schools in each education authority in Scotland; and of these how many have been identified as having specific learning difficulties at the most recent convenient date for which figures are available.

Mr. John MacKay: The latest available information for education authority schools is set out in the table:

	Primary (1984)		*Secondary (1983)*	
	Total pupils	*Pupils having contact with specialist remedial teachers during census week*	*Total pupils*	*Pupils timetabled to receive remedial education*
Borders	8,219	973	7,417	179
Central	24,287	2,169	21,479	800
Dumfries and Galloway	12,285	1,045	11,569	103
Fife	31,005	4,167	26,194	289
Grampian	43,274	6,758	35,366	416
Highland	19,168	1,805	15,958	113
Lothian	55,745	5,189	48,981	2,095
Strathclyde	204,311	8,775	189,219	4,729
Tayside	31,871	2,424	28,131	1,582
Orkney	1,866	181	1,464	—
Shetland	2,388	276	1,797	22
Western Isles	3,119	274	2,793	20
Scotland	437,538	34,036	390,368	10,348

Inverclyde Initiative

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has now received the Scottish Development Agency's report on the Inverclyde initiative; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: My right hon. and learned Friend has received the report on the Inverclyde initiative which he requested from the Scottish Development Agency. He is considering the report in light of all the representations to him about the economic problems of the area, and hopes to announce his conclusions shortly.

Argyll and Clyde Health Board

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many chiropodists are currently employed by the Agyll and Clyde health board; and what is the equivalent funded establishment number of chiropodists for the Argyll and Clyde health board.

Mr. John MacKay: The number of chiropodists in post at 30 September 1986 was 28·9 whole-time equivalent. The funded establishment number at the same date was 36·9 whole-time equivalent.

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the current waiting list for chiropody treatment in

each of the health board areas in Scotland; and how many of those on the lists are *(a)* men and *(b)* women aged 65 years and over.

Mr. John MacKay: This information is not available centrally.

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the numbers employed within Argyll and Clyde health board by main staff group; and what are the equivalent figures for 1981.

Mr. John MacKay: The information is as follows and relates to whole time equivalent staff employed by the board as at 30 September of each year:

	1981	*1986*[1]
Medical/Dental	352·6	342·3
Nursing/Midwifery	4,525·3	4,694·9
Scientific/Professions Allied to Medicine	2482	280·7
Technical	221·9	220·7
Works	41·0	50·0
Administrative/Clerical	1,013·5	1,068·4
Ancillary	1,992·1	1,738·1
Tradesmen	180·0	183·0
Pharmacists/Opticians	28·8	29·4
All Staff	8,603·4	8,607·5

[1] Provisional.

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many effective blood donors there have been in Argyll and Clyde health board in each year since 1980; and how many blood donations were made in each year.

Mr. John MacKay: The west of Scotland region of the Scottish national blood transfusion service covers the areas of six health boards. In the area of Argyll and Clyde health board, the total number of donors and donations taken are:

	Donors	*Donations*
1980	9,285	8,720
1981	10,852	9,878
1982	11,435	10,342
1983	11,465	10,383
1984	12,862	11,536
1985	14,297	12,215
1986	14,499	13,621

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many smears for cervical cytology examinations have been taken in Argyll and Clyde health board area in each of the past five years; and what proportion were positive in each year.

Mr. John MacKay: The numbers of cervical cytology examinations carried out in the Argyll and Clyde health board area for the years 1981 to 1985 inclusive are shown in the following table. Data for 1986 are not yet available.

Year	*Number of examinations*	*Percentage positive*
1981	25,990	n/a
1982	23,829	0·176
1983	27,151	0·195
1984	28,946	n/a
1985	35,195	0·224

Disabled People (Assistance)

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish information for *(a)* Strathclyde region and *(b)* Greenock and Port Glasgow for each year since 1981 showing the number of disabled people receiving assistance with telephone installations, telephone attachments, telephone rental, television supply, television licence, radio supply, other personal aids, assistance with holidays; and how many places there were for the mentally ill at day centres and adult training centres.

Mr. John MacKay: Local authority statistical returns of persons in need who have been provided with assistance do not distinguish disabled persons from others. Returns for Strathclyde region identify recipients of assistance by districts defined for local management purposes.

The available information for persons assisted and places provided in Strathclyde region is as follows:

	1981	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*[1]
(a) Persons Assisted						
Telephone Installation	179	190	208	269	294	281
Telephone Attachements[3]	—	—	—	—	—	43
Telephone Rental	1,059	916	956	769	838	668
Television/Radio Supply	46	296	56	0	26	94
Television Licence	45	282	40	22	36	46
Other Personal Aids	n/a	n/a	n/a	18,794	22,048	23,446
Assistance with Holidays	n/a	n/a	n/a	1,462	1,083	1,607
(b) Places Provided						
Places for the Mentally Ill at Day Centres[2]	30	35	35	35	35	32

[1] Provisional
[2] Day centres are classified according to the main group attending. Numbers of places for mentally ill persons attending adult training centres are not recorded.
[3] Information not collected before 1986 n/a Not available.

Restart

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will publish figures showing for each of the district wards in the Greenock and Port Glasgow constituency the number of people taken off the unemployment register as a result of the restart programme, the proportion of those people who have found full-time jobs, and the number of people currently on Government training schemes.

Mr. Lang: The information is not available in the precise form requested. A total of 524 people from the Greenock and Port Glasgow jobcentres have ceased to claim benefit since being identified under the restart programme. It is impossible, however, to determine how many of these left the unemployment register as a direct result of either the invitation to attend or the counselling itself. Between 1 July 1986, the date on which the restart programme commenced, and 12 February 1987, the numbers of people from the Greenock and Port Glasgow jobcentres who were placed in employment or in one of the Government's employment, enterprise or training schemes as a consequence of restart interviews were as shown in the table below.

	Number
Commenced employment	6
Placed on community programme	27
Placed in jobclub	81
Started own business under enterprise allowance scheme	12
MSC training course	6
Employment rehabilitation	9
Restart courses	265

In addition a number of people were referred to other specialist services — professional and executive recruitment, disablement resettlement officer, careers service, et cetera.

No statistics are available to indicate how many of those placed on restart courses have subsequently obtained employment or other forms of training.

Caledonian-MacBrayne (Ferry)

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to give approval for the ordering of a new Caledonian-MacBrayne ferry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: Caledonian MacBrayne has submitted a proposal to build a new passenger/car ferry and my right hon. and learned Friend hopes to give them his decision soon. The ordering of any new vessel will, as is normal, be subject to competitive tender.

Unemployment (Economic Implications)

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has made an assessment of the implications for the Scottish economy of the current level of unemployment in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: The increase in unemployment in Scotland over the past year can largely be explained by the fall in oil-related employment. Based on the results of the latest MSC survey, it is estimated that employment in wholly oil-related firms in Scotland fell by over 14,000 between December 1985 and December 1986, and total Scottish employment by some 1 per cent. It is important to preserve as much as possible of our oil-related capacity to take advantage of any upturn in demand.

The Government's economic policies, by creating the conditions for sustained economic growth and low inflation, offer the best hope of a lasting reduction in unemployment. Scotland benefits from regional policy and the activities of the SDA and HIDB, as well as a wide range of employment and training measures.

Manufacturing Investment

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his latest estimate of the percentage fall in the real value of manufacturing investment in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Greenock and Port Glasgow since 1980.

Mr. Lang: The percentage fall in the real value of manufacturing investment in Scotland between 1980 and 1984 (the latest year for which information is available) is estimated to have been 25 per cent. Information about changes in this period is not available for individual regions and areas within Scotland.

Theft

Mr. Maclennan asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his latest information on the incidence of theft from farmhouses and buildings in Scotland; and how this compares with the position in 1983.

Mr. Lang: This information is not collected centrally.

Prisoners (Police Stations)

Mr. David Marshall asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many prisoners are being held in police stations during the Scottish prison officers' industrial action; how many are in designated cells; and how many convicted prisoners are being held in cells other than designated cells.

Mr. Lang: At 6 pm on 25 February, 121 prisoners were being held in police stations, none in legalised police cells. Of that number 68 were convicted prisoners.

BBC Scotland (Police Raid)

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to the answer of 23 February, at what time on Friday 30 January a Strathclyde police officer telephoned his official about the intended police raid on the British Broadcasting Corporation's premises in Glasgow; what was the grade of the official concerned; in what division of the Scottish Office he worked; and what reason was given to him for the telephone call.

Mr. Rifkind: A grade 7 officer in the police division of the Scottish Home and Health Department was telephoned between 11 am and 12 noon. As regards the reason for the telephone call, I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 19 February.

Health and Social Services (Capital Expenditure)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the per capita spending on health and personal social services in cash terms and 1986-87 prices each year since 1979 to the latest available date for *(a)* all ages, *(b)* births, *(c)* 0 to four years, *(d)* five to 15 years, *(e)* 16 to 64 years *(f)* 65 to 74 years and *(g)* 75 years and over, giving the amount spent on (i) personal social services, (ii) family practitioner services, (iii) hospital and community health services and (iv) total in Scotland.

Mr. John MacKay [*pursuant to his reply*, 4 February 1987, c. *709*]: The information most closely available to that sought is as follows:

(i) Personal Social Services
Per Capita spending in cash terms

	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86[1]
All ages	36	47	51	54	59	63	67

(ii) Family Practioner Services: Recurrent Expenditure
Per head by age in cash terms

Year	All ages	Births	0-4	5-14	15-64	65-74	75+
1980-81	46	39	40	32	41	64	108
1981-82	56	47	44	41	52	70	131
1982-83	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1983-84	69	54	56	46	62	105	160
1984-85	76	61	62	51	67	118	171
1985-86[1]	80	64	70	68	69	114	176

(iii) Hospital and community health services: recurrent expenditure
Per head by age in cash terms

	All ages	Births	0-4	5-14	15-64	65-74	75+
1980-81	189	916	110	69	122	380	921
1981-82	215	1,111	112	81	137	415	1,070
1982-83	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1983-84	242	1,253	117	92	141	509	1,238
1984-85	259	1,339	128	97	149	547	1,332
1985-86[1]	276	1,389	142	101	156	555	1,442

(iv) Personal social services
Per capita spending at 1986-87 prices

	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86[1]
All ages	62	66	65	65	68	69	69

(v) Family practitioner services: recurrent expenditure
Per head by age at 1986-87 prices

	All ages	Births	0-4	5-14	15-64	65-74	75+
1980-81	64	54	57	45	58	90	151
1981-82	71	60	56	53	66	89	168
1982-83	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1983-84	79	62	64	52	70	119	183
1984-85	82	67	68	55	73	129	187
1985-86	82	66	72	70	71	118	182

(vi) Hospital and community health services: recurrent expenditure
Per head by age at 1986-87 prices

	All ages	Births	0-4	5-14	15-64	65-74	75+
1980-81	265	1,284	154	96	171	532	1,290
1981-82	274	1,417	143	104	174	530	1,365
1982-83	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1983-84	275	1,426	133	105	160	580	1,414
1984-85	283	1,462	140	106	163	597	1,455
1985-86	284	1,430	146	104	161	572	1,485

[1] Estimated expenditure.

Notes:

1. Information about expenditure on personal social services by age group is not maintained.
2. An analysis of total expenditure by age group on health services in Scotland (which include a number of servces financed centrally) is not available.
3. Details of health service expenditure by age group for 1979-80 and for 1982-83 are not available.
4. Per capita spending at 1986-87 prices has been calculated by application of the appropriate GDP deflator factors at market prices.
5. The hospital and community health services figures given include spending on the ambulance and blood transfusion service which are financed through the Common Services Agency.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Consultants

Mr. David Atkinson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has any plans to increase the number of consultants.

Mr. Newton: At 30 September 1986, the latest date for which figures are available, there were 13,785 consultants in post in England. The average rate of expansion since 1981 has been 2·15 per cent. per annum.

The proposals in the consultative document "Hospital Medical Staffing: Achieving a Balance" recommend that this basic rate of expansion should be maintained. In addition, the document proposes a pump-priming scheme for 100 extra consultant posts over two years. Funding for this scheme, amounting to £8·6 million over the next three years, was announced on 5 February and health authorities have been invited to submit bids for the posts. "Achieving a Balance" also contains proposals to further increase the number by converting surplus registrar and senior registrar posts to consultant.

Local Office Staffs

Ms. Harman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how many of the trained staff at the Department of Health and Social Security office in Blenheim grove, Camberwell, have been in post for more than 12 months;

(2) if any extra staff have been allocated to the Department of Health and Social Security office at Blenheim grove, Camberwell, as a result of the office being located on two sites;

(3) how many staff are allocated to the Department of Health and Social Security in Blenheim grove, Camberwell; and how many are currently in post at the Department of Health and Social Security office in Blenheim grove.

Mr. Lyell: The number of staff currently allocated to the Department's office in Blenheim grove, Camberwell is 135. Within this allocation is one post given because the office is located on two sites. On 1 February 1987, the latest date for which information is available, there were 133 staff in post. Of these, 99 have more than 12 months experience in the Department as a whole. Ninety-four have been in post at Camberwell for more than 12 months.

Mr. Squire asked the Secretary of State for Social Services, further to the answer to the hon. Member for Hornchurch on 8 December 1986, *Official Report*, column 67, when he expects to have received all the likely accommodation in Hornchurch capable of housing under one roof his Department's staff serving the constituents of the hon. Member for Hornchurch.

Mr. Lyell: As soon as the review of the Department's local office accommodation requirements in the Hornchurch area has been completed, action will be taken to seek suitable premises.

Mr. Squire asked the Secretary of State for Social Services, further to the answer to the hon. Member for Hornchurch on 8 December 1986, *Official Report*, column 67, whether he is now in a position to finalise the accommodation requirements for the Department of Health and Social Security staff currently working in separate buildings in Hornchurch and Romford.

Mr. Lyell: I regret that the statistical information required to complete the review of the accommodation requirements is not yet available. As I promised in my earlier reply, I will let my hon. Friend have a full reply as soon as the review has been completed.

Benefits

Ms. Harman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people in the London borough of Southwark have been in receipt of *(a)* supplementary benefit and *(b)* housing in each year since 1979.

Mr. Lyell: The numbers of people receiving supplementary benefit in the London borough of Southwark in the years 1981—the earliest figures available—to 1985—the latest figures available—were:

	Number
1981	24,000
1982	29,000
1983	30,000
1984	32,000
1985	34,000

Source: Supplementary Benefit Quarterly Statistical Inquiry. Figures rounded to nearest 1,000.

The number of people who were in receipt of housing benefit or rebates or allowances under the former Department of the Environment schemes in the London borough of Southwark is as follows:

	Number
1979-80	10,566
1980-81	12,583
1981-82	19,829
[1]1982-83	33,799
1983-84	39,309
[2]1984-85	38,159
[2]1985-86	45,384
[2]1986-87	36,610

Source: CIPFA housing rent statistics and local authority subsidy returns.

[1] The housing benefit scheme, which replaced the rent and rate rebates scheme was partially introduced in November 1982 and fully implemented in April 1983.

[2] The figures from 1984-85 are subject to revision.

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people in *(a)* Burnley constituency and *(b)* Pendle constituency have been in receipt of (i) supplementary benefit and (ii) housing benefit in each year since 1979.

Mr. Lyell: The constituencies of Burnley and Pendle are covered by the Department's local office at Burnley. The table shows the number of people receiving supplementary benefit from that office on 10 February 1987 and on comparable dates since 1979. Separate figures for the Burnley and Pendle constituencies cannot be provided.

	Number
1979	10,483
1980	9,972
1981	11,586
1982	13,478
1983	15,561
1984	16,020
1985	16,504
1986	16,463
1987	16,857

Source: 100 per cent. count of cases in action.

The estimated numbers of people who were in receipt of housing benefit or rebates or allowances under the former Department of the Environment schemes in the boroughs of Burnley and Pendle are as follows:

	Burnley	*Pendle*
1979-80	5,332	5,460
1980-81	5,874	5,635
1981-82	6,387	5,857
1982-83[1]	9,038	8,709
1983-84	13,206	12,925
1984-85	11,011	12,952
1985-86[2]	10,720	13,065
1986-87[2]	10,765	12,670

Source: CIPFA housing rent statistics and local authority subsidy returns.

[1] The housing benefit scheme, which replaced the rent and rate rebate scheme, was partially introduced in November 1982 and fully implemented in April 1983.

[2] The figures from 1985-86 are subject to revision.

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many claimants received payments for additional requirements at local offices in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Strathclyde region and *(c)* Greenock and Port Glasgow in each of the past five years.

Mr. Major: In 1984 (the latest year for which this information is available) 298,000 supplementary benefit claimants in Scotland were receiving an additional requirement. A comparable figure for 1983 is not immediately available but I shall let the hon. Member have a further reply with this information as soon as possible. The information for earlier years could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. I regret that the other information requested is not available.

Source: 1984 Annual statistical inquiry.

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many new claims for supplementary benefit were registered in local offices in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Strathclyde region and *(c)* Greenock and Port Glasgow in each year since 1980 by claimants aged under 25 years.

Mr. Lyell: I regret that the information requested is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the average weekly payment of supplementary benefit paid to claimants aged under 25 years in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Strathclyde region and *(c)* Greenock and Port Glasgow.

Mr. Lyell: Information is not immediately available about the average weekly payment of supplementary benefit paid to claimants aged under 25 years in Scotland but I shall let the hon. Member have a further reply as soon as possible. Information about Strathclyde region and Greenock and Port Glasgow is not available.

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the total amount paid to social security claimants in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Strathclyde region and *(c)* Greenock and Port Glasgow for additional requirements in each year since 1979.

Mr. Lyell: In 1984 (the latest year for which this information is available) supplementary benefit claimants in Scotland received additional requirements amounting to about £50 million. A comparable figure for 1983 is not immediately available but I shall give the hon. Member a further reply as soon as possible; however, those for earlier years could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. I regret that the other information requested is not available.

Source: annual statistical inquiry.

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the total amount paid to social security claimants in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Strathclyde region and *(c)* Greenock and Port Glasgow for single payments in each year since 1979.

Mr. Lyell: The total amounts paid as single payments for each year since 1979 to claimants in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Strathclyde region, *(c)* Greenock and *(d)* Port Glasgow are given in the table.

Year (April to April)	*(a) Scotland* £	*(b) Strathclyde* £	*(c) Greenock* £	*(d) Port Glasgow* £
1979-80	10,019,290	6,626,140	103,447	90,184
1980-81	14,123,563	9,847,098	289,568	199,653
1981-82	12,375,533	7,906,488	215,181	108,610
1982-83	22,670,751	15,454,679	413,061	272,372
1983-84	37,067,373	24,936,115	589,042	366,898
1984-85	54,250,887	36,927,066	852,311	531,208
1985-86[1]	71,053,317	48,170,412	1,106,074	766,240
1986-87[2]	65,153,217	46,200,967	1,501,307	844,651

[1] Figures for 1985-86 are provisional.

[2] Figures for 1986-87 are provisional and cover the period to 10 February 1987 only.

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many appeals against decisions relating to single payments for those people on supplementary benefit are currently being dealt with by the local officer serving *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Strathclyde region and *(c)* Greenock and Port Glasgow; and what were the comparable numbers for one year ago.

Mr. Lyell: National administrative statistics for social security appeals are not disaggregated below regional level. The most recent figures available are for the quarter ended 30 June 1986, when the total number of appeals relating to supplementary benefit single payments awaiting a decision in Scotland was 10,303, compared to 7,617 for the quarter ended 30 June 1985.

Mr. Robert C. Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many persons resident in Newcastle upon Tyne, North constituency are at present in receipt of social security benefits.

Mr. Lyell: Information is not available in the precise form requested. Newcastle upon Tyne, North constituency is covered by the Department's local office of Newcastle St. James but its boundaries are not conterminous with those of the constituency.

On 10 February 1987—the latest figures available—the numbers of people receiving locally administered social security benefits from that office were:

	Number
Sickness and Invalidity Benefit	3,714
Maternity Allowance	293
Severe Disablement Allowance	779
Supplementary Benefit	16,987

Information is not available in respect of centrally paid benefits (for example retirement pension) showing the number of beneficiaries in any particular locality.

Housing benefit is administered by the local authority and the number of recipients in the city of Newcastle in the autumn of 1986—the latest date for which information is available—was 62,950.

Separate figures for individual parts of the local authority cannot be provided.

Mr. Bermingham asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the total number of people in receipt of unemployment benefit and supplementary benefit in St. Helens, South at the latest date available.

Mr. Lyell: The information is not available in the precise form requested. St. Helens South constituency is covered by three unemployment benefit offices at St. Helens A and B, and Widnes, and by the Department's local office at St. Helens. The boundaries are not conterminous with those of the constituency. The number of persons receiving unemployment benefit and supplementary benefit from these offices were:

At 14 August 1986

	UB only	*UB and SA*	*SA only*
St. Helens 'A' UBO	1,219	275	3,593
St. Helens 'B' UBO	1,150	218	3,225
Widnes UBO	941	228	2,688

At 10 February 1987

	SA	*SP*
At 10 February 1987		
St. Helens DHSS office	5,534	5,534

Notes:
SA = Supplementary Allowance
SP = Supplementary Pension

12:

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what has been the total amount of supplementary benefit paid out to Welsh claimants in each of the past seven years.

Mr. Lyell: The information is as follows:

Financial Year	*£ million*[3]
1979-80	125
1980-81	170
1981-82	275
1982-83	358
1983-84	[1]334
[2]1984-85	374

Notes:
[1]Reduction because, with the introduction of housing benefit, most financial support for housing costs is now provided through that scheme.
[2] Latest available date.
[3] Estimate.

Mr. Winnick: asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the number and percentage of those of working age in receipt of supplementary benefit in *(a)* the west midlands region, *(b)* the black country area of the west midlands and *(c)* the borough of Walsall in May 1979 and at present.

Mr. Lyell [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 February 1987, c. *823*]: The black country area of the west midlands is covered by eight of the Department's local offices at Dudley North and South, Smethwick, Walsall East and West, West Bromwich and Wolverhampton North and South. The borough of Walsall is covered by the two Walsall local offices.

The number of people of working age receiving supplementary benefit in *(a)* the west midlands region, *(b)* the black country area of the west midlands and *(c)* the borough of Walsall, on 15 May 1979 and 10 February 1987—the latest available figures—and the percentage of all supplementay benefit recipients in those areas on those dates were:

	1979	*Percentage of all supplementary benefit recipients*	*1987+*	*Percentage of all supplementary benefit recipients*
West midlands	126,331	44·1	379,680	69·4
Black country	26,623	38·9	83,647	68·1
Walsall	6,381	40·9	21,967	70·5

Source: 100 per cent. count of cases in action.

The west midlands region was merged with part of east midlands and East Anglia region in 1982 to form the present midlands region. But for the sake of consistency, the table shows, for 1987, the total figures for those offices which were formerly part of west midlands region.

NHS (Pay Comparability)

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what research he has done into the effect on the National Health Service of the ending of comparability of pay between medical academic staff and National Health Service staff.

Mr. Newton: The Government remain committed to the principle that the pay of clinical academic staff should be linked to that of doctors and dentists in the National Health Service. The clinical academic staff salaries committee has notified universities of increases in pay for clinical academics in line with those made to National Health Service doctors following the report of the Doctors and Dentists Review Body. I therefore see no need for research of the kind suggested by the hon. Member.

Hospital Closures

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he has any plans to visit the Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale health authority to look at the hospitals at present under threat of closure.

Mr. Newton: I plan to visit Hartley hospital on 6 March.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Maxton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will provide the number of households in Scotland in receipt of housing benefit for each of the years 1978 to 1986 inclusive, showing the numbers of *(a)* public sector tenants in receipt of rent rebates only, *(b)* public sector tenants in receipt of rate rebates only, *(c)* public sector tenants in receipt of both rent and rate rebates, *(d)* private sector tenants in receipt of rent allowance only, *(e)* private sector tenants in receipt of rate rebates only, *(f)* private sector tenants in receipt of both rent allowances and rate rebates and *(g)* owner-occupiers in receipt of rate rebates.

Mr. Lyell: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Dental Treatment

Mr. Conway asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what action he has taken to implement the recommendations of the committee of inquiry into unnecessary dental treatment.

Mrs. Currie: I am pleased to announce that 32 of the committee's 52 recommendations have been or are in the process of being implemented. Active discussions are taking place about the implementation of a further 15. Progress on the major proposals is summarised as follows.

The Dental Estimates Board was supplied with a new more powerful computer last year and work to develop better control systems is at an advanced stage. A statistician has been seconded from my Department to assist the board with this work. To improve liaison between the board and the dental profession, the board has started publishing occasional newsletters, which will inform dentists of the board's views on certain treatments including those requiring the board's prior approval.

The prior approval requirements themselves are under review and proposals will be discussed with the profession in the near future. As already announced a committee has begun work to consider methods of assisting the board in the assessment of the need for orthodontic treatment.

To improve standards of treatment a new vocational training scheme for dentists wishing to enter general dental practice is to be introduced on 1 January 1988. This voluntary scheme is being introduced with the co-operation of the dental profession which we welcome.

Information to patients on dental treatment has been revised in a leaflet issued in July last year. It includes details of the complaints procedure (which is also the subject of separate consultations as part of the consultations in progress on the complaints procedure for family practitioner services as a whole.) Advice has been issued to family practitioner committees on their role in monitoring and detecting unnecessary treatment. Consultations have begun with the FPCs and other interested bodies on amendments to the legal procedures which provide sanctions against dentists who are providing excessive treatment.

The staffing of the Department's dental reference services has been increased and a study has been started with the objective of improving the effectiveness of the DRS.

In these ways I am satisfied that considerable progress has been, and is being, made.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the number of part-time and full-time employees in the National Health Service in Great Britain in *(a)* 1960, *(b)* 1970, *(c)* 1980, *(d)* 1981, *(e)* 1982, *(f)* 1983, *(g)* 1984, *(h)* 1985 and *(i)* 1986; and if he will show the increase in each year.

Mr. Newton I am sorry that I am unable to provide all the information my hon. Friend has asked for. Figures for 1960 and 1970 are not available on a comparable basis to those for the other years. Figures for 1986 are not yet available to the level of detail requested. The other figures are shown in the table.

NHS Directly Employed Staff: 30 [1] September [2]

Great Britain	*Total Number*	*Whole-Time Number*	*Part-Time Number*
1980	1,145,700	712,700	433,000
1981	1,179,000	743,200	435,700
1982	1,189,800	751,100	438,700
1983	1,189,200	752,000	437,300
1984	1,174,900	743,300	431,600
1985	1,171,100	737,800	433,300
Change			
1980-81 Number	+ 33,300	+ 30,500	+ 2700
Per Cent.	+ 2·9	+ 4·3	+ 0·6
Change			
1981-82 Number	+ 10,900	+ 7,900	+ 3000
Per Cent.	+ 0·9	+ 1·1	+ 0·7
Change			
1982-83 Number	— 600	+ 900	— 1,500
Per Cent.	— 0·0	+ 0·1	— 0·3
Change			
1983-84 Number	— 14,300	— 8,700	— 5,600
Per Cent.	— 1·2	— 1·2	— 1·3
Change			
1984-85 Number	— 3,800	— 5,500	+ 1,700
Per Cent.	— 0·3	— 0·7	+ 0·4

Source: DHSS Annual Censuses of NHS medical and non-medical manpower; Welsh Office and Scottish Common Services Agency.
[1] All figures are independently rounded to the nearest 100 (one hundred). Year on year changes are calculated on unrounded figures.
[2] Excludes nursing/midwifery agency staff and medical/dental locums. Includes hospital practitioners, part-time medical/dental officers (clinical assistants). Part-time staff includes honorary staff.

Health Services (Statistics)

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has as to how many people are employed in the health services in the United Kingdom, the United States of America, France and West Germany; and what percentage of the population these figures represent.

Mr. Newton I am sorry I cannot provide all the information my hon. Friend has asked for. Figures for other countries are not available centrally. The figures for the United Kingdom are shown in the table.

Total NHS Directly Employed Staff:[1] 30 September 1985

United Kingdom	*Numbers*
Total Staff	1,236,200
Population	56,617,800
Total Staff as per cent. of Population	2 per cent.

Source: DHSS Annual Censuses of NHS medical and non-medical manpower; Welsh Office; Scottish Common Services Agency; Northern Ireland Office.

[1]Excludes nursing/midwifery agency staff and medical/dental locums. Figures for Great Britain include hospitals practitioners, part-time medical/dental officers (clinical assistants). Northern Ireland figures exclude these staff.

Health Care (North-West)

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the national average cost of health care per man, woman and child; and what is the comparable figure for the north-west region.

Mr. Newton: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Family Credit

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what estimate he has made of the number of families in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Strathclyde region and *(c)* Greenock and Port Glasgow who will be entitled to receive family credit; how many of them will be entitled to continue receiving free school meals; and what is the likely take-up of this award in each of the three above.

Mr. Major: I regret that it is not possible to make reliable estimates on such a localised basis. Overall, family credit is expected to reach about double the number of families now helped by family income supplement. This is consistent with a take-up rate of 60 per cent. Only families receiving income support will be entitled to free school meals, but the rates of family credit will be set at a higher level so as to give extra cash help instead.

Family Income Supplement

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many families in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Greenock and Port Glasgow currently receive family income supplement; what is the average weekly sum received by each family; and how many children in these families are entitled to free school meals as a result.

Mr. Major: I regret that information is not available relating to Strathclyde nor to Greenock and Port Glasgow. However, in Scotland at April 1986, the latest date for which information is available, there were a total of 24,000 families in receipt of family income supplement and the average weekly amount in payment was £13·50. The number of school age children, all those over five years, was 33,000 and they would be eligible for free school meals.

Social Fund

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what estimate he has made of the change in expenditure by his Department from the introduction of the social fund in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Strathclyde region and *(c)* Greenock and Port Glasgow; how many payments he estimates will be made from this fund in each of the three; and what is the estimated average amount of payment.

Mr. Major: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Deakins) 23 February at column *123*.

Pensioners

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many pensioners were in receipt of social security payments in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Strathclyde region and *(c)* Greenock and Port Glasgow in 1986; how many of these will be required to pay 20 per cent. of their rates bill; what will be the average weekly payment by such citizens towards rates on the assumption that their rates liabilities will remain unchanged from 1986-87; and how many such citizens will be paying rates for the first time when the new requirement comes into force.

Mr. Lyell: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Cervical Cancer

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what is the average waiting time between diagnosis and treatment for those women found to have severe cervical dysplasia over the last four months in North-East Thames regional health authority;

(2) what is the average waiting time between diagnosis and treatment for those women found to have severe cervical dysplasia over the last four months in Islington district health authority;

(3) what is the average waiting time between diagnosis and treatment for those women found to have cervical carcinoma in situ over the last four months in the North-East Thames regional health authority;

(4) what is the average waiting time between diagnosis and treatment for those women found to have cervical carcinoma in situ over the last four months in Islington district health authority;

(5) what is the number of women in the Islington district health authority area who are on the waiting list for treatment for cervical carcinoma in situ, broken down by hospital;

(6) what is the number of women in the North-East Thames regional health authority who are on the waiting list for treatment for severe cervical dysplasia;

(7) what is the number of women in the North-East Thames regional health authority area who are on the waiting list for treatment for cervical carcinoma in situ;

(8) what is the number of women in the Islington district health authority area who are on the waiting list for treatment for severe cervical dysplasia, broken down by hospital.

Mr. Newton: I am sorry that I cannot give the hon. Member the information he seeks. Waiting list information is held centrally by the specialty of treatment and not by diagnosis. On waiting time, the numbers in the central data sample are too small for reliable estimates to be made below regional level or for part of a year. The hon. Member may wish to write to the chairmen of the Islington district health authority and North East Thames regional health authority for the information required.

Asthma (Deaths)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what action he has taken to reduce deaths from asthma since 1978.

Mrs. Currie: There are many causes of asthma requiring different forms of treatment. Despite improvements in these treatments deaths from asthma continue to increase. This emphasises the need for research. The Department supports a research project in prevalence and treatment in asthma at St. Thomas's hospital at an estimated cost of £65,000. The Medical Research Council also supports research in this field. In 1985-86 MRC expenditure on projects with relevance to asthma totalled £599,000.

Severe Weather Payments

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give *(a)* the daily mean temperature and *(b)* the weekly mean temperature for the 64 Department of Health and Social Security weather stations for the weeks beginning 1 February and 8 February 1987.

Mr. Major: The Department receives information from the Meteorological Office for 63 weather stations in respect of seven-day periods beginning each Monday. The information requested for the weeks commencing Monday 2 February and 9 February is as follows:

Week commencing 2 February 1987

Weather stations	*Monday*	*Tuesday*	*Wednesday*	*Thursday*	*Friday*	*Saturday*	*Sunday*	*Average*
Scotland								
Aberdeen Airport	0·4	4·0	4·9	7·8	8·4	3·2	5·8	4·9
Dumfries	−0·9	5·5	3·8	5·3	9·0	3·5	6·5	4·6
Edinburgh Airport	0·2	4·3	6·0	7·1	8·4	4·4	5·8	5·1
Eskdalemuir (Galashiels)	−2·2	4·3	2·6	4·7	5·6	2·1	5·1	3·3
Fort William	1·7	4·3	6·5	7·9	8·6	5·2	5·9	5·7
Glasgow Airport	−0·7	3·9	5·3	6·8	8·3	3·9	5·6	4·7
Kinloss (Inverness)	1·5	5·0	6·4	8·4	7·7	1·6	4·9	5·1
Kirkwall	4·2	4·8	5·7	7·1	6·3	3·3	4·7	5·1
Lerwick	3·9	5·3	5·0	6·5	5·4	1·9	3·7	4·5
Leuchars (Dundee)	−0·7	3·5	5·1	6·6	9·0	3·3	6·7	4·6
Machrihanish (Campbeltown)	6·0	6·3	6·0	7·8	8·1	7·2	7·9	7·0
Prestwick (Ayr)	4·0	4·5	5·9	7·8	8·8	5·2	6·1	6·0
Stornoway	6·5	4·9	6·6	8·0	7·3	4·2	4·6	6·0
Whithorn	4·2	5·2	4·5	6·8	7·8	4·9	6·2	5·6
Wick	4·8	3·3	5·1	7·2	6·8	1·6	3·9	4·7
England								
Aughton (Liverpool)	1·7	5·0	5·1	6·7	8·0	5·2	6·6	5·4
Bedford RAE	0·4	4·2	5·5	7·8	9·4	6·1	7·5	5·8
Binbrook (Hull)	−0·1	3·9	3·0	6·8	7·9	5·4	7·3	4·9
Birmingham Airport	−0·1	6·0	5·2	7·7	9·2	7·3	7·8	6·1
Blackpool Airport	2·0	5·3	2·4	5·0	6·8	4·7	5·4	1·2
Boscombe Down (Sarum)	1·1	6·5	7·0	8·1	9·0	5·7	7·7	6·4
Boulmer (Berwick)	1·0	4·1	4·9	6·6	9·0	5·6	8·0	5·6
Bournemouth Airport	0·1	7·5	7·4	8·1	8·7	5·7	7·0	6·3
Bristol	3·3	7·9	8·6	9·5	9·3	6·8	7·6	7·5
Brize Norton (Oxford)	0·0	5·6	6·9	7·7	9·5	5·1	6·8	5·9
Carlisle	0·7	6·0	4·2	6·2	8·0	5·6	5·8	5·2
Chivenor (Barnstaple)	7·3	8·0	8·3	9·2	9·1	6·7	—	—
Coltishall (Norwich)	−0·2	2·5	4·9	7·5	9·5	6·8	7·8	5·6
Coningsby (Boston)	−1·5	3·2	4·2	5·9	10·3	5·6	6·9	4·9
Culdrose (Penzance)	9·2	8·1	7·1	7·8	8·8	6·2	7·4	7·8
East Hampstead	−0·8	6·0	7·2	8·6	9·7	4·4	7·1	6·0
Eskmeals (Whitehaven)	3·6	6·3	3·4	5·0	7·4	4·2	5·0	5·0
Exeter	6·7	8·4	7·5	9·0	10·4	7·1	8·6	8·2
Finningley (Sheffield)	−1·3	4·3	3·9	6·6	9·2	7·1	8·2	5·4
Gatwick Airport (Guildford)	0·8	5·2	6·2	7·8	8·3	6·4	8·1	6·1
Heathrow Airport (London)	1·8	6·3	7·2	9·0	10·3	5·7	8·1	6·9
Herstmonceaux (Brighton)	2·1	4·9	5·6	6·8	7·6	5·2	5·9	5·4
Honington (Bury St. Edmunds)	0·8	3·7	5·2	8·1	9·7	7·7	7·5	6·1
Leeds Weather Centre	−0·3	4·9	4·1	6·8	9·4	6·7	8·0	5·6
Leeming (Newcastle)	−2·1	4·7	3·6	6·0	9·0	5·9	6·9	4·9
Lyneham (Chippenham)	3·2	6·3	7·0	8·0	8·5	5·6	6·7	6·4
Manchester Airport	2·1	5·3	3·6	7·3	8·8	6·9	8·1	6·0

Week commencing 2 February 1987

Weather stations	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Average
Manston (Dover)	0·9	4·9	4·7	6·8	8·1	6·1	7·5	5·5
Marham (Kings Lynn)	−0·6	3·4	5·0	7·3	9·3	5·1	7·7	5·3
Mouth Batten (Plymouth)	6·8	8·6	7·9	8·4	8·8	6·4	7·3	7·7
Okehampton	6·0	6·8	6·3	7·1	7·5	5·8	7·0	6·5
St. Mawgan (Truro)	8·4	7·9	7·5	8·9	9·2	6·9	7·9	8·1
Shawbury (Shrewsbury)	0·8	4·9	4·7	6·8	9·6	5·2	7·1	5·5
Southampton Weather Centre	3·5	6·6	7·1	8·4	8·9	7·3	8·8	7·2
Stansted	0·9	5·2	6·2	7·8	9·4	5·8	7·5	6·1
Tynemouth (Sunderland)	1·4	4·3	5·3	7·5	8·3	6·3	7·7	5·8
Watnall (Derby)	−0·7	4·9	4·7	7·1	8·8	5·8	7·4	5·4
Wattisham (Ipswich)	0·5	3·5	4·2	7·4	9·1	5·4	7·4	5·3
Whitby Coastguard	2·9	4·3	3·7	6·5	7·6	7·0	8·1	5·7
Wyton (Cambridge)	0·3	4·5	5·9	7·8	10·0	5·9	7·8	6·0
Yeovilton (Yeovil)	3·9	8·1	7·7	8·7	10·1	5·9	7·7	7·4
Wales								
Aberporth (Aberystwyth)	4·6	6·8	5·7	8·1	9·7	6·9	6·3	6·5
Brawdy (Pembroke)	5·2	7·0	6·1	7·7	8·2	5·3	5·9	6·5
Cilfynydd (Merthyr Tydfil)	3·2	6·7	6·0	7·2	7·7	5·4	6·5	6·1
Mumbles (Swansea)	4·7	6·8	6·2	6·9	7·7	6·7	6·7	6·4
Rhoose (Cardiff)	3·1	6·8	6·9	8·0	7·7	5·5	5·7	6·2
Trawsfynydd (Dolgellau)	4·7	5·2	4·2	5·4	7·1	4·4	4·6	5·1
Valley (Caernarfon)	6·9	7·7	4·5	7·5	9·1	4·4	6·0	6·4
Scotland								
Aberdeen Airport	3·2	3·3	2·6	3·1	2·9	0·9	−0·3	2·2
Dumfries	3·9	5·3	3·9	3·7	1·0	1·9	−0·7	2·7
Edinburgh Airport	2·3	4·0	2·9	2·9	−0·6	1·2	−0·5	1·7
Eskdalemuir (Galashiels)	1·8	3·8	2·1	1·3	0·7	1·6	−2·4	1·2
Fort William	4·3	3·1	3·4	1·3	0·2	−0·6	−1·3	1·5
Glasgow Airport	3·2	4·0	2·7	2·0	−0·4	0·6	−0·4	1·6
Kinloss (Inverness)	3·7	3·3	3·0	2·5	1·7	0·3	0·0	2·0
Kirkwall	5·0	3·3	3·4	2·9	2·1	0·4	−0·1	2·4
Lerwick	5·3	2·6	3·0	2·4	0·5	−0·5	−1·5	1·7
Leuchars (Dundee)	3·0	4·1	3·0	2·7	1·9	1·1	−0·4	2·2
Machrihanish (Campbelltown)	4·4	4·8	3·3	3·8	1·4	1·2	1·1	2·8
Prestwick (Ayr)	2·0	3·7	4·3	2·7	1·3	1·8	−0·2	2·2
Stornoway	4·4	3·2	3·5	2·7	2·7	1·3	0·2	2·6
Whithorn	4·1	4·2	3·3	3·2	0·3	1·6	−0·1	2·3
Wick	3·4	3·2	2·8	2·5	2·8	−0·6	−1·5	1·8
England								
Aughton (Liverpool)	7·4	5·1	4·4	2·9	2·8	2·6	1·2	3·7
Bedford RAE	8·6	6·3	3·6	2·3	1·8	2·2	1·6	3·7
Binbrook (Hull)	7·0	5·2	2·3	1·2	1·2	1·3	0·6	2·7
Birmingham Airport	8·3	6·4	2·2	3·4	2·2	2·5	−0·4	3·5
Blackpool Airport	6·1	4·6	4·8	3·1	−0·1	1·8	−0·1	2·9
Boscombe Down (Sarum)	8·7	5·9	4·1	3·0	0·6	1·5	1·1	3·6
Boulmer (Berwick)	4·6	5·1	3·8	2·2	2·6	3·3	1·1	3·2
Bournemouth Airport	8·2	6·8	4·6	3·3	1·0	2·7	0·7	3·9
Bristol	9·0	6·7	5·4	4·8	3·7	3·6	2·9	5·1
Brize Norton (Oxford)	9·0	6·2	2·8	3·0	1·2	1·1	1·7	3·6
Carlisle	5·0	5·2	3·8	4·1	3·6	2·4	1·1	3·6
Chivenor (Barnstaple)	9·7	7·2	5·3	5·2	2·8	5·4	1·8	5·3
Coltishall (Norwich)	8·4	7·0	3·8	3·1	3·6	2·8	3·5	4·5
Coningsby (Boston)	7·3	6·4	2·8	2·5	1·5	2·0	1·4	3·4
Culdrose (Penzance)	9·1	6·3	5·8	4·8	3·4	5·3	2·0	5·2
East Hampstead	8·8	6·8	4·6	3·7	1·8	1·8	1·2	4·1
Eskmeals (Whitehaven)	5·4	4·9	3·0	1·4	3·4	3·4	2·4	3·4
Exeter	9·4	6·5	4·6	4·1	1·5	4·4	1·1	4·5
Finningley (Sheffield)	7·5	6·0	3·9	3·6	1·6	2·1	1·2	3·7
Gatwick Airport (Guildford)	8·6	6·0	3·9	3·7	1·1	1·5	2·8	3·9
Heathrow Airport (London)	9·4	7·6	5·2	4·3	3·4	3·2	2·8	5·1
Herstmonceux (Brighton)	8·4	6·7	5·2	2·6	2·5	2·2	3·4	4·4
Honington (Bury St. Edmunds)	9·0	6·8	4·5	3·3	1·8	2·2	2·2	4·2
Leeds Weather Centre	8·1	5·2	5·3	4·7	3·6	2·5	1·3	4·3
Leeming (Newcastle)	7·0	5·9	4·6	3·3	2·8	2·7	−0·1	3·7
Lyneham (Chippenham)	8·6	6·0	3·8	3·0	1·0	1·8	0·5	3·5
Manchester Airport	7·5	5·6	4·1	3·7	3·4	2·8	1·5	4·1
Manston (Dover)	8·4	7·2	3·7	1·8	1·9	2·5	3·1	4·1
Marham (Kings Lynn)	7·1	7·1	4·0	3·3	1·6	2·4	1·5	3·8
Mount Batten (Plymouth)	9·0	8·6	5·4	4·6	2·7	5·6	2·2	5·1

Week commencing 2 February 1987

Weather stations	*Monday*	*Tuesday*	*Wednesday*	*Thursday*	*Friday*	*Saturday*	*Sunday*	*Average*
Okehampton	7·3	3·1	2·6	2·6	−0·7	2·2	−0·6	2·3
St. Mawgan (Truro)	9·1	6·2	6·0	5·5	3·1	5·0	1·9	5·2
Shawbury (Shrewsbury)	7·8	6·2	3·9	2·8	3·1	1·7	−0·4	3·6
Southampton Weather Centre	8·4	7·3	6·3	5·7	3·1	4·0	2·5	5·3
Stansted	8·6	6·4	3·7	2·9	1·5	1·9	1·5	3·8
Tynemouth (Sunderland)	7·1	5·0	4·4	3·3	3·3	3·5	1·3	4·0
Watnall (Derby)	7·6	5·7	2·5	3·1	2·0	2·1	1·8	3·5
Wattisham (Ipswich)	8·5	6·5	3·6	3·9	0·6	1·7	2·3	3·9
Whitby Coastguard	7·3	5·7	5·1	2·7	2·9	3·0	2·0	4·1
Wyton (Cambridge)	8·9	6·6	4·3	3·0	1·9	2·9	1·5	4·1
Yeovilton (Yeovil)	9·0	5·7	4·5	3·6	1·8	2·4	0·1	3·8
Wales								
Aberporth (Aberystwyth)	8·3	5·4	4·3	3·8	2·8	3·2	3·3	4·4
Brawdy (Pembroke)	7·9	5·9	4·8	4·0	2·3	3·1	1·2	4·1
Cilfynydd (Merthyr Tydfil)	7·7	5·3	2·6	3·9	1·7	3·3	1·3	3·7
Mumbles (Swansea)	7·2	6·8	5·0	5·6	4·0	4·9	3·7	5·3
Rhoose (Cardiff)	8·1	6·1	4·1	4·0	2·4	4·4	2·1	4·4
Trawsfynydd (Dolgellau)	7·1	4·0	3·3	2·2	1·1	2·0	0·7	2·9
Valley (Caernarfon)	6·9	6·2	5·3	2·5	3·3	2·6	2·4	4·1

[1] Data not available.

Pharmacists

Mr. Kennedy asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the number of registered pharmacists employed in National Health Service hospitals in the East Anglian, and the four Thames regional health authorities; and how many of the established pharmacist posts in each region are currently unfilled.

Mr. Newton: The latest available figures for staff in post are shown in the table.

Registered pharmacists in specified National Health Service regions as at 30 September 1985[1,2]

Regional Health Authority	*Whole time equivalent*
East Anglian	90
North West Thames	250
North East Thames	270
South East Thames	230
South West Thames	170

Source: DHSS annual census of NHS non-medical manpower.

[1] Figures are rounded to the nearest ten (10) whole time equivalents.

[2] Includes Regional and District Pharmaceutical Officers.

Information on unfilled posts is not centrally available.

Alzheimer's Disease

Mr. Beith asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what treatment is available under the National Health Service which involves the injection of foetal cells as a treatment for Alzheimer's disease or related conditions.

Mrs. Edwina Currie: I understand that no such treatment is available. There has been some research which suggests that implantation of embryo brain cells relieved symptoms in animal models of Alzheimer's disease. There is no guarantee that this will lead to the development of effective treatment for humans.

Treatment (Foetal Tissue)

Mr. Beith asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement outlining any treatment which is currently available under the National Health Service which involves the use of human foetal tissue.

Mr. Newton: While amnion from the placenta is sometimes used in the preparation for skin grafting, I am not aware that foetal tissue is used in treatment provided under the National Health Service.

Children in Care

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list in the *Official Report* the 10 local authority districts with the highest rates of children in care.

Mrs. Currie: Based on information available centrally, the 10 local authorities with the highest number of children and young persons in care per thousand population aged under 18 are shown in the table.

Children and young persons in care of local authorities at 31 March 1985 per thousand population aged under 18: the 10 authorities with the highest rates

Local authority	*Number per thousand population aged under 18*[1]
Lambeth	17·4
Hammersmith	15·6
Hackney	15·5
Southwark	15·0
Manchester	14·3
Kensington	14·1
Newcastle upon Tyne	12·5
Westminster	12·3
Camden	11·5
Wandsworth	11·2

[1] The number of children in care per thousand population aged under 18 is based on the population as at 30 June 1984 in each authority.

Meningitis

Mr. Simon Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received from

the National Meningitis Trust concerning the incidence of meningitis *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* in Stonehouse, Gloucestershire.

Mrs. Currie: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State visited Stonehouse on 7 August 1986 and spoke at a public meeting concerning meningitis in that area. My noble Friend also met members of the meningitis trust during a later visit to Gloucester. At the request of my noble Friend the secretary of the trust and a small delegation will be meeting her on 5 March to discuss these matters.

Mr. Simon Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what initiatives he has already taken and intends to take to combat the rising incidence of meningitis, especially in Stonehouse, Gloucestershire;

(2) what funds have been allocated to research into meningitis in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie [*pursuant to her reply*, 23 February 1987, c. *128*]: The Department provided funds totalling £57,000 for the Stonehouse meningococcal survey, which commenced last November and is proceeding. It is not possible to quantify precisely the funds allocated to other continuing work on meningitis, particularly in the public health laboratory service; this includes monitoring of incidence by the communicable disease surveillance centre, development of a vaccine against the B15 strain of meningococcal meningitis at the centre for applied microbiological research at Porton Down, and investigation of the causes of the disease at the PHLS's Manchester laboratory.

Christmas Bonus

Mr. Christopher Hawkins asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list for each year since its introduction *(a)* the value of the Christmas bonus for pensioners and *(b)* the cumulative increase in the retail price index.

Mr. Major: The level of the Christmas bonus has been £10 in each year since its introduction in 1972, except in 1975 and 1976 when it was not paid. The cumulative percentage increase in the retail price index for each year since December 1972 is shown in the table.

December	*Per cent.*
1973	10·6
1974	31·7
1975	64·5
1976	89·3
1977	112·3
1978	130·1
1979	169·8
1980	210·6
1981	248·0
1982	266·8
1983	286·3
1984	304·0
1985	327·0
1986	342·9

AIDS

Mr. Madden asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what action he is taking to give advance notification of Government publicity concerning AIDS to local voluntary groups to enable organisers to be prepared for any increasing demand for their services.

Mr. Newton: It is not possible for Government to give advance warning of Government initiatives to every local voluntary organisation. However, the main elements in the Government's public education campaign have been widely publicised in advance; and health authorities, who were given full details of our plans in December last year, have been asked to work with voluntary organisations in prevention, health education and counselling in support of AIDS sufferers. The need to act quickly to educate the public about AIDS and counter the spread of infection has been paramount in our considerations.

Mr. Madden asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what improvements have been agreed as a result of discussions between his Department and British Telecom to enable the public to obtain information about voluntary and public agencies giving information and counselling about AIDS; whether local directory inquiry services now hold the numbers of such local voluntary and public agencies; and whether they have been instructed to issue these numbers to callers on request;

(2) what action he is taking to promote local voluntary agencies, including Aidslines and gay switchboards, to assist those seeking information and counselling about AIDS to obtain such help locally.

Mr. Newton: As part of the national AIDS campaign, the Government have set up a national telephone advisory service on AIDS. Counsellors manning the service maintain lists of local voluntary agencies to which callers may be referred for further help and advice. It is, of course, for local organisations themselves to ensure that their telephone numbers are available through local directory inquiry services.

Mr. Madden asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what action he has taken on matters raised in a letter sent to him on 9 January by Adam M. Mitchell-Christie, liaison officer with the West Yorkshire AIDS information exchange.

Mr. Newton: The letter raises a number of points which need to be considered in detail. A reply will be sent as soon as possible.

Mr. Madden asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he proposes to issue national information leaflets about AIDS in languages other than English; in what languages such leaflets will be printed; if he will place advertisements about AIDS in British ethnic minority publications; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: We are urgently considering how best to ensure that essential information about AIDS reaches people from ethnic minorities, particularly those who have difficulty reading and understanding English, in ways that are sensitive to the needs of each community. On 5 February I attended a meeting with representatives of the ethnic press at which it was apparent that straight translation of existing leaflets may not be appropriate in all cases. We will consider carefully all the views expressed in devising a strategy for carrying forward this important aspect of its public information campaign.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what guidelines have been issued to nursing staff regarding the treatment of AIDS sufferers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 February 1987, c. *513*]: The following guidance has been issued, under cover of letters from the Chief Nursing Officer (CNO).

1. Children at School and problems relating to AIDS. (Draft) (CNO(86)1).
2. Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome—AIDS—Booklet 3: Guidance for Surgeons, Anaesthetists, Dentists and their teams in dealing with patients infected with HTLVIII. April 1986 (CNO(86)7).
3. Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome—AIDS—General Information for Doctors (May 1985) (CNO(86)7).
4. Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome—AIDS—Booklet 2. Information for Doctors concerning the introduction of the HTLVIII Antibody Test. (October 1985) (CNO(86)7).
5. Children at School and problems related to AIDS (revised version). Department of Education and Science and Welsh Office. (CNO(86)12).
6. Information on the guidance issued by the Royal College of Nursing, entitled AIDS Nursing Guidelines—Royal College of Nursing November 1986 (CNO(86)17).
7. Information about the latest stage of the public information campaign, to explain the current AIDS situation in the UK and to give further information about advice on testing. (CNO(86)18).

Private Hospitals (Admissions)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what percentage of all admissions were made to private hospitals for each year since 1979.

Mrs. Currie: The information requested is not available. There is no requirement on private hospitals to report the number of patients admitted.

Suicides

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list in the *Official Report* the 10 district local authority areas with the highest suicide rate in each of the last three years.

Mrs. Currie: I regret that the full information requested can be provided only at disproportionate cost. However the number of suicides by local authority area of usual residence is published in table 5 of "Mortality Statistics, area. Series DH5 no 12", a copy of which is in the Library.

Diabetics

Mr. Cormack asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to complete his review of policy on the provision of free needles to registered diabetics.

Mrs. Currie: Shortly.

Health Authorities

Mr. Canavan asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will state, for each regional health authority, the difference between the amount requested and the amount actually spent on capital expenditure, broken down by new building and repair to existing capital stock, for each year from 1979 to date.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 4 February 1987, c. *696*]: Cash allocations to regional health authorities are not made in response to bids.

Since 1979-80 the distribution of total capital resources between regional health authorities has been based on a formula recommended by the Resource Allocation Working Party. The formula uses regions' populations weighted to take account of age and sex distribution and mortality rates, and the value of capital stock in relation to the weighted population as indicators of relative need. From 1991-92 weighted population factors alone will be used.

Regional health authorities have the flexibility to transfer up to one per cent. of their revenue allocations to capital and up to 10 per cent. of the capital allocation to revenue in any one financial year.

Total capital expenditure by each region from 1979-80 to 1985-86 is shown in the table. The annual accounts of health authorities, from which the figures are derived, do not distinguish between expenditure on entirely new buildings and that on the reconstruction, extension or adaptation of existing buildings. Expenditure on building maintenance and on repairs to other capital stock is charged to revenue.

Regional Health Authorities
Total Capital Expenditure (£000)

	1979-80	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*
Northern	27,590	35,014	44,357	48,072	44,337	47,880	49,525
Yorkshire	30,914	44,930	50,924	52,584	51,404	51,588	72,815
Trent	45,054	53,985	69,217	65,862	69,402	72,661	77,692
E. Anglian	22,069	27,866	32,254	31,879	24,064	29,976	31,954
N.W. Thames	25,931	35,838	43,387	46,989	50,539	55,369	64,906
N.E. Thames	31,700	48,652	51,592	56,017	61,600	66,652	65,932
S.E. Thames	25,992	35,138	39,422	46,327	51,988	49,852	55,181
S.W. Thames	22,997	36,030	37,582	34,669	35,834	42,174	52,859
Wessex	22,677	33,737	37,668	41,746	49,188	61,692	66,982
Oxford	12,483	18,689	26,382	28,769	32,334	29,099	30,126
South Western	24,791	33,004	43,034	44,354	54,836	60,813	64,920
West midlands	39,272	60,161	65,587	58,886	66,413	86,554	118,188
Mersey	26,511	32,573	36,037	36,611	36,088	39,921	37,837
North Western	50,957	60,739	84,679	82,522	69,224	84,831	83,187
Total	408,938	556,356	662,122	675,287	697,251	779,062	872,104

Note:

The figures for the years since 1982-83 are taken from the annual accounts of regional and district health authorities and prior to 1982-83 from those of their predecessor authorities.

Hospital Beds

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services, pursuant to the reply of 23 January, giving the average number of available beds in National Health Service hospitals, if he will give the estimated saving to the National Health Service of cutting available beds for the mentally ill by 14·8 per cent and for the mentally handicapped by 17·1 per cent. between 1979 and 1985; and what proportion of this saving has been transferred to developing community services for the mentally-ill and handicapped for *(a)* children *(b)* adults and *(c)* both.

Mrs. Currie [*pursuant to her reply*, 4 February 1987, c. *701-2*]: It is not possible to answer the hon. Member in the terms of his question. The reduction in the numbers of beds in NHS hospitals has been more than compensated for by patients' transference to care in the community, by the avoidance of inappropriate admissions, and by more rational use of beds.

Gross current expenditure in 1984-85 on hospital and community health services for mentally ill people is estimated to have been £1,029 million, representing an increase in real terms of some 14 per cent. over 1979-80; the comparable figure for mental handicap is £462 million, representing a real increase of 10 per cent. During this period, personal social services expenditure on residential and day care services for these groups increased by some 40 per cent. in real terms.

Health authorities have taken advantage of the fall in in-patient numbers both to improve existing hospital provision and to invest in community provision. The changes which have been taking place in services are complex and figures are not available to give an accurate overall picture distinguishing community developments as a whole, or for children and adults respectively, from other improvements. There have, for example, been increases in hospital and community based nursing staff and in the number of mentally handicapped people resident in small NHS units in the community.

Social Workers

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what were the number of whole-time equivalent *(a)* home helps and *(b)* social workers in each local authority, and per 1,000 population over 65 years each year since 1982.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 21 January 1987, c. *623*]: The numbers of whole-time equivalent home helps and social workers in each authority are published in table1 of "Staff of Local Authority Social Services Departments, 30 September" for 1982, 1983, and 1984 (S/F 83/1, S/F 84/1, S/F 85/1 respectively), copies of which are in the Library. The figures for 1985 are given in table 1.

The whole-time equivalent home helps and social workers per thousand population aged 65 years and over in each local authority for 1982-85 are given in tables 2 and 3.

Table 1

Home helps and social workers, expressed as whole-time equivalents, by local authority, 1985[1] [2]

	Home helps	*Social workers*
Cleveland	616·0	270·1
Cumbria	522·6	215·0
Durham	823·7	249·4
Northumberland	450·0	137·9
Gateshead	333·5	141·0
Newcastle upon Tyne	676·0	299·0
North Tyneside	289·7	132·0
South Tyneside	209·0	100·0
Sunderland	633·5	153·4
Humberside	1,104·3	334·5
North Yorkshire	695·0	269·0
Barnsley	357·0	89·5
Doncaster	466·0	131·0
Rotherham	402·3	128·5
Sheffield	1,076·5	416·5
Bradford	725·5	327·8
Calderdale	329·9	92·9
Kirklees	534·9	180·3
Leeds	1,065·8	414·4
Wakefield	358·9	210·0
Cheshire	863·3	400·4
Lancashire	1,585·3	675·3
Bolton	354·0	137·0
Bury	225·4	95·0
Manchester	779·0	449·0
Oldham	354·0	113·0
Rochdale	325·9	127·0
Salford	343·6	155·0
Stockport	308·0	157·8
Tameside	399·5	111·3
Trafford	258·3	82·5
Wigan	473·8	137·1
Knowsley	206·7	93·7
Liverpool	672·0	371·5
Sefton	337·8	134·0
St. Helens	405·0	78·0
Wirral	324·6	163·5
Hereford and Worcester	616·8	244·2
Shropshire	259·7	143·0
Staffordshire	[3]958·0	[3]365·5
Warwickshire	499·0	182·0
Birmingham	1,366·6	663·7
Coventry	449·3	280·4
Dudley	305·5	146·5
Sandwell	327·0	148·5
Solihull	158·7	88·9
Walsall	226·2	135·0
Wolverhampton	312·9	160·1
Derbyshire	1,465·3	499·0
Leicestershire	[3]730·0	[3]340·1
Lincolnshire	505·0	202·2
Northamptonshire	309·3	225·4
Nottinghamshire	1,244·9	575·1
Bedfordshire	412·0	235·4
Berkshire	611·7	300·3
Buckinghamshire	487·4	274·0
Cambridgeshire	504·3	248·7
Essex	[3]1,171·0	621·0
Hertfordshire	656·1	423·3
Norfolk	671·3	299·4
Oxfordshire	468·0	218·5
Suffolk	456·5	222·2
Camden	[3]409·8	[3]319·8
Greenwich	416·8	183·7
Hackney	402·9	207·5
Hammersmith	252·3	162·8
Islington	253·9	203·9
Kensington	113·3	166·3
Lambeth	[3]492·5	[3]426·9
Lewisham	493·2	324·9
Southwark	[3]435·0	[3]266·2
Tower Hamlets	218·0	193·9
Wandsworth	410·9	330·8
Westminster	286·7	237·7
City of London	8·1	22·3
Barking	194·0	53·6
Barnet	218·0	112·0
Bexley	260·4	96·7
Brent	419·3	228·0

	Home helps	Social workers
Bromley	219·5	134·5
Croydon	234·3	136·5
Ealing	242·5	159·2
Enfield	303·4	144·5
Haringey	414·6	201·1
Harrow	213·0	132·3
Havering	215·4	93·0
Hillingdon	272·3	129·8
Hounslow	163·2	115·5
Kingston-upon-Thames	[3]73·4	[3]86·0
Merton	207·6	80·5
Newham	294·0	171·5
Redbridge	187·2	80·0
Richmond-upon-Thames	143·6	53·0
Sutton	117·1	110·8
Waltham Forest	382·8	209·3
Dorset	540·7	307·9
Hampshire	977·0	540·2
Isle of Wight	93·0	62·7
Kent	988·5	645·0
Surrey	464·6	347·6
East Sussex	658·2	325·3
West Sussex	[3]560·6	[3]259·6
Wiltshire	377·0	271·7
Avon	1,162·3	436·4
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	382·2	166·7
Devon	803·8	445·6
Gloucestershire	430·6	202·4
Somerset	432·5	188·2
England	51,898·8	24,789·4

[1] The numbers of home helps and social workers relate to the position at 30 September 1985.
[2] Figures are provisional.
[3] Estimated from information for earlier years.

Table 2—Home helps[1], expressed as whole time equivalents, per thousand population aged 65 years and over[2] by local authority, 1982-85

	1982	1983	1984	[3]1985
Cleveland	7·2	8·2	8·6	9·0
Cumbria	5·9	6·1	6·1	6·6
Durham	9·2	9·3	8·0	9·3
Northumberland	9·3	8·9	9·0	9·5
Gateshead	10·9	10·7	10·8	10·5
Newcastle upon Tyne	14·5	15·2	15·2	14·7
North Tyneside	8·1	8·7	8·6	9·3
South Tyneside	10·4	8·9	8·6	8·4
Sunderland	11·6	14·2	16·1	16·3
Humberside	8·4	8·3	9·0	8·7
North Yorkshire	[4]4·6	4·7	5·5	5·9
Barnsley	11·0	11·3	11·3	11·1
Doncaster	13·1	12·8	12·4	12·0
Rotherham	11·7	12·3	12·4	12·2
Sheffield	11·5	10·5	11·3	11·8
Bradford	8·7	9·9	10·7	11·0
Calderdale	9·2	9·6	10·4	10·6
Kirklees	8·7	[4]8·9	9·9	9·7
Leeds	8·0	8·5	8·9	9·7
Wakefield	8·1	8·5	8·6	8·5
Cheshire	6·2	6·8	7·7	6·8
Lancashire	6·2	6·7	7·1	6·9
Bolton	8·4	8·5	9·0	9·4
Bury	6·2	7·7	8·4	8·8
Manchester	9·1	9·7	10·6	11·3
Oldham	10·0	10·1	11·0	11·0
Rochdale	11·2	11·7	12·1	11·6
Salford	8·4	9·1	9·4	8·9
Stockport	6·4	6·9	[4]6·9	7·3
Tameside	9·7	9·7	10·8	12·3
Trafford	7·5	8·6	9·0	7·9
Wigan	11·7	12·1	12·3	11·6
Knowsley	10·7	11·0	11·7	11·2
Liverpool	7·5	8·0	8·4	8·7
Sefton	6·8	7·1	7·2	7·0
St. Helens	15·4	16·0	16·1	16·3
Wirral	5·5	5·7	5·7	6·0
Hereford and Worcester	5·9	7·0	6·4	6·6
Shropshire	4·7	4·7	4·8	4·7
Staffordshire	[4]7·3	[4]7·4	[4]7·3	[4]7·1
Warwickshire	8·3	8·4	8·2	7·6
Birmingham	8·9	9·3	9·2	9·3
Coventry	9·0	9·5	9·5	10·1
Dudley	6·7	7·0	7·1	7·4
Sandwell	6·7	7·3	6·9	7·2
Solihull	5·5	5·7	5·5	6·4
Walsall	[4]6·1	6·8	6·9	6·6
Wolverhampton	7·7	[4]7·7	8·1	8·6
Derbyshire	7·8	9·2	9·7	10·5
Leicestershire	[4]6·2	[4]6·2	[4]6·2	[4]6·1
Lincolnshire	5·6	5·9	6·0	5·6
Northamptonshire	4·8	5·1	5·1	4·1
Nottinghamshire	[4]7·2	8·3	8·5	8·7
Bedfordshire	5·7	7·2	6·6	6·8
Berkshire	6·6	6·4	7·7	7·2
Buckinghamshire	5·9	6·3	7·3	6·9
Cambridgeshire	5·8	5·9	6·0	6·0
Essex	[4]5·4	[4]5·4	[4]5·4	5·2
Hertfordshire	4·5	4·9	5·0	5·0
Norfolk	4·7	4·8	5·0	5·2
Oxfordshire	6·1	6·2	6·3	6·3
Suffolk	4·7	4·7	4·5	4·5
Camden	13·4	13·6	15·1	[4]14·9
Greenwich	11·5	12·4	13·3	13·1
Hackney	14·5	15·0	14·8	15·6
Hammersmith	10·8	11·1	11·4	10·7
Islington	9·9	10·3	10·8	10·7
Kensington	6·3	6·6	6·8	6·2
Lambeth	[4]12·2	14·0	[4]14·2	[4]14·3
Lewisham	10·3	13·7	13·9	13·4
Southwark	10·8	11·8	12·8	[4]12·7
Tower Hamlets	9·6	9·8	9·9	10·1
Wandsworth	10·0	10·4	10·4	10·4
Westminster	7·8	8·1	9·1	9·6
City of London	16·0	16·3	14·0	13·5
Barking	7·6	7·6	7·6	7·6
Barnet	3·8	4·2	3·7	4·5
Bexley	8·3	8·6	8·7	8·4
Brent	8·5	9·8	10·2	12·3
Bromley	6·2	6·0	4·7	4·6
Croydon	4·8	4·7	5·2	5·4
Ealing	6·3	5·8	5·9	6·1
Enfield	5·5	5·5	6·3	7·2
Haringey	13·7	14·5	15·2	15·5
Harrow	4·7	5·8	6·1	6·7
Havering	6·8	6·8	7·0	6·5
Hillingdon	7·1	7·4	8·5	7·9
Hounslow	5·2	5·8	5·6	5·8
Kingston-upon-Thames	[4]3·2	[4]3·2	[4]3·2	[4]3·2
Merton	6·7	7·0	7·6	7·3
Newham	9·9	10·7	11·5	10·5
Redbridge	4·4	4·5	4·7	5·0
Richmond-upon-Thames	5·1	4·9	4·8	5·0
Sutton	3·8	4·3	4·0	4·3
Waltham Forest	9·4	9·0	10·4	11·0
Dorset	3·9	4·0	4·1	3·9
Hampshire	4·1	4·5	4·5	4·5
Isle of Wight	2·6	2·5	2·6	3·4
Kent	3·5	3·5	4·1	4·2
Surrey	3·2	[4]3·2	[4]3·2	3·0
East Sussex	3·4	3·7	3·9	4·1
West Sussex	4·5	3·6	4·0	[4]4·0
Wiltshire	4·6	4·8	5·1	4·8
Avon	7·1	8·8	7·8	7·8
Cornwall & Isles of Scilly	4·2	4·0	4·3	4·6
Devon	4·0	4·3	4·3	4·2
Gloucestershire	5·6	5·8	5·9	5·3

	1982	1983	1984	[3]1985
Somerset	5·1	5·2	5·4	5·5
England	6·7	7·0	7·2	7·2

[1] The numbers of home-helps relate to the position at 30 September each year.
[2] The rates are based on the estimated population aged 65 years and over at 30 June each year.
[3] The 1985 figures are provisional.
[4] Estimated from information for earlier years.

Table 3 Social workers[1], expressed as whole-time equivalents, per thousand population aged 65 years and over[2] by local authority, 1982-85

	1982	1983	1984	[3]1985
Cleveland	4·3	4·2	4·0	4·0
Cumbria	2·5	2·8	2·6	2·7
Durham	2·8	2·9	3·0	2·8
Northumberland	2·4	2·6	2·8	2·9
Gateshead	4·3	4·5	4·6	4·4
Newcastle upon Tyne	5·9	6·2	6·5	6·5
North Tyneside	3·8	3·9	4·1	4·2
South Tyneside	4·2	4·1	3·9	4·0
Sunderland	4·0	4·6	4·1	4·0
Humberside	2·7	2·7	2·5	2·6
North Yorkshire	[4]2·1	2·4	2·4	2·3
Barnsley	2·7	2·9	2·9	2·8
Doncaster	3·5	3·5	3·6	3·4
Rotherham	3·4	3·5	3·8	3·9
Sheffield	3·9	4·3	4·4	4·6
Bradford	4·3	4·8	5·1	5·0
Calderdale	2·8	3·2	3·2	3·0
Kirklees	2·8	[4]2·8	3·1	3·3
Leeds	2·9	3·2	3·3	3·8
Wakefield	5·3	5·3	5·1	5·0
Cheshire	2·9	3·0	3·2	3·1
Lancashire	2·6	2·8	2·9	3·0
Bolton	3·3	3·4	3·6	3·7
Bury	2·6	3·0	3·6	3·7
Manchester	5·8	6·2	6·6	6·5
Oldham	3·6	3·8	3·6	3·5
Rochdale	4·7	4·6	4·9	4·5
Salford	3·3	3·4	4·0	4·0
Stockport	3·4	3·7	[4]3·7	3·7
Tameside	3·2	3·5	3·6	3·4
Trafford	2·7	2·6	2·6	2·5
Wigan	3·2	3·2	3·3	3·3
Knowsley	5·4	5·4	5·3	5·1
Liverpool	4·2	4·8	4·8	4·8
Sefton	2·9	2·8	2·8	2·8
St. Helens	3·6	3·8	3·6	3·1
Wirral	3·1	3·0	3·2	3·0
Hereford and Worcester	2·6	2·8	2·5	2·6
Shropshire	2·5	2·5	2·6	2·6
Staffordshire	[4]2·8	[4]2·	[4]2·8	[4]2·7
Warwickshire	2·6	2·8	2·6	2·8
Birmingham	4·8	4·6	4·6	4·5
Coventry	5·6	5·5	6·1	6·3
Dudley	3·1	3·1	3·3	3·6
Sandwell	2·9	3·3	3·4	3·3
Solihull	2·8	2·9	2·8	3·6
Walsall	[4]4·0	3·6	3·5	4·0
Wolverhampton	4·1	[4]4·1	4·3	4·4
Derbyshire	3·4	3·4	3·8	3·6
Leicestershire	[4]2·9	[4]2·9	[4]2·9	[4]2·8
Lincolnshire	2·4	2·3	2·2	2·3
Northamptonshire	3·0	3·1	3·3	3·0
Nottinghamshire	[4]3·4	3·9	4·0	4·0
Bedfordshire	3·6	3·9	4·0	3·9
Berkshire	3·2	3·3	3·5	3·5
Buckinghamshire	2·9	3·1	3·8	3·9
Cambridgeshire	2·9	3·1	3·1	3·0
Essex	[4]2·6	[4]2·5	[4]2·5	2·8
Hertfordshire	2·9	3·1	3·3	3·2
Norfolk	2·4	2·5	2·5	2·3
Oxfordshire	3·1	3·0	2·9	3·0
Suffolk	2·1	2·1	2·2	2·2
Camden	9·8	10·6	11·8	[4]11·6
Greenwich	3·9	5·2	5·8	5·8
Hackney	5·9	5·8	7·7	8·0
Hammersmith	7·2	6·6	7·4	6·9
Islington	7·5	8·2	7·7	8·6
Kensington	8·8	8·6	8·7	9·0
Lambeth	[4]9·0	12·1	[4]12·3	[4]12·4
Lewisham	7·9	8·3	8·6	8·8
Southwark	7·4	7·7	7·8	[4]7·8
Tower Hamlets	8·3	8·6	9·4	9·0
Wandsworth	7·2	8·3	8·2	8·3
Westminster	5·5	8·5	8·0	8·0
City of London	27·7	29·5	35·7	37·2
Barking	2·2	2·5	2·5	2·1
Barnet	2·4	2·4	2·2	2·3
Bexley	3·2	3·4	3·3	3·1
Brent	5·5	5·7	6·6	6·7
Bromley	3·1	2·8	2·9	2·8
Croydon	3·3	3·0	3·1	3·2
Ealing	3·8	4·4	5·0	4·0
Enfield	3·2	3·1	3·2	3·5
Haringey	6·3	6·6	7·4	7·5
Harrow	4·1	4·2	4·2	4·1
Havering	2·9	2·9	2·6	2·8
Hillingdon	4·1	4·0	4·1	3·8
Hounslow	3·7	4·1	4·5	4·1
Kinston-upon-Thames	[4]3·8	[4]3·8	[4]3·8	[4]3·7
Merton	2·6	2·8	3·3	2·8
Newham	4·5	5·3	5·5	6·1
Redbridge	2·4	2·4	2·2	2·1
Richmond-upon-Thames	1·7	1·6	1·7	1·8
Sutton	3·8	3·9	4·0	4·0
Waltham Forest	5·4	5·4	5·4	6·0
Dorset	2·2	2·0	2·2	2·2
Hampshire	2·4	2·5	2·3	2·5
Isle of Wight	1·6	1·7	2·3	2·3
Kent	2·1	2·2	2·3	2·7
Surrey	2·1	[4]2·2	[4]2·2	2·2
East Sussex	2·2	2·2	2·3	2·0
West Sussex	1·8	1·8	1·9	[4]1·8
Wiltshire	3·3	3·3	4·2	3·5
Avon	3·3	3·3	3·3	2·9
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	1·8	2·0	2·0	2·0
Devon	2·3	2·0	2·1	2·3
Gloucestershire	2·5	2·5	2·5	2·5
Somerset	2·4	2·5	2·5	2·4
ENGLAND	3·2	3·4	3·5	3·5

[1] The numbers of social workers relate to the position at 30 September each year.
[2] The rates are based on the estimated population aged 65 years and over at 30 June each year.
[3] The 1985 figures are provisional.
[4] Estimated from information for earlier years.

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list in the *Official Report* the 10 local authority districts with the highest number of social workers per head of population.

Mrs. Currie: Based on information available centrally, the 10 authorities with the highest number of social workers per thousand population are shown in the table.

TABLE

Social workers, expressed as whole-time equivalents, at 30 September 1985 per thousand population: the 10 authorities with the highest rates.

Local authority	*Number per thousand population*[1]
City of London	[2]4·37
Camden	[3]1·77

Local authority	*Number per thousand population*[1]
Lambeth	[3]1·75
Lewisham	1.40
Westminster	1.33
Tower Hamlets	1.32
Wandsworth	1.28
Southwark	[3]1·23
Islington	1.21
Kensington	1.21

[1] The numbers of social workers per thousand population are based on the population as at 30 June 1985 in each authority.

[2] The rate for City of London is based on very small numbers.

[3] In calculating the rates for Camden, Lambeth and Southwark the numbers of social workers were estimated from information for earlier years.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Telephones, (Interception of Calls)

Mr. Dickens asked the Lord Privy Seal if he will take steps to engage a specialist company to ensure that there is no illegal interception of or interference with the telephone calls of hon. Members.

Mr. Biffen: No, I do not think this would be justified.

Members' Group Accident Insurance

Mr. Corrie asked the hon. Member for Berwick upon Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, what changes have been made to hon. Members' group accident insurance arrangements.

Mr. Beith: The death and capital benefits available under the terms of the policy have been increased to £93,000 as from 1 January 1987. The memorandum by the Accountant, which gives details of the cover and exclusions, is held in the Library.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 27 February 1987

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Campuses (Security)

Mr. Amess asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what new steps are being taken to ensure freedom of speech and greater security regarding the protection of visiting speakers on university and polytechnic campuses.

Mr. Walden: Section 43 of the Education No. 2 Act 1986, which places a duty on all concerned in the government of institutions of further and higher education in England and Wales to take all reasonably practicable steps to secure freedom of speech within the law for members, students and employees of the institution and for visiting speakers, is to be brought into force on 1 September 1987. By then governing bodies should have issued the codes of practice required by the section to facilitate the discharge of the duty imposed on them. The Department and the Welsh Office will be writing to institutions shortly to offer some guidance on these provisions. The Government will continue to seek reports from institutions on any incidents before the section comes into force in which visiting speakers are prevented from speaking or in which violence occurs.

Open University

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has for the Open university, regarding *(a)* the inquiries for undergraduate study by region *(b)* the applicants for undergraduate study by region *(c)* the offers made to applicants for undergraduate study by region and *(d)* the initial registration for undergraduate study by region, for each year since 1978-79.

Mr. Walden: The following information is on the basis of the university's academic (calendar) year.

(a) The Open university does not record inquiries on a regional basis. The total number of inquiries each year was as follows:

	Number
1978	85,335
1979	81,783
1980	93,399
1981	84,051
1982	102,045
1983	100,597
1984	98,639
1985	110,029
1986	149,017

(b) Applicants for undergraduate study by region were:

	1978	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*
London	6,888	6,114	6,605	5,990	6,248	5,771	5,892	7,222	8,079
South	4,080	3,884	4,552	4,126	4,354	3,959	3,693	4,729	5,466
South West	2,684	2,671	2,974	2,918	3,119	2,816	2,697	3,263	3,745
West Midlands	3,475	3,244	3,376	3,207	3,722	3,252	3,278	3,730	4,057
East Midlands	2,437	2,250	2,486	2,519	2,883	2,789	2,614	2,949	3,486
East Anglia	4,360	4,094	4,561	4,150	4,453	4,146	3,776	4,453	5,153
Yorkshire	2,913	2,532	2,901	2,791	2,944	3,051	2,739	3,130	3,298
North West	4,292	4,059	4,844	4,209	4,832	4,864	4,315	4,689	5,312
North	1,929	1,930	2,081	2,034	1,972	1,946	1,909	2,188	2,484
Wales	1,685	1,642	1,863	1,686	1,862	1,726	1,785	2,060	2,411
Scotland	3,819	3,608	4,275	4,399	4,731	4,408	4,523	6,168	6,704
Northern Ireland	986	1,000	1,120	956	1,008	1,213	1,037	1,162	1,195
South East	3,285	3,207	3,487	3,388	3,539	3,391	3,237	3,948	4,687
Total	42,833	40,235	45,125	42,373	45,667	43,332	41,495	49,691	56,077

(c) offers made to applicants for undergraduate study by region were:

	[1]*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*
London	3,912	5,580	5,176	4,315	3,997	4,109
South	2,560	3,703	3,614	2,958	2,812	2,801
South West	1,934	2,648	2,571	2,471	2,071	2,150
West Midlands	2,334	3,361	2,982	3,229	2,711	2,758
East Midlands	1,778	2,457	2,582	2,421	2,079	2,023
East Anglia	2,641	3,714	3,724	3,322	2,921	2,860
Yorkshire	2,091	2,695	2,790	2,707	2,459	2,605
North West	3,056	4,135	4,448	4,196	3,493	3,519
North	1,563	1,806	1,756	1,877	1,650	1,616
Wales	1,252	1,737	1,548	1,735	1,335	1,407
Scotland	2,929	4,129	4,014	3,355	3,281	3,124
Northern Ireland	742	933	1,095	1,045	901	840
South East	2,114	3,024	3,045	2,771	2,373	2,508
Total	28,906	39,922	39,345	36,402	32,083	32,320

[1] Information prior to 1981 is not readily available. Total offers made in this period were:
1978—28,787
1979—28,425
1980—27,459

(d) Initial registrations for undergraduate study by region were

	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
London	3,078	2,938	2,721	2,792	3,507	3,439	2,634	2,427	2,543
South	1,707	1,768	1,685	1,895	2,356	2,333	1,864	1,622	1,744
South West	1,336	1,308	1,257	1,404	1,713	1,735	1,504	1,281	1,372
West Midlands	1,822	1,976	1,738	1,590	2,102	1,890	1,902	1,696	1,809
East Midlands	1,323	1,314	1,147	1,282	1,573	1,678	1,439	1,232	1,235
East Anglia	1,880	1,926	1,797	1,898	2,371	2,451	2,063	1,797	1,818
Yorkshire	1,500	1,537	1,389	1,423	1,665	1,859	1,556	1,486	1,596
North West	2,214	2,279	2,139	2,093	2,646	2,840	2,383	2,091	2,196
North	1,158	1,122	992	1,009	1,173	1,178	1,094	992	1,024
Wales	944	939	841	890	1,036	912	993	805	871
Scotland	1,890	1,867	1,777	2,015	2,584	2,549	1,970	1,958	1,938
Northern Ireland	604	565	504	504	625	723	598	533	506
South East	1,544	1,601	1,461	1,537	1,960	2,026	1,699	1,446	1,495
Total	21,000	21,140	19,448	20,332	25,311	25,613	21,699	19,366	20,147

Dyslexia (Surrey)

Mr. Onslow asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he is satisfied that Surrey county council is making adequate provision for the educational needs of dyslexic children.

Mr. Dunn: The Education Act 1981 imposes duties on all local education authorities to identify, assess and make appropriate provisions for all children including dyslexics in their areas with special educational needs. Any parents within Surrey, as in any other part of the country, who are not content with the arrangements proposed by a local education authority for their child, may appeal to the Secretary of State either under section 5(6) of the Act, if the authority decides that it is not required to maintain a statement determining the special educational provision to be made for the child; or under section 8(6), if the parents are not satisfied with the educational provision specified in the statement and their appeal to a local appeal committee has failed. The Secretary of State considers each individual case on its own merits.

GCSE

Mr. Hardy asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has to the subjects and the syllabi for which there are no suitable text books available for schools providing General Certificate of Secondary Education examinations.

Mrs. Rumbold: The introduction of the GCSE does not require the wholesale replacement of existing textbooks: the need is rather for these to be supplemented and updated over time. The GCSE examining groups have given the Educational Publishers' Council every possible assistance to enable a full range of GCSE text books to be produced, and many have already been published. The Government have, of course, provided substantial resources to ensure that schools are able to purchase additional books and equipment for GCSE courses.

Mr. Hardy asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what action he is now taking to ensure that General Certificate of Secondary Education examinations are satisfactorily funded.

Mrs. Rumbold: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 26 February 1987.

City Technology Colleges

Mr. Radice asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many companies have been approached by his Department to fund city technology colleges; and how many companies have expressed a willingness to provide funding.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Preliminary approaches were made to over 1800 companies. Earlier this week, Hanson Trust PLC made public their decision to contribute £1 million in sponsorship of the first city technology college. Several other companies have expressed a willingness to provide funding, but some of these offers are conditional or subject to discussion and I am not prepared to confirm offers until sponsors are ready to make their decision public.

Student Fees

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what recommendations he has made about fees for students on courses of further and higher education in the academic year 1987-88.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The information is as follows:

Home and European Community Students

For the academic year 1987-88 I have recommended the following fee levels for home students and for students from other European Community countries. (fees for 1986-87 are shown in brackets):

	£	£
Postgraduate courses	1,730	(1,680)
First degree and diploma courses	556	(536)

Other fees for home and European Community students are the responsibility of the local education authorities. I understand that the Council of Local Education Authorities has recommended fees for 1987-88 as follows (fees for 1986-87 are shown in brackets):

	Advanced further education[1]		*Non-advanced further education*	
	£	£	£	£
Full-time	556	(536)	360	(342)

	Advanced further education[1]		*Non-advanced further education*	
	£	£	£	£
Sandwich/block release (weekly rate)	15·50	(14·90)	10	(9·50)
Part-time per course hour	0·52	(0·50)	0·34	(0·32)
Part-time annual fee for one session per week	55·60	(53·60)	36·00	(34·20)

[1] other than first degree and diploma courses

Overseas Students

The Government's policy is that students from outside the European Community should pay fees that cover the cost of their education here. It is for institutions and local authorities to determine the fees to be charged to overseas students in the light of this policy and of their own circumstances.

For the universities, the University Grants Committee has recommended minimum fee levels for overseas students on undergraduate and postgraduate courses in 1987-88 as follows (recommended minima for 1986-87 are shown in brackets):

	£	£
Arts courses	3,690	(3,480)
Science courses	4,840	(4,570)
Clinical courses in medicine dentistry and veterinary science	8,960	(8,450)

For local authority institutions the Council of Local Education Authorities has recommended minimum fee levels as follows (recommended minima for 1986-87 are shown in brackets):

	£	£
Advanced courses	3,720	(3,540)
Non-advanced courses	2,055	(1,947)

TRANSPORT

Road Accidents

Mr. Onslow asked the Secretary of State for Transport what statistics are available to him concerning the number of road accidents in which *(a)* learner drivers and *(b)* drivers who have recently passed their driving test are involved.

Mr. Moore: Information on driver licence status is not included in road accident reports.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Severe Weather Payments

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what figures are available to indicate the number of claimants in Northern Ireland of severe weather payments in respect of the weeks beginning 12 January and 19 January who are on fuel direct.

Mr. Needham: No figures are available and they could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Fuel Costs

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information he has on the prices in Northern Ireland of (i) a bag of coal, (ii) a bag of anthracite, (iii) a unit of electricity, (iv) a cylinder of gas and (v) a litre of central heating oil; and on comparable prices in each region of Great Britain.

Mr. Viggers: Regional prices of a bag of house coal (Group 2), a bag of anthracite and a unit of electricity are as follows:

Town	*Group 2 house coal* £	*Anthracite/ grains* £
Newcastle	4·30	6·50
Leeds	4·30	6·91
Nottingham	4·40	7·20
Belfast	5·04	7·77
Glasgow	5·10	7·70
Liverpool	5·30	7·62
Ipswich	5·70	7·65
Cardiff	5·70	7·30
Inverness	5·90	8·20
London district	6·10	7·75
Bournemouth	6·40	8·32
Exeter	6·40	8·40

Source: British Coal.

Electricity

Area board	*Domestic tariff (October 1986) per unit (pence)*
East Midlands	5·45
North-Eastern	5·25
South-Eastern	5·24
Southern	5·09
South-Western	5·32
South Wales	5·49
London	5·45
Midlands	5·52
Eastern	5·16
Yorkshire	5·47
North-Western	5·05
Merseyside and North Wales	5·70
NIE	5·68
North of Scotland	4·77
South of Scotland	5·02

Note: Excludes standing charges.
Source: Published area board tariffs.

There is no published information on regional prices of domestic central heating oil and LPG, but on the basis of spot checks carried out in response to this question I am satisfied that prices in Northern Ireland of both these fuels compare closely with prices prevailing in Great Britain.

Privatisation

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the catering and other services carried out by private enterprise for *(a)* the Northern Ireland Electricity Service, *(b)* the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, *(c)* hospitals, *(d)* education and library boards, *(e)* Government training centres and *(f)* other public establishments; and what other services are to be put out to contract.

Mr. Scott: Services now carried out by private enterprise include the following categories:

(a) Northern Ireland Electricity
Catering
Cleaning services
Security
Maintenance

(b) The Northern Ireland Housing Executive
Catering
Cleaning services
Maintenance
Security

(c) Hospitals
Maintenance
Cleaning services
Maintenance of vehicles

(d) Education and Library Boards
Catering
School transport
Maintenance and repair of musical instruments
Maintenance of vehicles

(e) Government Training Centres
Catering

(f) Other Public Establishments
Security
Cleaning services
Laundry
Catering
Maintenance
Printing
Specialist conservation services
Maintenance of vehicles
Grounds maintenance
Courier services

Putting services out to contract is always an option where it is appropriate and cost effective.

Security Forces (Offences)

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a list of those cases where members of security forces have been charged with offences causing *(a)* the death or *(b)* injury to civilians for each year since 1969, indicating the branch of the service involved Royal Ulster Constabulary, Ulster Defence Regiment, Army, Marines and soon, the charge originally brought the charge for which each person was tried the verdict and, where appropriate, where the sentence was served.

Mr. Scott [*pursuant to his reply*, 23 February 1987]: I shall write to the hon. Member giving the available information as soon as possible.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give details for 1986 of the number of members of the Ulster Defence Regiment, the Royal Ulster Constabulary, their respective reserves, and the British Army, who have been charged with offences and who have been convicted of offences, giving details of custodial sentences imposed, and separately for charges and convictions concerning: murder, attempted murder, membership of illegal organisations, conspiracy to cause explosions, withholding information concerning terrorist activities, possession of explosives, possession of explosives with intent to cause bodily harm, possession of firearms, possession of firearms with intent to cause bodily harm and other offences classified as scheduled offences.

Mr. Scott [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 February 1987]: I shall write to the hon. Member giving the available information as soon as possible.

PRIME MINISTER

Public Servants

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Prime Minister what was the number of persons, full and part-time *(a)* in the Civil Service and *(b)* in local government in the United Kingdom for the years 1979, 1984,1985 and 1986; and, in each case, what was the reduction of persons employed in percentage terms and numerically.

The Prime Minister: The figures are as follows (thousands):

	1979	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1979 numerical change*	*1986 minus percentage change*
Civil Service[1]						
Full-time	717	613	588	582	135	(-18·9)[2]
Part-time	30	21	22	25	5	
Full-time equivalent	732	624	599	594	138	(-18·8)[2]
Local Authorities						
Full-time[3]	1,980	1,880	1,880	1,890	-90	(-4·5)
Part-time[3]	1,020	1,000	1,010	1,020	0	
Full-time equivalent	2,368	2,275	2,273	2,286	-82	(-3·5)
(excludes Community Programme FTE	-	45	52	66)		

[1] Figures at 1 April.
[2] Percentages calculated from unrounded figures.
[3] To nearest 10,000 – mid year figures.

Sources: Treasury statistics of Civil Service manpower, and data underlying 'Employment in the Public and Private Sectors, 1980-86' Economic Trends, December 1986.

Plutonium

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Prime Minister if, pursuant to her answers to the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury of 15 April, *Official Report*, column *330* and 18 April 1986, *Official Report*, column *525*, she has received any new information in the past 10 months about the uses to which plutonium produced by the reprocessing of spent fuel from any British civil reactor was put under previous Administrations and in particular about whether such plutonium has ever been used for a nuclear weapons programme.

The Prime Minister: I have nothing to add to the replies I gave to the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) of 15 April, *Official Report*, column *330*, and 18 April 1986, *Official Report*, column *525*.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Soviet Prisoners

Mr. Ames asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if, following the release of 140 Soviet political prisoners, he will estimate the number of political and religious prisoners still held in the Soviet Union in prisons and labour camps.

Mrs. Chalker: A further 600-700 names are known. It is likely that there are many hundreds more of whom we have no record.

Council of Ministers

Mr. Hanley asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish in the *Official Report* a statement of forthcoming business in the European Community Council of Ministers.

Mrs. Chalker: The usual forecast was deposited in the House earlier today. At present, eight meetings of the Council of Ministers are planned for March.

The Agriculture Council is expected to meet on 2-3 March and 30-31 March to discuss the 1987 price fixing proposals, which will include reviews of the green currency system and the oils and fats regime. It may also discuss socio-structural proposals, intervention in dairy produce, milk quotas and French national aid for small milk producers.

The Economic and Finance Council will meet on 9 March to consider the Commission's quarterly review of the economic situation in the Community, and the European Court of Auditors annual report on the 1985 financial year. The Council may also discuss the budget reference framework for 1988; a proposed directive on prospectuses to be published when securities are offered for subscription or sale to the public, and amendment to directive 80/390 on listing particulars for admission of securities to official stock exchange listing.

The Foreign Affairs Council will meet on 16-17 March. The Council will discuss EC-Japan relations. It will also discuss the EC student mobility programme (ERASMUS). The Council may consider a draft negotiating mandate for an EC-Hungary trade and economic co-operation agreement; and Commission proposals for a new generation of financial protocols for some of the Community's preferential partners.

The Industry Council will meet on 19 March and will consider the next steps in European steel policy.

The Environment Council will meet on 19-20 March and will discuss large combustion plants; vehicle emissions; sulphur content of gas oil; the fourth environment action programme; export of dangerous chemicals; and regular leaded petrol.

The Transport Council will meet on 23-24 March. Discussion is likely to concentrate on the aviation package, but the Council will also discuss road haulage liberalisation, infrastructure spending and vehicle taxation.

The Research Council is scheduled to meet on 24 March. The agenda includes discussion on the Community's Framework Programme for Research and development in the period 1987-91. Three individual research programmes — RACE (Telecommunications), Science and Technology for Development and Medical and Public Health — may also be discussed, although final agreement may not be possible in advance of agreement on the framework programme. The Council may also consider the report of the industrial panel on the future role and organisation of the Community's joint research centre.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the level of income tax in the Falkland Islands; what information he has as to the levels of banking and commercial secrecy; if he has any evidence of use of the Falkland Islands as a tax haven; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: In the current financial year, personal income tax in the Falkland Islands is chargeable as follows:

	Per cent.
On the first £500 of chargeable income	20
On the next £500 of chargeable income	25
On the next £6,500 of chargeable income	30
On the next £2,500 of chargeable income	40
On the remainder of chargeable income	50

Deductions that may be claimed:	£
Personal income	2,100
For wife	1,200
Wife's earned income relief	[1]2,100
Dependent relative	650
Insurance premium or pension fund contribution	[2]

[1] Maximum.

[2] Up to one-sixth of total income after deducting wife's earned income relief.

Banking in the Falkland Islands is regulated by the 1972 Ordinance no. 7 for the licensing and control of banking in the colony. A copy and subsequent amendments have been laid in the Library of the House. We have no evidence of the use of the Falkland Islands as a tax haven.

EMPLOYMENT

Community Programme

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Paymaster-General if he will make a statement on the future funding of the numbers involved in the community programme.

Mr. Lee: Expenditure on the community programme is planned to rise from about £1,038 million this year to about £1,120 million in 1987-88. The programme will continue to provide worthwhile opportunities on work of value to the community for some 300,000 long term unemployed people in a year.

Work Creation

Mr. Wilson asked the Paymaster General if he will list the various work creation schemes introduced by this Government or inherited and continued from the previous Administration; if he will show against each the amount

of central Government funding in all its forms; and if he will show the estimated numbers of people who have participated in each scheme in each year since its inception.

Mr. Trippier: Information in the form requested can be provided only at disproportionate cost. The employment, enterprise and training measures which were operating in 1979 together with those introduced since are listed below. Details of expenditure on and coverage of these measures are published each year in the public expenditure white paper.

Training Opportunities Scheme[1]
Youth Opportunities Programme[1]
Youth Employment Subsidy[1]
Job Creation Programme[1]
Special Temporary Employment Programme[1]
Temporary Short Time Working Compensation Scheme[1]
Short Time Working Compensation Scheme[1]
Adult Employment Subsidy[1]
Temporary Employment Subsidy[1]
Small Firms Employment Subsidy[1]
Young Workers Scheme[2]
Community Employment Programme[2]
Part-time Job Release Scheme[2]
Community Industry[1]
Job Release Scheme[1]
Community Programme
Job Splitting Scheme
Enterprise Allowance Scheme
Voluntary Projects Programme
Restart
Jobstart
New Job Training Scheme
New Workers Scheme
Jobclubs
Career Development Loans
YTS
Job Training Scheme
Training for Enterprise
Training Grants for Employers
Access to Information Technology
Wider Opportunities Training Programme
Open Learning
Loan Guarantee Scheme
Business Expansion Scheme

[1] Introduced before 1979 and now closed.
[2] Introduced since 1979 and now closed.
[3] Introduced pre-1979 and still in operation.

Small Businesses

Mr. Wilson asked the Paymaster General if he will list the legislative measures introduced by this Government designed to assist directly the small business community; if he will show against each the amount of central Government funding in all forms of advice and assistance;

Small Businesses

Mr. Wilson asked the Paymaster General if he will list the legislative measures introduced by this Government designed to assist directly the small business community; if he will show against each the amount of central Government funding in all forms of advice and assistance; and if he is able to show the estimated increase in small business formation associated with each measure.

Mr. Trippier: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Unemployment Benefit (Claimants)

Mr. Frank Cook asked the Paymaster General what is the present number of quarterly signers signing on at unemployment benefit offices in Cleveland at *(a)* Stockton: Bayheath house, Prince Regent street, *(b)* Stockton: Daryl house, Park terrace, *(c)* Billingham: Kingsway house, West Precinct, *(d)* Guisborough: Morgan drive, Guisborough: Loftus market place, *(f)* Hartlepool: Raby road, *(g)* Middlesbrough: 36 Grange road and *(h)* Middlesbrough: Crown house, Wilson street.

Mr. Trippier: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Skillcentre (Irvine)

Mr. Lambie asked the Paymaster General when will the proposed new skillcentre at Irvine be given the go-ahead, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier [*pursuant to the reply*, 23 February 1987, c. 88]: We have asked the Manpower Services Commission to review its skills training agency's capital expenditure policies and arrangements. This follows upon a review last year of the agency's personnel policies and practices in the light of its experience as a trading organisation. Until the further review is completed, the agency has decided that the Irvine skillcentre should continue at its present site.

Mr. Pike asked the Paymaster General if he will list in the *Official Report* the skillcentres in Lancashire in June 1979 and at present: and the number of places provided at each centre for both dates.

Mr. Trippier [*pursuant to his reply*, 26 February 1987]: There are two skillcentres in Lancashire; East Lancs skillcentre in Hyndburn and Preston skillcentre. Both were in operation in 1979. As I stated in my reply to the hon. Member's question on 25 June 1986 at column 339, statistics on skillcentre training volumes have, since 1983, been kept in terms of training weeks available rather than places available. In January 1987, East Lancs provided 697 training weeks, and Preston provided 639 training weeks. Figures for 1979 are not available.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Homosexuality

Ms. Richardson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many males aged between 16 years and 21 years were, respectively, prosecuted, convicted and imprisoned for consensual sexual acts with other males aged 16 years to 21 years in 1985; and, in the case of those imprisoned, what were the maximum, minimum and average sentences served by such men.

Mr. Mellor: Information is not available in exactly the form requested. However, records available to me for England and Wales, which may be incomplete, show 10 males aged 16-20 proceeded against in 1985 for buggery or attempted buggery with another male person aged 16 or over with consent and six defendants found guilty: 42 males aged 16-20 proceeded against for indecency between males; and 43 defendants found guilty some of whom may have initially been proceeded against for a more serious offence or in a previous year. Of the 49 found guilty for these offences, two were given custodial sentences, each receiving 18 months' custody.

Electrical Wiring Defects (Fires)

Mr. Richard Page asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many deaths occurred in the United Kingdom in the latest year for which figures are available from fires caused by electrical wiring defects.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: In 1984 there were 20 deaths in fires attended by local authority fire brigades in the United Kingdom for which a fault in electrical wiring was recorded by the brigade as the source of ignition.

Lieutenant Narendra Sethia

Mr. Campbell-Savours asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis as to the reasons why a copy of the statement taken by the police from Mr. Narendra Sethia in connection with alleged breaches of the Official Secrets Act has not been made available to Mr. Sethia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hurd: It is not the normal practice of the police to provide copies of statements to those who make them. A copy would only be provided upon written request by the person making the statement and with the approval of the prosecuting authority, in this case the Director of Public Prosecutions. In March 1985 Mr. Sethia wrote to the Metropolitan police requesting that copies of the record of questions and answers be sent to his solicitors. The police forwarded the request to the Director of Public Prosecutions, who consulted the Ministry of Defence. No further correspondence on the matter was received from Mr. Sethia or his solicitors, nor has any fresh request been received from them.

SCOTLAND

Capital Allocations

Mr. Maxton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide the capital allocation in Scotland for *(a)* the housing revenue account for local authorities, *(b)* the non-housing revenue account for local authorities, *(c)* the Scottish Special Housing Association, *(d)* the new towns and *(e)* the Housing Corporation for the years 1978-79 to 1987-88, inclusive, showing all figures at (i) cash prices and (ii) estimated 1987-88 outturn prices.

Mr. Ancram: The information at cash prices and estimated 1987-88 constant prices is as follows:

£ million

	(a) HRA		*(b) non-HRA*		*(c) SSHA*		*(d) New Towns*		*(e) Housing Corporation*	
	(i) Cash	*(ii) Estimated 1987-88 prices*	*(i) Cash*	*(ii) Estimated 1987-88 prices*	*(i) Cash*	*(ii) Estimated 1987-88 prices*	*(i) Cash*	*(ii) Estimated 1987-88 prices*	*(i) Cash*	*(ii) Estimated 1987-88 prices*
1978-79	216·617	437·6	50·0	101·0	48·9	98·8	41·8	84·4	31·4	63·4
1979-80	230·7	398·8	48·6	84·0	40·0	69·1	33·3	57·6	48·5	83·8
1980-81	231·738	337·7	59·35	86·5	49·0	71·4	36·1	52·6	65·7	95·7
1981-82	250·158	331·9	76·994	102·2	47·2	62·6	40·7	54·0	85·0	112·8
1982-83	279·637	345·9	106·59	131·9	61·9	76·6	38·3	47·4	108·5	134·2
1983-84	310·485	367·7	98·061	116·1	72·9	86·3	38·1	45·1	109·0	129·1
1984-85	245·989	279·3	172·1	195·4	65·0	73·8	33·4	37·9	99·6	113·1
1985-86	290·274	310·2	124·979	133·6	52·1	55·7	26·9	28·7	104·1	111·2
1986-87	322·355	334·4	119·210	123·7	50·0	51·9	27·4	28·4	112·8	117·0
1987-88	362·5	362·5	147·5	147·5	52·75	52·75	24·2	24·2	120·4	120·4

Notes:

1. The estimated 1987-88 figures are produced by applying the GDP deflator (base year 1987-88).
2. The Scottish Special Housing Association did not receive an annual block capital allocation until 1979-80.
3. Capital allocations to the bodies listed have, since 1982-83, been made on a net basis; the Secretary of State provides a net allocation in addition to which the bodies can spend the actual net capital receipts realised in the year in question. However, for ease of comparison the figures in the above table for 1982-83 and subsequent years are given on a gross basis. They include actual receipts for the years from 1982-83 to 1985-86 (although some figures within the 1985-86 totals for the HRA and non-HRA are still subject to audit). They include forecast receipts for the years 1986-87 and 1987-88. If actual receipts in those years are higher or lower than the forecast level, the level of gross spending permitted to authorities will be higher or lower by a corresponding amount. All figures for 1987-88 are based on provisional net allocations, in addition to being subject to the relationship between forecast and actual receipts.
4. The figures given may not correspond exactly to the public expenditure outturn for each year under these various headings because there may have been overspending or underspending of allocations.

Housing

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report*, for each district and island council area, his estimate of the housing surplus or deficit.

Mr. Ancram: The table below gives a crude measure of housing surpluses, by areas, obtained by subtracting the estimated number of households at 30 June 1985 from the numbers of domestic subjects on the valuation rolls at 1 April 1985. It is not possible to give figures for both series on the same day. Moreover, definitional differences between the two series mean that estimates of housing surpluses in any authority obtained by the subtraction must be considered to be very approximate.

	Estimated households at 30 June 1985	*Domestic subjects on valuation roll at 1 April 1985*	*Crude surplus*
SCOTLAND	1,913,430	2,036,180	122,750
Borders	40,150	45,340	5,190
Berwickshire	7,250	8,540	1,290

	Estimated households at 30 June 1985	Domestic subjects on valuation roll at 1 April 1985	Crude surplus
Ettrick and Lauderdale	13,100	14,470	1,370
Roxburgh	14,060	15,810	1,750
Tweeddale	5,740	6,510	770
Central	100,400	104,790	4,390
Clackmannan	17,440	18,240	800
Falkirk	53,980	55,920	1,940
Stirling	28,990	30,630	1,640
Dumfries and Galloway	55,220	60,070	4,850
Annandale and Eskdale	13,680	14,810	1,130
Nithsdalle	21,200	22,350	1,150
Stewartry	8,940	10,300	1,360
Wigtown	11,400	12,610	1,210
Fife	129,270	138,380	9,110
Dunfermline	46,740	49,340	2,600
Kirkcaldy	56,990	60,660	3,670
North East Fife	25,550	28,380	2,830
Grampian	185,760	200,660	14,900
Aberdeen	84,280	88,030	3,750
Banff and Buchan	29,800	33,200	3,400
Gordon	24,910	27,330	2,420
Kincardine and Deeside	16,690	18,620	1,930
Moray	30,080	33,480	3,400
Highland	71,100	83,020	11,920
Badenoch and Strathspey	3,770	5,030	1,260
Caithness	9,730	10,900	1,170
Inverness	21,250	23,370	2,120
Lochaber	6,970	8,210	1,240
Nairn	3,660	4,080	420
Ross and Cromarty	16,590	19,500	2,910
Skye and Lochalsh	4,020	5,400	1,380
Sutherland	5,100	6,530	1,430
Lothian	285,910	301,210	15,300
East Lothian	30,500	32,350	1,850
Edinburgh	177,090	187,280	10,190
Midlothian	28,570	29,580	1,010
West Lothian	49,760	51,990	2,230
Strathclyde	866,740	906,380	39,640
Argyll and Bute	24,330	29,800	5,470
Bearsden and Milngavie	13,980	14,230	250
Clydebank	18,350	18,990	640
Clydesdale	20,700	21,300	600
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	20,960	21,510	550
Cumnock and Doon Valley	15,820	16,510	690
Cunninghame	50,330	54,340	4,010
Dumbarton	28,390	30,160	1,770
East Kilbride	29,080	29,280	200
Eastwood	19,870	20,100	230
Glasgow	284,590	298,720	14,130
Hamilton	37,710	38,740	1,030
Inverclyde	35,730	36,800	1,070
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	30,050	31,710	1,660
Kyle and Carrick	42,800	44,630	1,830
Monklands	36,470	37,330	860
Motherwell	52,690	53,780	1,090
Renfrew	75,570	78,620	3,050
Strathkelvin	29,310	29,810	500
Tayside	152,730	166,450	13,720
Angus	35,840	38,780	2,940
Dundee	70,960	76,670	5,710
Perth and Kinross	45,930	51,000	5,070
Orkney Islands	6,990	7,970	980
Shetland Islands	8,190	8,940	750
Western Isles	10,970	13,000	2,030

All numbers have been individually rounded to the nearest ten.

Diabetics (Disposable Syringes)

Mr. Maclennan asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received concerning the possible provision of disposable syringes to sufferers from chronic diabetes; what estimate he has of the cost of such a provision to these patients alone; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacKay: My right hon. and learned Friend has received a number of letters on this matter both from members of the public and hon. Members on behalf of their constituents. He has also had correspondence with representatives of the British Diabetic Association and some members of the medical profession. The additional cost to the NHS in Scotland for the provision of disposable syringes and needles to diabetics through the general practitioner service is estimated at £0·7 million per annum.

ENVIRONMENT

Secondary Mortgage Market

Mr. Heddle asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he proposes to make a statement on the secondary mortgage market.

Mr. John Patten: I hope to receive a report from the working group on the secondary mortgage market within the next few weeks.

Rent Arrears

Mr. Heddle asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what steps his Department takes to encourage local councils to reduce their level of rent arrears;

(2) if he will publish in the *Official Report* the names of the local authorities whose level of rent arrears have exceeded *(a)* 1 per cent., *(b)* 2 per cent., *(c)* 3 per cent., *(d)* 4 per cent. and *(e)* 5 per cent. or more of total rentals at the latest available date.

Mr. John Patten: I have nothing to add at present to the answer I gave my hon. Friend on December 10 at column *188-89*.

Derelict Land Grant

Mr. Heddle asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list in the *Official Report* the number of schemes for which derelict land grants were paid in Staffordshire for the last five years, the amount of the grant paid, and the value in each respect.

Mr. John Patten: In the period 1982-87, 292 grants were paid totalling £19,782,125. Total value of these schemes was £20,240,910.

Sport (Illegal Substances)

Mr. Sedgemore asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had with the Sports Council on the problems of the use of illegal substances in sport.

Mr. Tracey: I met representatives of the Sports Council on 26 January to discuss the work of the council's drug abuse advisory group. We reviewed progress made since this issue was raised at the Conference of European Sport Ministers in Dublin last year and discussed what further measures could be taken now by the United Kingdom and European Governments and the governing bodies of sport.

Housing

Mr. Nicholls asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the effect of the Housing and Planning Act 1986 on the flow of applications for the purchase of their homes by secure tenants.

Mr. John Patten: The provisions of the Housing and Planning Act which concern the right to buy came into operation on 7 January. Statistics on applications received from that date are not yet available, but I expect to see an increase in the number of flats sold.

Rates

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will now seek to make it mandatory for local authorities to allow commercial property owners to pay their rates by instalments in the same way as domestic ratepayers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: Since 1 April 1985, all business ratepayers have been entitled to pay their rates by instalments.

Local Authorities (Financial Interests)

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he is proposing to write to all local authorities with a questionnaire seeking detailed information on their interests in any Companies Act companies.

Mr. Ridley: Yes. My Department has consulted the English local authority associations about such a questionnaire to provide a firm, factual basis for consideration of the recommendations of the Widdicombe committee on local authority companies. The four associations which have so far replied see no objection in principle to what is proposed.

Residential Care Homes

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce regulations to require unregistered residential care homes to be inspected by the local environmental health and fire prevention officers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tracey: I shall answer this question shortly.

Water Authorities

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to introduce legislation in respect of uniform connection charges by water authorities.

Mr. John Patten [*pursuant to his answer*, 26 February 1987]: My right hon. Friend has no plans to do so. However, proposals for modifications in the present arrangements for requisitioning of sewers and water mains were set out in the Department's consultation paper 'Water and Sewerage Law' published in March 1986.

Land

Mr. Craigen asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each six-month period since 1 January 1982 and for the latest available period *(a)* how much underused public land was on the land registers, *(b)* how much land was added to the registers, *(c)* how much land was removed from the registers, divided between the amounts sold, the amounts brought back into use and the amounts removed in other ways, *(d)* how many notices he issued under section 99 of the Local Government Planning and Land Act 1980 and how much land was involved and *(e)* how many directions he issued under section 98 of the 1980 Act and how much land was involved.

Mr. John Patten [*pursuant to his answer*, 25 February 1987]: Following is the information:

	31 December 1982[1]	*30 June 1983*	*31 December 1983*	*30 June 1984*	*Period ended 31 December 1984*	*30 June 1985*	*31 December 1985*	*30 June 1986*	*31 December 1986*
Area of land recorded on the land register at end of period	110,200	109,100	111,500	114,100	113,100	113,000	110,000	106,900	100,100
Area of land added	122,400	700	5,900	5,000	2,700	4,000	3,600	200	1,100
Area of land removed									
(i) Area sold	5,500	300	2,500	1,200	2,700	2,500	4,200	1,800	4,700
(ii) Area brought back into use	2,700	100	900	600	700	800	1,000	800	1,400
(iii) Area removed for other reasons	4,000	1,400	100	600	300	800	1,400	700	1,800

	31 December 1982[1]	30 June 1983	31 December 1983	30 June 1984	Period ended 31 December 1984	30 June 1985	31 December 1985	30 June 1986	31 December 1986
Notices issued under S99 of the LGPL Act (Area in acres)	—	—	—	—	9 (47)	50 (386)	[2]4 —	[2]58 (332)	[2]74 (372)
Directions issued under S98 of the LGPL Act (Area in acres)	—	—	—	—	4 (37)	—	[3]22 (140)	1 [3]—	[3]28 (40)

[1] Details of additions and removals in period prior to December 1982 could only be provided at disproportionate cost. The figures show cumulative totals to 31 December 1982.
[2] Some sites have been the subject of more than one notice issued under Section 99; where this is so, the acreage shown refers to the first notice.
[3] Some sites have been the subject of more than one direction under Section 98 as this is the means whereby a direction once issued is varied or revoked; where this is so, the acreage shown refers to the first direction.

THE ARTS

Children's Librarians

Mr. Fisher: asked the Minister for the Arts how many specialist children's librarians are employed by public library services in England; and what steps he is taking to ensure more specialist support to combat illiteracy.

Mr. Luce [*pursuant to his reply* 26 February 1987]: There are no statistics readily available on this. My Office has commissioned research into statistics and patterns of service delivery for public library services to children and young people. The results should be available shortly.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Corporation Tax

Mr. Wainwright asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer by what approximate amount the yield of corporation tax 1986-87 would be increased had there been no agreed losses, excluding the public sector, available for offsetting profits.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Use of accumulated past losses is estimated to reduce corporation tax receipts in 1986-87 by £1 billion to £2 billion.

Mr. Wainwright asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his reply of 12 February, why he is unable to quantify the total of losses, excluding the public sector, agreed for corporation tax purposes by the Inland Revenue.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Where a company has an amount of loss to carry forward against profits in subsequent accounting periods, agreed or estimated figures are available within the tax district, but they are not formally recorded on a tax assessment form and full details of such losses are not available centrally. The estimates in my reply of 12 February were therefore based on a projection from a small sample of tax district records.

Losses (Public Sector)

Mr. Wainwright asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his reply of 12 February, for what reason he excludes the public sector from the total estimate of losses.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Because the circumstances of the public sector organisations are such that, in the main, there are no implications for corporation tax receipts.

EC Commission (Cash Flow)

Mr. Deakins asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) on 20 January, *Official Report*, column 467, whether he expects the EEC Commission's cash flow problem to continue during 1987-88.

Mr. Brooke: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth) on 20 February, *Official Report* col. 880, concerning the European Commission's current cash position. The adoption on 19 February of a budget for the European Economic Community for 1987 will provide the Commission with additional revenue which will ease its cash difficulties, although the pressures on available resources are likely to continue. The Government's public expenditure plans for 1986-87 and 1987-88 assume that an advance of £130 million will be required from April to March 1987 (Cm. 56-II, page 70, paragraph 11).

Capital Gains Tax

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the additional revenue in 1987-88 of taxing all real capital gains, after allowing for inflation, at 40 per cent. but with separate taxation of husband and wife, excluding gains arising on disposals of a person's only or main residence.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The present yield of capital gains tax would be reduced by about one-third.

Budget Council

Mr. Deakins asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the definition of the term "negative reserves" as used in his statement on the outcome of the February Budget Council, *Official Report*, 17 February, column 542.

Mr. Brooke: A negative reserve is a provision in the Reserve Chapter 100 for unspecified reductions in expenditure elsewhere in the Budget. It involves the Commission proposing transfers from this reserve on to substantive budget lines during the budgetary year, thereby cancelling equivalent amounts of unused expenditure.

Public Expenditure

Mr. Blair asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table like that published in a written answer on 27 January columns

229-30, showing for the years 1974-75 to 1978-79 the actual proceeds of public sector sales of assets outside the central privatisation proceed.

Mr. John MacGregor: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Privatisation

Mr. Blair asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish in the *Official Report* the opening and closing price on the first day of trading of the shares sold in the privatisation share issues, together with, in each case, the number of shares sold.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Lady Maybray-King

Sir Phillip Holland asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the arrangements that have been made for the payment of a pension to Sheila, Lady Maybray-King, the widow of the former Speaker, Lord Maybray-King pending the approval of the Parliamentary and other Pensions Bill.

Mr. Brooke: The Parliamentary and other Pensions Bill which my right hon. Friend the Lord Privy Seal introduced yesterday includes provision for a pension to be paid as a charge on the Consolidated Fund to Sheila, Lady Maybray-King when that Bill comes into force. In the meantime an advance of £4,903·66 has been sought from the Contingencies Fund to provide for the gross payment of this pension in respect of the period between Lord Maybray-King's death on 3 Sepember 1986 and 31 March 1987. Repayment of this sum to the Fund will be made by means of the special omnibus Vote (Other Services: repayments to the Contingencies Fund). A further small advance may be necessary from the Contingencies Fund, to be repaid by the same means, for the period from 1 April 1987 until the Parliamentary and other Pensions Bill comes into force.

Imports

Mr. Meacher asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the marginal propensity to import for each additional increment of consumer demand for each year since 1979.

Mr. John MacGregor [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 February 1987, c. 829]: The marginal propensity to import is defined as the ratio of the change from the previous year in the volume of imports of consumer goods to the change from the previous year in the volume of consumers expenditure. Imports of consumer goods (including passenger motor vehicles) along with imports of food, drink and tobacco. The table gives the figures for 1979 to 1986:

	Marginal propensity to import
1979	0·28
1980	3·13
1981	8·78
1982	0·63
1983	0·16
1984	0·28
1985	0·05
1986	0·23

Tax Revenue

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the total revenue from the taxation of cars of benefits in kind in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available; and what was the percentage change in such revenues on the preceding year in each case.

Mr. Norman Lamont [*pursuant to his reply*, 24 February 1987]: The table gives the estimated income tax liability from the taxation of cars (and fuel from 1983-84) and all expenses and benefits provided by employers. The percentage changes from the previous year are given in brackets.

£ million

Year	*Cars provided by employer (including fuel from 1983-84)*[2]		*All expenses and benefits*	
1977-78	60		75	
1978-79	70	(+17%)	100	(+33%)
1979-80	75	(+ 7%)	125	(+25%)
1980-81	85	(+13%)	140	(+12%)
1981-82	115	(+35%)	190	(+36%)
1982-83	130	(+13%)	250	(+32%)
1983-84	240	[2]	370	(+48%)
1984-85[1]	280	(+17%)	420	(+14%)
1985-86[1]	340	(+21%)	500	(+19%)
1986-87[1]	410	(+21%)	580	(+16%)

[1] Provisional

[2] The method of taxing car fuel benefit changed from 1983-84 when a scale charge was introduced: from 1983-84 the tax liability from the scale charge is included in the first column; so those figures are not comparable with the figures for earlier years. Liability on car fuel benefit is included in the second column for all years, but the amounts for years prior to 1983-84 cannot be separately identified.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Schanschieff Report

Mr. Weetch asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many recommendations of the Schanschieff report on dentistry have been implemented; what progress is expected on the remaining proposals; and whether he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Conway) on 26 February.

Single Payments

Mr. Flannery asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many single payments for maternity items were made to women in Sheffield in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: I regret that the information requested is not collected by individual local offices and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Benefits

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what would be the net cost of a £5 a week increase in child benefit for all children under five years; and what would be the net cost if the supplement for one-parent families were withdrawn.

Mr. Major: The gross annual cost of a £5 a week increase of child benefit for children under 5 would be £920 million. The gross annual cost of one parent benefit is £148 million. Individual net costings could be provided only at disproportionate expense. The effect of such a change is not clear cut because a substantial number of single parent families and families with children under 5 are entitled and would continue to be entitled to supplementary benefit.

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will indicate, for all welfare and national insurance benefits and allowances, the percentage change in value each year since 1979 and the comparable change in national average earnings for each of those years.

Mr. Major [*pursuant to his reply*, 17 February 1987 c. *598*]: The information requested is shown in the tables. Table 1 gives the percentage increase in the major social security benefit rates at uprating dates in each year from 1979 to 1986. Table 2 gives the percentage increase in average earnings at uprating dates.

Table 1 - Percentage increase in benefit rates since previous uprating at uprating dates

Per cent.

Benefit	*1979 November*	*1980 November*	*1981 November*	*1982 November*	*1983 November*	*1984 November*	*1985 November*	*1986 July*
Retirement pension								
Single	19·5	16·5	9·0	11·0	3·7	5·1	7·0	1·0
Couple	19·6	16·5	9·0	11·0	3·7	5·1	7·0	1·1
Non-contributory over 80s pension								
Single	19·7	16·4	8·9	12·4	2·5	5·1	7·0	1·1
Couple	19·5	16·5	8·8	12·7	2·2	5·0	7·0	1·1
Widows' benefits								
Widows' allowance	19·4	16·6	8·9	11·0	3·7	5·1	7·0	1·1
Widowed mother's allowance	19·5	16·5	9·0	11·0	3·7	5·1	7·0	1·0
Widow's pension	19·5	16·5	9·0	11·0	3·7	5·1	7·0	1·0
Age-related widow's pension —30 per cent.—93 per cent. of rate of widow's pension								
Invalidity pension								
Single	19·5	11·6	9·0	10·9	3·7	5·1	11·8	1·0
Couple	19·6	11·5	9·0	10·9	3·7	5·1	11·9	1·1
Unemployment benefit								
Single	17·5	11·6	9·0	11·1	8·2	5·2	7·0	1·1
Couple	17·5	11·5	9·0	11·1	8·2	5·1	7·1	1·1
Sickness benefit								
Single	17·5	11·6	9·0	11·1	3·8	5·0	7·0	1·0
Couple	17·5	11·5	9·0	11·1	3·7	5·0	7·0	1·1
Maternity allowance								
Single	17·5	11·6	9·0	11·1	3·8	5·0	7·0	1·0
Couple	17·5	11·5	9·0	11·1	3·7	5·0	7·0	1·1
Severe disablement[1] *allowance*								
Single	19·7	16·4	8·9	11·0	3·8	5·1	7·0	1·1
Couple	19·5	16·5	8·8	10·9	3·8	5·0	7·0	1·1
Attendance allowance								
Higher rate	19·2	16·4	9·2	11·0	3·6	5·1	7·0	1·1
Lower rate	19·2	16·5	9·0	11·1	3·7	5·2	7·1	1·0
Invalid care allowance								
Single	19·7	16·4	8·9	11·0	3·8	5·1	7·0	1·1
Couple	19·5	16·5	8·8	10·9	3·8	5·0	7·0	1·1
Mobility allowance	20·0	20·8	13·8	10·9	3·8	5·3	7·0	1·2
Child benefit	[2]33·3	18·8	10·5	11·4	11·1	5·4	2·2	1·4

Benefit	1979 November	1980 November	1981 November	1982 November	1983 November	1984 November	1985 November	1986 July
One parent benefit	25·0	20·0	10·0	10·6	11·0	4·9	7·1	1·1
Family income supplement								
Prescribed amount[3] for one-child family, where child is aged								
Under 11	}						8·3	1·1
11-15	} 21·7	19·6	10·4	11·5	3·6	5·3	9·4	1·1
16 and over	}						10·6	1·1
Maximum amount for one-child family, where child is aged								
Under 11	}						8·7	1·2
11-15	} 28·6	25·9	8·8	13·5	4·8	4·5	10·9	1·2
16 and over	}						13·0	1·2
Supplementary benefit								
Long-term rates								
Single (householder)	19·1	14·6	9·0	10·5	4·3	4·7	5·0	1·1
Couple	19·3	15·4	9·0	10·5	4·3	4·7	5·1	1·1
Non-householder 18 or over	18·8	14·5	9·0	10·6	4·2	4·8	5·1	1·2
Non-householder 16-17[4]	17·8	48·0	9·0	10·5	4·2	4·8	5·0	1·1
Ordinary rates								
Single (householder)	17·7	16·4	9·2	10·5	4·3	4·7	5·2	1·0
Couple	17·6	16·5	9·1	10·5	4·3	4·7	5·0	1·1
Non-householder 18 or over	17·7	16·4	9·1	10·5	4·4	4·7	5·1	1·1
Non-householder 16-17	17·8	16·4	9·2	10·5	4·4	4·8	5·2	1·1
Dependent children[5]								
Over 18	17·7	16·4	9·1	10·5	4·4	4·7	5·1	1·1
16-17	17·8	16·4	9·2	10·5	4·4	4·8	5·2	1·1
11-15	17·6	41·6/16·6	9·2	10·5	4·2	4·7	5·2	1·3
Under 11	17·9/18·2	40·4/16·8	8·2	10·8	4·6	4·9	5·2	1·0
Industrial disablement pension								
Over 18	19·1	16·6	9·0	11·0	3·7	5·0	7·0	1·1
Under 18	19·5	16·5	9·0	10·3	3·7	5·1	7·0	1·0
Reduced rates—10 per cent. —90 per cent. of basic rate								
Maximum disablement gratuity (lump sum)	19·3	16·6	8·8	10·9	3·7	5·1	7·0	1·2
Unemployability supplement	19·5	11·6	9·0	10·9	3·7	5·1	11·8	1·0
Maximum special hardship allowance	19·1	16·4	9·2	11·0	3·7	5·0	7·0	1·1
Industrial death benefit								
Initial rate	19·4	16·6	8·9	11·0	3·7	5·1	7·0	1·1
Higher permanent rate	19·0	16·1	8·8	10·8	3·6	5·1	6·9	1·0
Lower permanent rate	19·5	16·6	9·0	11·0	3·7	5·1	7·0	1·0
Constant attendance allowance								
Normal maximum rate	19·7	16·4	9·6	10·8	3·7	4·9	6·8	1·2
Part-time rate	19·7	16·4	9·6	10·8	3·7	4·9	6·8	1·2
Intermediate rate	19·7	16·4	9·6	10·8	3·7	4·9	6·8	1·2
Exceptional rate	19·7	16·4	9·6	10·8	3·7	4·9	6·8	1·2
Housing benefit[6]								
Needs allowance								
Single	13·9	12·4	7·0	10·8	4·0	4·8	5·8	0·8
Couple/single parent	15·5	13·5	7·5	9·7	4·1	4·7	5·6	0·9
Single handicapped	14·8	12·4	7·1	10·8	4·0	4·8	5·8	0·8
Couple—one handicapped	15·9	13·4	7·5	9·8	4·1	4·7	5·6	0·9
Couple—both handicapped	15·5	13·5	7·5	9·7	4·1	4·7	5·5	1·0
Pensioner addition[7]	—	—	—	—	—	6·7	6·3	Not increased
Dependent child addition	17·6	24·7	7·8	10·1	4·4	8·0	12·8	0·7
Child dependency addition								
With short-term benefits[8]	*100·0	−26·5	−36·0	−62·5	−50·0	—	—	—
With long-term benefits	32·7	5·6	2·7	3·2	−4·4	0·7	5·2	Not increased

Table 2—Percentage increase in earnings since previous uprating date

	Per cent.
November 1979	19·1
November 1980	17·9
November 1981	11·5
November 1982	8·3
November 1983	7·3
November 1984	6·5
November 1985	8·6
July 1986	5·9

All benefits increases apply to weekly rates unless otherwise stated. Small variations in the increases in rates to which the same percentage increase was originally applied are due to rounding. Earnings figures are for whole economy average earnings, seasonally adjusted.

[1] Replaced non-contributory invalidity pension and housewives' non-contributory invalidity pension from November 1984.

[2] Fully introduced only in April 1979, therefore not uprated in November 1979.

[3] These are *not* rates of benefit.

[4] Supplemetary benefit scale rates were restructured in 1980 and separate long-term and ordinary rates for non-householders age 16-17 were introduced. Previously there had been only a single rate for this group.

[5] Before the restructuring of the scale rates in 1980 there were separate scale rates for children aged 11-12 and under 5.

[6] Housing benefit was fully introduced only in April 1983. The figures used to calculate percentage increases in years prior to this are the most closely comparable figures from the previous rent and rates rebate scheme. Housing benefit needs allowances are not rates of benefit. The way in which they are constructed means that a comparison of increases with increases in other benefits, with price inflation using the RPI or with increases in average earnings, is inappropriate. A fuller explanation of the reasons for this is given in the reply to the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford on 4 December 1986 at columns *729-730*.

[7] Pensioner additions were introduced in 1982 and first increased in 1984.

[8] Child dependency additions with short-term benefits were abolished in 1984.

[9] Increase since April 1979.

Maternity Payments

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many claims for maternity allowance have been made in the county of Derbyshire at the latest available date.

Mr. Major: In the 12 months ending April 1986, the latest year for which figures are available, the following number of claims to maternity allowance were made at the Department's offices which cover the county, although the boundaries are not conterminous:

	Number
Derby (London Road)	1,551
Derby (Beckett Street)	1,233
Derby (Heritage Gate)	1,071
Chesterfield	1,860
Ilkestone	928

Mr. Garrett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in North Tyneside received maternity allowance in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: Information is not available in the form requested. But in the 12 months ending April 1986, the latest year for which figures are available, the following number of claims to maternity allowance were made at the Department's offices which cover North Tyneside although the boundaries are not conterminous:

	Number
Newcastle (East)	983
Wallsend	624
North Shields	807

Mr. Lofthouse asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in Pontefract, Castleford and Knottingley received maternity allowance in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: Information is not available in the form requested. But in the 12 months ending April 1986, the latest year for which figures are available, the following numbers of claims to maternity allowance were made at the Department's offices which cover Pontefract, Castleford and Knottingley although the boundaries are not conterminous:

	Number
Pontefract	658
Castleford	784

Health Education Authority

Mr. Robert Atkins asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he is yet in a position to announce the names of the members of the new Health Education Authority.

Mr. Fowler: I am pleased to announce that, in addition to Sir Brian Bailey, Miss Ann Burdus and Mr. Alastair Service, whose appointments I announced on 18 February, the following have agreed to serve as members of the new Authority:

Professor Anthony Clare — Professor of Psychological Medicine, St. Bartholmew's Hospital
Mr. Sebastian Coe—Vice-Chairman, Sports Council
Miss Carey Dennis—Director of Products and Consumer Services Department, Tesco Stores Ltd.
Professor Alastair Geddes — Professor of Communicable Disease, Birmingham University
Mrs. Pat Marshall — Director of Nursing Services (Community), City and Hackney Health Authority
Mr. Robin Moss — Head of Independent Broadcasting Association Educational Programme Services
Mrs. Ann Parker—Director of Social Services, Berkshire
Mr. James Pease-Watkin—Personnel Director, the Bowater Corporation
Mr. William Rhodes — Assistant Secretary, the Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain
Dr. Colin Waine—General Practitioner
The Hon. Mrs. Caroline Waldegrave—Managing Director, the Leith School of Food and Wine
Mrs. Kate Wood — Schools Curriculum Development Committee

Orthopaedic X-Rays

Mr. Onslow asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will update his guidance to health authorities in England and Wales on the retention of orthopaedic X-rays.

Mrs. Currie: We have at present no plans to do so.

Abortions

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the number of girls under 16 years upon whom abortions were performed, with only their own consent, during each of the years for which records exist.

Mr. Newton: The table shows the numbers of abortions carried out under the Abortion Act 1967 to women aged under 16 years of age in England and Wales from April 1968 to September 1986. Information on consent is not available centrally.

Number of notifications of legal abortions to women aged under 16 years. England and Wales 1968-1986

Year	Number
[1]1968	553
1969	1,231
1970	1,822
1971	2,618
1972	3,320
1973	3,660
1974	3,948
1975	4,006
1976	3,835
1977	4,067
1978	3,724
1979	3,856
1980	4,143
1981	3,949
1982	4,343
1983	4,566
1984	4,609
1985	4,427
[2]1986	3,744

[1] From 27 April 1968.
[2] Notifications for first three quarters received by end of November. From 1968 to 1980, figures are based on notifications received. From 1981 onwards, figures are based on occurrences.

NHS Hospital and Community Services

Mr. Simon Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will provide figures for the change in real expenditure on National Health Service hospital and community health services for each year between the earliest year after 1974 and the most recent year for which comparable figures are available as measured using *(a)* the gross domestic product deflator and *(b)* the National Health Service pay and price deflator, by Greater London district health authorities in total, and by Inner London district health authorities in total.

Mr. Newton: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Young People (Hearing)

Mr. Speed asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what research is being sponsored by his Department on the effects upon young people's hearing by excessive noise through loudspeakers or earphones.

Mr. Newton: The Department is not currently supporting any research in this field. The Medical Research Council, which receives grant-in-aid from the science budget of the Department of Education and Science, is the main Government funded body dealing with medical research.

Hospital Wastes

Mr. Terry Lewis asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) which National Health Service hospitals have facilities for the incineration of all wastes produced from the clinical functions carried out therein; and what is the total weekly tonnage incinerated;

(2) if he will list the companies which have contracts for the removal of clinical wastes from National Health hospitals; and what is the weekly weight of clinical waste removed.

Mr. Newton: Information on the disposal of clinical waste in NHS hospitals is not collected centrally.

Nurses

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the source for the statement by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) on 17 February, *Official Report*, column *867*, about the number of nurses in the National Health Service; what action he proposes to take in the light of representations from the hon. Member for Brent, South about shortages of nurses in Brent; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: The source of the statement was the increase of 62,000 whole time equivalents (from 428,000 to 490,800 WTEs) in the total nursing and midwifery staff (including agency staff) in Great Britain between September 1978 and September 1985. Of these an estimated 29,200 WTEs were needed to compensate for the reduction in the working week in 1980-81.

The provision of nursing services in Brent itself is a matter for the Brent Health Authority. However the NHS Management Board has commissioned a study into the nursing services in London. The Steering Group is currently processing the information obtained and is aiming to complete its study and report to the Management Board by late Spring. We will then consider what local or national action may be required to remedy any problems revealed.

Family Income Supplement

Mr. Patrick Thompson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when awards of family income supplement will terminate as a result of the introduction of the provisions of the Social Security Act 1986.

Mr. Major: I have today laid regulations[1] providing for awards of FIS to terminate not later thaan 11 April 1988, when it is proposed that the new Family Credit scheme should take effect under the Social Security Act 1986. Transitional arrangements for existing FIS recipients will be made under separate regulations to be made under that Act. A commencement order for the relevant provisions of the 1986 Act will be introduced in due course.

[1] The Family Income Supplement (General) Amendment Regulations 1987.

General Practitioners (Computers)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement about his Department's refusal to finance the computer-based advice systems for general practitioners being established by Dr. Roger Brittain and colleagues at the University of Warwick.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 February 1987, c. *500*]: We have not refused to fund Dr. Brittain's system. We have written to him asking for a more detailed and costed protocol setting out the aims and methodology of the proposed research. When this is received, it will be

considered for funding on its scientific merits, together with other research applications submitted to the Department.

AIDS

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what evidence there is from other countries of AIDS victims developing a dangerously infectious state such as would justify use of the Public Health (Infectious Diseases) Regulations 1985.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 February 1987, c. *512-13*]: There is no evidence that AIDS overseas is more readily infectious than AIDS in this country.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to decide whether to extend practice of handing out free syringes to drug addicts; if he will list the hospitals where the trial is being conducted; and how he will assess the impact of the practice on the spread of AIDS.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 February 1987, c. *513*]: My right hon. Friend announced in his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mr. Galley) on 18 December 1986 at column *703* the establishment of a small number of schemes where drug misusers will be able both to receive counselling and exchange used needles and syringes for sterile equipment. Discussions about the operation of these schemes are currently under way in a number of locations and we hope to approve the first schemes shortly.

Independent research will be commissioned to monitor changes in the attitudes and behaviour of those using the schemes with regard to the sharing of injecting equipment, misuse of drugs and sexual practices. We hope to receive preliminary findings towards the end of the year and that these will help us assess the efficacy of such schemes in combating the spread of HIV infection.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services on what grounds HIV infection has not been made a notifiable disease.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 February 1987, c. *513*]: We already have a system of voluntary reporting in confidence of AIDS cases and HIV antibody positive cases to the Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre and the Communicable Disease for Scotland Unit. This system is working well and there appear no advantages at present in replacing it by a statutory system.

WALES

Rate Support Grant

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales what provision has been made, within the current year's rate support grant to the Welsh counties, specifically to meet expenditure on bilingual education; what are the corresponding figures for each financial year since 1976-77; and what are the projected figures for 1987-88, 1988-89 and 1989-90.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Central Government support towards billingual education comes from two main sources. Specific grant supports expenditure on certain local authority schemes approved by the Secretary of State. Any further spending by local authorities on bilingual education is eligible for rate support grant but information on expenditure supported in this way is not held centrally.

Since 1981-82 the level of specific grant estimated in the main Rate Support Grant reports has been as follows:

	£000
1981-82	729
1982-83	566
1983-84	600
1984-85	622
1985-86	950
1986-87	1,000

Support for bilingual education prior to 1981-82 was provided entirely through rate support grant, and is not separately identifiable.

Our intention for the rate support grant settlement for 1987-88 is that the specific grant for bilingual education should be £1,075,000. No decisions have yet been taken for the years 1988-89 and 1989-90.

Welsh Language

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* primary schoolchildren and *(b)* secondary school students attend Welsh-medium schools, or units, in each local education authority area in Wales; what proportion of the total they represent in each case; and what are the corresponding figures for each year since 1977.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The information is not readily available, and I shall reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many and what proportion of schoolchildren *(a)* entering secondary education and *(b)* leaving secondary education in each local education authority area in Wales in each year since 1977 were (i) fluent in the Welsh language, (ii) had some working knowledge of the Welsh language but were not fluent or (iii) had little or no knowledge of the Welsh language.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Information in the form requested is not available. Figures given in the following tables show, however, the numbers and percentages of pupils in their final year of primary school who were assessed by headteachers as being fluent in Welsh.

Number of pupils aged 10 and over in maintained primary schools

	Clwyd	*Dyfed*	*Gwent*	*Gwynedd*	*Mid Glamorgan*	*Powys*	*South Glamorgan*	*West Glamorgan*
1977:								
Category A[1]	364	1,160	7	1,579	52	102	54	182
Category B[2]	349	476	19	576	355	100	64	151
Category C[3]	5,407	3,142	7,321	1,154	8,541	1,393	5,864	5,309

	Clwyd	Dyfed	Gwent	Gwynedd	Mid Glamorgan	Powys	South Glamorgan	West Glamorgan
1978:								
Category A	365	1,131	5	1,554	36	102	91	188
Category B	474	522	23	692	348	122	55	144
Category C	5,324	3,162	7,215	1,150	8,348	1,328	5,624	5,231
1979:								
Category A	314	1,115	5	1,611	36	114	97	163
Category B	390	633	18	798	366	76	60	154
Category C	5,716	3,086	7,166	1,095	8,479	1,466	5,566	5,117
1980:								
Category A	318	1,110	—	1,557	52	107	83	190
Category B	371	661	40	756	399	73	91	183
Category C	5,504	3,066	6,669	1,078	8,050	1,372	5,280	4,698
1981:								
Category A	341	1,077	39	1,631	37	117	73	171
Category B	368	644	40	842	469	110	151	275
Category C	5,585	3,107	6,983	1,119	8,325	1,404	5,445	4,889
1982:								
Category A	322	999	3	1,487	49	103	78	184
Category B	397	641	33	769	456	73	88	138
Category C	5,224	2,852	6,461	1,052	7,749	1,386	4,996	4,596
1983:								
Category A	277	962	2	1,397	53	86	116	201
Category B	423	694	40	905	484	94	62	146
Category C	4,749	2,682	5,866	881	7,157	1,301	4,744	4,296
1984:								
Category A	216	884	3	1,266	60	88	48	145
Category B	416	652	46	868	461	97	87	143
Category C	4,496	2,524	5,567	854	6,661	1,294	4,647	4,158
1985:								
Category A	231	827	1	1,183	40	103	45	116
Category B	464	803	48	949	510	86	111	121
Category C	4,216	2,320	5,340	657	6,362	1,186	4,274	4,103

[1] Category A = pupils whose home language is Welsh.
[2] Category B = pupils whose home language is not Welsh but who can speak Welsh with fluency.
[3] Category C = pupils who do not speak Welsh fluently or cannot speak Welsh at all.

Note:
These figures are derived from assessments of fluency made by headteachers.

Percentage of pupils aged 10 and over in maintained primary schools

	Clwyd	Dyfed	Gwent	Gwynedd	Mid Glamorgan	Powys	South Glamorgan	West Glamorgan
1977								
Category A[1]	5·9	24·3	0·1	47·7	0·6	6·4	0·9	3·2
Category B[2]	5·7	9·9	0·2	17·4	3·9	6·3	1·0	2·7
Category C[3]	88·4	65·8	99·7	34·9	95·5	87·3	98·1	94·1
1978								
Category A	5·9	23·5	0·1	45·7	0·4	6·6	1·6	3·4
Category B	7·7	10·8	0·3	25·4	4·0	7·8	0·9	2·6
Category C	86·4	65·7	99·6	28·9	95·6	85·6	97·5	94·0
1979								
Category A	4·9	23·1	0·1	46·0	0·4	6·9	1·7	3·0
Category B	6·1	13·1	0·2	22·8	4·1	4·6	1·0	2·8
Category C	89·0	63·8	99·7	31·2	95·5	88·5	97·3	94·2
1980								
Category A	5·1	22·9	—	45·9	0·6	6·9	1·5	3·7
Category B	6·0	13·7	0·6	22·3	4·7	4·7	1·7	3·7
Category C	88·9	63·4	99·4	31·8	94·7	88·4	96·8	92·6
1981								
Category A	5·4	22·3	0·5	45·4	0·4	7·2	1·3	3·2
Category B	5·9	13·3	0·6	23·4	5·3	6·7	2·7	5·2
Category C	88·7	64·4	98·9	31·2	94·3	86·1	96·0	91·6

	Clwyd	Dyfed	Gwent	Gwynedd	Mid Glamorgan	Powys	South Glamorgan	West Glamorgan
1982								
Category A	5·4	22·2	0·1	45·0	0·6	6·6	1·5	3·7
Category B	6·7	14·3	0·5	23·2	5·5	4·7	1·7	2·8
Category C	87·9	63·5	99·4	31·8	93·9	88·7	96·8	93·5
1983								
Category A	5·1	22·2	—	43·9	0·7	5·8	2·4	4·3
Category B	7·7	16·0	0·7	28·4	6·3	6·4	1·2	3·2
Category C	87·2	61·8	99·3	27·7	93·0	87·8	96·4	92·5
1984								
Category A	4·2	21·6	0·1	42·4	0·9	5·9	1·0	3·3
Category B	8·1	16·0	0·8	29·0	6·4	6·6	1·8	3·2
Category C	87·7	62·2	99·1	28·6	92·7	87·5	97·2	93·5
1985								
Category A	4·7	21·0	—	42·4	0·6	7·5	1·0	2·7
Category B	9·5	20·3	0·9	34·0	7·4	6·2	2·5	2·8
Category C	85·8	58·7	99·1	23·6	92·0	86·3	96·5	94·5

[1] Category A = pupils whose home language is Welsh.
[2] Category B = pupils whose home language is not Welsh but who can speak Welsh with fluency.
[3] Category C = pupils who do not speak Welsh fluently or cannot speak Welsh at all.
Note:
These figures are derived from assessments of fluency made by headteachers.

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to be able to make a statement on the funding of the new Welsh language education development committee of the Welsh Joint Education Council.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: I have told the Welsh Joint Education Committee that the Government are prepared to meet the necessary administrative expenses of the new Welsh Language Education Development Committee.

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will outline in detail the proposed work of the new Welsh language education development committee of the Welsh Joint Education Council.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: My right hon. Friend has said that he looks to the new Committee to provide a forum for discussion of policy by those responsible for the provision of Welsh medium education; to co-ordinate activities in Welsh language education, thereby ensuring the best and most economical use of available resources; to disseminate information; and to identify areas for further research and development. It will be for the Committee itself to consider in detail the work necessary for it to discharge this role.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Departmental Computers

Dr. Hampson asked the Attorney-General what the Lord Chancellor's Department has spent on *(a)* computer hardware and *(b)* computer software for each year since 1984; and what the projected expenditure is for 1987.

The Solicitor-General: The answer is as follows:

	Hardware £	*Software* £
1985-86	639,000	80,000
1986-87	1,831,000	153,000
[1]1987-88	2,060,000	130,000

[1] projected

Dr. Hampson asked the Attorney-General, to which firms the Lord Chancellor's Department have awarded contracts for computer hardware for each year since 1984; and what was the value of each contract.

The Solicitor-General: Major (in excess of £10,000 worth of business) suppliers of computer hardware to the Lord Chancellor's Department in the years 1985-86 and 1986-87 have been as follows:

Apricot (UK) Ltd.
British Olivetti Ltd.
Burroughs Machines Ltd.
CASU Electronics Ltd.
Cybertek Computing Ltd.
Data General Ltd.
Electronic Business Systems Ltd.
Farnell International Instruments Ltd.
International Business Machines Ltd.
McDonnell Douglas Information Systems Ltd.
Rank Xerox (UK) Ltd.

The value of each contract is a matter of commercial confidentiality.

Lieutenant Narendra Sethia

Mr. Campbell-Savours asked the Attorney-General why he did not prosecute Lieutenant Narendra Sethia under the Official Secrets Act prior to his leaving the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

The Solicitor-General: My right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General announced on 10 June 1985 at cols. *299-300* that the Metropolitan police had submitted their report on this matter to the Director of Public Prosecutions who had concluded that it was not possible for him to institute proceedings against any person on the evidence then available. It was also his view that there was insufficient prospect that further investigations would enable him to come to a different conclusion for it to be in the public interest for him to ask the police to pursue their inquiries any further. The Attorney-General agreed with the Director of Public Prosecutions in all respects.

Mr. Campbell-Savours asked the Attorney-General (1) whether, in the light of the return to the United Kingdom

of Lieutenant Narendra Sethia, he will now prosecute him under section 2 of the Official Secrets Act for revealing to others classified information in his naval diary; and if he will make a statement;

(2) whether he will prosecute Mr. David Leigh of the Observer Newspaper under section 2 of the Official Secrets Act for revealing information from the naval diaries of Narendra Sethia, knowing that information to be classified; and if he will make a statement.

The Solicitor-General: No. I refer the hon. Member to my answer to his previous question.

DEFENCE

DROPS

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy concerning the use of his Department's generic acronyms by suppliers of trials equipment in describing their equipment; what action his Department generally takes to implement this policy; and if he will make a statement about how this was applied in the context of the demountable rack off-loading pick-up system.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Ministry of Defence does not normally seek to restrict the use of acronyms which it has originated, and there are accordingly few rights which MOD possesses in respect of its acronyms including copyright. One right the Ministry does retain is that of free use of an acronym it has coined in the face of third party attempts to use and to register the acronym or similar word as a trademark. The use of the acronym DROPS is not restricted in any way.

Sir Ian Gilmour: asked the Secretary of State for Defence what were the changes in concepts, requirements or understanding which led his Department to purchase from Boughtons demountable rack off-loading pick-up system trials equipment identical to the equipments they had rejected when they were first offered by Boughtons two and a half years earlier; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There is no record in currently available papers of the equipment referred to as having been offered by Boughtons at the time in question.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's normal practice with regard to the stage in the procurement process at which a general staff target is formulated; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A staff target is the first formal definition by the Defence Staff, expressed in broad terms, of the functions and desired performance of a new weapon or equipment. Approval of a staff target will normally be followed by a feasibility study, if warranted by the size and complexity of the project in question.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence what were the principal differences between the demountable rack off-loading pick-up system concept which emerged in 1979-80 and the ampliroll concept which preceded it; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No "Ampliroll concept" as such was formulated comparable with the DROPS concept which emerged in 1979-80. The DROPS requirement involved a range of separate equipment elements to provide a complete bulk load handling system. The Ampliroll equipment purchased for trail purposes in 1976 and 1977 was relevant to part, but not all, of that requirement.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence what priority was attached in the 1983 selection of the demountable rack off-loading pick-up system trucks to assessments of legality for use on roads; what consideration was given in the selection of the offroad MMLC truck configuration to its road-legality; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The ability of all equipment proposals to meet peacetime construction and use regulations was an important but not paramount consideration in the 1983 assessments. There is no separate offroad MMLC truck configuration.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence which demountable rack off-loading pick up system contractors selected in 1983 included among their range of solutions and options for low mobility demountable rack off-loading pick up system detailed designs of demountable rack off-loading pick up system trailers; if these contractors recommended the trailer option to his Department as the correct choice for LMLC demountable rack off-loading pick up system; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Both selected main contractors provided and recommended trailer options and designs to meet the LMLC requirements.

Frigates and Destroyers

Mr. Speed asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the number of frigates and destroyers that are currently fully operational in the fleet; and what were the comparable figures one and two years ago, respectively.

Mr. Stanley: The Royal Navy currently has 51 frigates and destroyers in service of which the number currently operational or engaged in preparing for service or trials or training is 46 compared to 47 on 1 April 1986 and 46 on 1 April 1985.

Mr. Speed asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many frigates and destroyers have been removed from the active fleet for each of the last three years; and how many were added to it over the same period.

Mr. Stanley: The information requested is as follows:

Calendar year	*Withdrawals from the active fleet*	*Acceptances*
1984	3	1
1985	4	3
1986	2	1

Mr. Speed asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is his assessment of the future size of the total operational fleet of frigates and destroyers in the next three years.

Mr. Stanley: As my hon. Friend the then Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement said to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) on

1 March 1985 at column 299 it is not the practice to give details of the forecast operational availability of warships for specific years. It remains our intention to maintain a force level of about 50 frigates and destroyers.

Radioactive Waste, Devonport

Dr. Owen asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to move radioactive waste from Devonport and store it in Chatham dockyard.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No decision has been taken on whether to move radioactive material from Devonport and no firm plans have been drawn up.

Lieutenant Narendra Sethia

Mr. Campbell-Savours asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will place in the Library a copy of the certificate dated 2nd May 1986 he issued prohibiting Lieutenant Narendra Sethia from revealing in court classified information contained in his diary on the grounds of national security.

Mr. Younger: No. The document to which the hon. Member refers is not a public document. Its consideration by a judge in chambers is still pending.

Royal Marines (Inquiry Report)

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to receive the report of the inquiry into the recent public disclosure of a letter between the honorary Captain General and the Commandant General of the Royal Marines concerning a former Royal Marines officer; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Younger: Investigations are still continuing.

DEFENCE

Airborne Early Warning System

251. **Mr. Ashdown** asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if any of the airborne warning and control system offset work being offered by the Boeing company will be carried out under the terms of the Export Administration Act of 1985 of the USA; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he has received any guarantees regarding application of the United States of America Export Administration Act to offset orders in connection with the Boeing airborne warning and control system contract; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his answers*, 18 December 1986 c. *693* and 12 January 1987, c. *93-4*]: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said in the House on 18 December 1986 at column 1350 the order for AWACS was subject to satisfactory completion of contractual negotiations with Boeing. The purchase also involves an element of direct acquisition from the United States Government, and is the subject of a memorandum of understanding between the two Governments. As is normal in projects of this size and complexity, negotiations took place for some weeks after the initial announcement of our intention to purchase.

We have now reached agreement with Boeing on a contract which has been negotiated against the background of existing United Kingdom and US law. The agreements reached with Boeing and the US Government are free from any acceptance by the United Kingdom Government that US laws can be applied to encroach on United Kingdom sovereignty. Equipment exported from the USA forming part of the United Kingdom AEW system or needed for its subsequent through-life support will, of course, be subject to controls on its export from the USA. Control of re-export from the United Kingdom will be enforced exclusively by the United Kingdom Government, and this will also apply to the defence articles and services forming part of the United Kingdom AEW system arising from contracts placed by Boeing or its US subcontractors in the United Kingdom.

The other individual work packages to be generated by the procurement will not be fully identified for a number of years, and will be the subject of separate contracts placed on United Kingdom companies. Her Majesty's Government have long stated their rejection of any claims that US laws and regulations can be applied to encroach upon United Kingdom jurisdiction, and United Kingdom companies will negotiate these contracts in this light.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Protein Crops

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has considered granting incentives to farmers to grow more protein crops in the more fertile land areas and leave the growing of other crops to the less favoured areas.

Mr. Donald Thompson: There are existing support arrangements for the protein sector and for less favoured areas. I am in favour of farmers diversifying out of products in surplus towards those in deficit and am pleased to see that this is already taking place.

Archaeological Sites

Mr. Amess asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he proposes to take to protect archaeological sites affected by increases in woodland plantings as a result of his recently announced proposals for the rural economy and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: It will be a condition of every entry to the proposed farm woodland scheme that planting is approved by the Forestry Commission for the purposes of the existing forestry grant schemes. Under these schemes applicants are expected to clear afforestation likely to affect archaeological sites on their land with the appropriate authorities.

Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance

Mr. Steen asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he hopes to arrange for an inspection of Court Gate Farm, Harbourneford, South Brent, South Devon, for hill livestock compensatory allowance, in view of the letter of 27th February 1986 from Mrs. V. Large of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Exeter, stating she was arranging for a Ministry surveyor to inspect the land in the near future (ref. 10/279/18 HY).

Mr. Donald Thompson: I shall reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Seal Cull

Mr. Hancock asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has any proposals for a seal cull this year.

Mr. Gummer: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Intervention Food Stores

Mr. Clay asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give details of quantities and type of food held within EEC intervention food stores and their location in *(a)* Sunderland, *(b)* Gateshead, *(c)* Newcastle-upon-Tyne, *(d)* North Tyneside and *(e)* South Tyneside.

Mr. Gummer: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Oils and Fats (Tax)

Mr. Craigen asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the proposal by DS VI of the European Commission to introduce a tax on oils and fats; and what is his estimate of the likely increase in consumer costs on food and drink if the proposal is approved.

Mr. Gummer: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 2 March 1987

PRIME MINISTER

United States (Distribution Licensing)

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Prime Minister what specific measures she has taken to ensure that computer purchase records relating to the Cabinet Office are not made subject to audit by United States Government inspectors in the United Kingdom; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: No such measures are necessary. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry made it clear in his reply of 19 February to the hon. Member for Leeds, West at columns *751-52* that he will not normally allow audit visits except where he is satisfied that a company wishes to maintain approved foreign consignee status and does not therefore wish the Government to reject an application for a visit.

The purpose of any visit, if allowed, would be to check the procedures which United Kingdom firms choosing to use the distribution licence system agree to operate. A visit would only be permitted on conditions which safeguarded national security and commercial confidentiality, so that any computer purchase records relating to this Department would, if they raised such issues, be protected.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Prime Minister (1) what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government towards the extent to which the restrictions on Ministers, set out in clause 2 of the Channel Tunnel Bill, regarding the approval by them of funds to the concessionaires of the Channel tunnel project should be observed before the enactment of the Bill; and if she will make a statement;

(2) what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government towards payment of compensation to persons who suffer loss in consequence of any approval by Ministers acting in their official capacity of funds for the concessionaires of the Channel tunnel project before the enactment of clause 2 of the Channel Tunnel Bill; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The Government have no intention of providing funds or financial guarantees to the Channel tunnel concessionaires for the construction of operation of the Channel tunnel either before or after the enactment of clause 2 of the Channel Tunnel Bill. The question of compensation to persons suffering loss as a consequence of such payments or guarantees does not therefore arise.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Prime Minister to what extent the restrictions placed on Ministers under clause 2 of the Channel Tunnel Bill regarding the granting of funds to the concessionaires of the Channel tunnel project affect their activities and decisions when acting as trustees or directors of multinational or international financial institutions to which they are appointed solely because of their Governmental capacities, and to which Government funds are contributed; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Clause 2 of the Channel Tunnel Bill would, if enacted, prohibit any Minister of the Crown from providing funds to the Channel tunnel concessionaires, or guarantees of a financial or commercial nature, for the construction or operation of the Channel tunnel. This prohibition would apply whether or not such Government funds for the tunnel concessionaires were to be provided through such multinational or international financial institutions.

Minister for Sport (Responsibilities)

Mr. Pendry asked the Prime Minister if she will list the areas of responsibility of the Minister for Sport.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend the Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey), Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment has special responsibility for sport and recreation and, in addition, supports his colleagues on planning, regional affairs, housing, inner city and gipsy issues.

Voluntary Bodies (Grants)

Mr. Pawsey asked the Prime Minister if she will list the total amounts paid in grants by Government Departments to voluntary bodies during the financial year 1985-86; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The figures are shown in the table. The total amount provided in 1985-86 represents a cash increase of 19·1 per cent. (in real terms 12·3 per cent.) on the level of provision in 1984-85. In the period between 1979-80 and 1985-86 the level of Government support to voluntary bodies has risen by about 208 per cent. (or in real terms 91 per cent.). These percentage increases take account of revised figures for Northern Ireland Departments in 1979-80 and 1984-85.

Grants and payments by Government Departments in 1985-86

		£	£
Agriculture, Fisheries and Food			117,700
Defence			3,543,815
Education and Science	grants	8,450,508	
	payments	9,638,571	18,089,079
Employment			30,316,000
Energy			865,000
Environment—direct grants			2,566,366
—Urban programme[1]			76,300,000
Foreign and Commonwealth Overseas Development Administration		[2]31,233,174	32,255,657
Health and Social Security			32,045,917
Home Office	grants	18,202,975	
	payments	97,300	18,300,275
Lord Chancellor's Department			691,476
Northern Ireland Departments			
	grants	11,350,894	
	payments	5,450,234	16,801,124
Scottish Office—direct grants			8,247,195
—Urban programme			11,700,000
Trade and Industry			8,063,455
Transport			605,000
Welsh Office—direct grants			5,093,652
—Urban programme			2,375,000
Total			267,976,711

[1] Includes contributions from the Departments of Education and Science, Health and Social Security, and Transport.

[2] Overseas Development Administration's total consists solely of grants to various British charities for work in overseas relief and development.

Employment

In addition payments were made directly to voluntary bodies under various employment programmes:

	£
Manpower Services Commission (estimated payments):	
Community Programme	366,000,000
Voluntary Projects Programme	7,830,000
YTS	132,400,000
	506,230,000

The MSC makes payments to voluntary bodies under other programmes, but these cannot be given in detail except at disproportionate cost.

	£
Department of Economic Development, Northern Ireland:	
Action for Community Employment	14,270,000
Community Volunteering Scheme	635,000
Youth Community Projects	637,636
Community Workshops	13,356,506
Youthelp	551,408
	29,450,610

Housing

Government Departments also made grants and payments to Housing Associations and Societies:

	£
Department of the Environment	944,800,000
Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland	39,648,142
Scottish Office	105,734,494

Non-Departmental Public Bodies

Grants made to voluntary bodies in 1985-86 by Non-Departmental Public Bodies include the following:

	£
Equal Opportunities Commission	61,393
Commission for Racial Equality	3,828,035
Development Commission	2,358,685
Countryside Commission	2,405,000
Countryside Commission for Scotland	286,701
Nature Conservancy Council	[1]1,227,000
contracts with voluntary bodies	325,000
Sports Council	12,415,000
Sports Council for Northern Ireland	431,395
Scottish Sports Council	2,389,766
Sports Council for Wales	1,061,077
Health Education Council grants	810,000
payments	54,000
Health Education Council—Northern Ireland	278,000

[1] £573,000 of this amount was for the purchase of nature reserves.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Photocopying Facilities

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Lord Privy Seal if he will investigate the continued misuse of the photocopier in Upper Committee Corridor North by some research assistants; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Biffen: The authorities of the House will continue to investigate any allegations of improper use of the photocopying machines provided for the use of right hon. and hon. Members, which are drawn to their attention.

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Lord Privy Seal what records there are of the paper used in the photocopier in Upper Committee Corridor North; how the quantity of paper used compares with similar machines located in other parts of the Palace of Westminster; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Biffen: Monthly records are maintained of the numbers of copies made on each of the photocopying machines provided for the use of right hon. and hon. Members. There is no significant difference in the quantities of paper used in the Upper Committee Corridor North photocopying machine and similar models situated elsewhere in the Palace of Westminster.

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Lord Privy Seal if he will indicate how many hon. Members have entered their names in the payment book at the photocopying machine in Upper Committee Corridor North for having more than 12 copies of one sheet; what is the latest date of entry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Biffen: Seven right hon. and hon. Members have entered their names in the payment book provided at the photocopying machine in Upper Committee Corridor North. Two of them have done so more than once. The latest date of entry is 12 February 1987. I welcome the co-operation of right hon. and hon. Members in ensuring compliance with the existing regulations.

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Lord Privy Seal if he will place in the *Official Report* the amount of money paid by hon. Members for having in excess of 12 copies of one sheet at the photocopier in Upper Committee Corridor North; when the last charge was made upon hon. Members; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Biffen: The records to provide this information in the form requested prior to June 1986 are no longer available. Since that date, £9 has been recovered from hon. Members in respect of the photocopying machine on the Upper Committee Corridor North. The last account rendered to an hon. Member was on 3 July 1986. Accounts are not rendered until the sum due exceeds £1·00, which accounts for the delay in charging Members for copies entered in payment books.

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Lord Privy Seal if he has any plans for a photocopying central pool in the Palace of Westminster; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Biffen: There are no plans for the establishment of a central pool of photocopying machines in the Palace of Westminster. Machines are sited at a number of different locations throughout the Palace of Westminster and Parliamentary outbuildings for the convenience of right hon. and hon. Members and their staffs in carrying out their parliamentary duties. The conditions, recommended by the Services Committee, under which they may be used are displayed on notices by each machine. The authorities of the House will continue to investigate specific instances of abuse which are drawn to their attention.

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Lord Privy Seal how many times the photocopying machine in Upper Committee Corridor North has required repairs; what has been the

cost of these repairs including labour and materials in the years 1983 to 1986 and the latest available figures for 1987; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Biffen: The number of times the photocopying machine in the Upper Committee Corridor North has required repairs, excluding routine maintenance visits, for the years 1983 to date is as follows:

	Number
1983	3
1984	7
1985	3
1986	4
[1]1987	2

[1] To date.

There are no separate charges for repairs, including labour and materials, carried out by the suppliers because these are included in the rental costs.

Engagements

Mr. Dalyell asked the Lord Privy Seal if he will make a statement of his official engagements on Friday 30 January.

Mr. Biffen: In addition to my duties in this house, I had a meeting with a fellow Member of Parliament to discuss a proposal relating to the services of the House.

Parliamentary Papers

Mr. Ashton asked the Lord Privy Seal if he will list the companies which have an account at the Vote Office for the daily delivery of *Hansard* and other parliamentary papers.

Mr. Biffen: There are no companies which have an account at the Vote Office for the daily delivery of *Hansard* and other parliamentary papers. The Vote Office exists exclusively to supply parliamentary papers free of charge to Members and Officers of the House.

The Sale Office of the House of Commons, which is under the separate control of the Deliverer of the Vote, supplies, on payment, parliamentary papers for collection by clients. These clients include registered parliamentary agents and other suitably approved organisations requiring specialist documentation.

The moneys received from this service are shown in the Supply Estimates under class XIX vote 6AZ, as an appropriation in aid and amount to some £130,000 in the financial year 1986-87.

The following is the current list of approved clients:

Parliamentary Agents
Dyson Bell and Co.
Sharpe Pritchard and Co.
Sharwood and Co.
Rees and Freres Lewin Gregory and Co.
Martin and Co.

Public Organisations
Association of Metropolitan Authorities
Association of District Councils
Water Authority Association
British Gas
Electricity Council
British Rail
Post Office HQ
British Telecom
British Nuclear Fuels
Consumer Association
Confederation of British Industry
Church Commissioners

Parliamentary Consultancies
Charles Banken Watney Powell
CSM Parliamentary Consultants
Randalls Parliamentary Service
Dewe Rogerson Ltd
GJW Government Relations
Sallingbury Casey Ltd.
Profile Political Relations
Westminster Strategy
Ian Greer Associates
Roland Freeman Ltd.

HOME DEPARTMENT

AIDS

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on the circumstances in which an airline steward, arriving from the United States of America and suspected of suffering from AIDS, was held overnight by immigration officials at Gatwick airport and put on a return flight the next morning; what was the source of information regarding his condition; and if the steward was asked about the purpose of his proposed visit to the United Kingdom;

(2) if he will make a statement on his Department's guidelines relating to the procedure for handling the entry or attempted entry into the United Kingdom of persons known to be, or suspected of, carrying the AIDS virus or suffering from AIDS; when the guidelines were introduced; and if he will publish them.

Mr. Waddington: All overseas nationals seeking to enter the United Kingdom must qualify under the immigration rules (HC 169 as amended). These provide, inter alia, that where a port medical inspector advises that for medical reasons it is undesirable to admit a passenger, the immigration officer should refuse leave to enter unless he considers admission warranted by strong compassionate reasons. It was on this basis that the case reported recently in the press was handled.

Firearms Offences

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what firearms offences were recorded on Merseyside in 1986.

Mr. Mellor: The total number of notifiable offences recorded by the police in which firearms were reported to have been used is published annually, by police force area, in "Criminal Statistics England and Wales, Supplementary Tables", volume 3 (table S.3.1(A) of the edition for 1985). A breakdown of the offences recorded in Merseyside in 1985 is given in the table. Information for 1986 is not yet available.

Notifiable offences recorded by the Merseyside Police in 1985 in which firearms were reported to have been used, by offence group

	Number
Homicide	—
Attempted murder etc.[1]	12
Other violence against the person[2]	131
Robbery	89
Burglary	10
Criminal damage[3]	238
All offences	480

[1] Includes other acts (including wounding) endangering life.
[2] Includes wounding which was not classified as an act 'endangering life'.
[3] Includes only offences of criminal damage where the damage was estimated at over £20.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Ray Powell asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department, in respect of each category of crime, what is the percentage difference between the total number of crimes committed in the first nine months of 1986 and the totals in the nine months ended 31 March 1979.

Mr. Mellor: The numbers of notifiable offences recorded by the police are published regularly for each category of crime. Quarterly figures are published in the Home Office statistical bulletin "Notifiable Offences Recorded by the Police", copies of which are in the Library. The most recent figures, for the third quarter of 1986 are contained in bulletin 39/86. More detailed annual figures are published in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales", (1985 figures are included in Comnd. 10).

Child Destruction

Mr. Nicholls asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions have been brought during the last five years on charges of child destruction under the Infant Life (Preservation) Act; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: The information available to me, which may be incomplete, shows no prosecutions brought for child destruction under section 1 of the Infant Life (Preservation) Act 1929 in the years 1981 to 1985. Information for 1986 is not yet available.

Off-licences

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has about the current number of off-licence outlets for sales of alcohol; if he plans to take any steps to seek to restrict this number; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: The total number of off-licensed premises at 30 June 1986 was 43,891 (published at table 1 of "Liquor Licensing Statistics, England and Wales, July 1985-June 1986": Home Office statistical bulletin, 37/86). We have no plans to seek to restrict the number of premises granted an off-licence. It is open to the licensing justices, when considering new applications, to take into account the number of licensed outlets already in the area.

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to introduce legislation to bring the law on off-licences in line with that for the grant of on-licences; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: We have at present no plans to do so.

US (Distribution Licensing)

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what specific measures he has taken to ensure that computer purchase records relating to his Department are not made subject to audit by United States Government inspectors in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: No such measures are necessary. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry made clear in his reply of 19 February to the hon. Member for Leeds, West at column *751-752* that he will not normally allow audit visits except where he is satisfied that a company wishes to maintain approved foreign consignee status and does not therefore wish the Government to reject an application for a visit. The purpose of any visit, if allowed, would be to check the procedures which United Kingdom firms choosing to use the distribution licence system agree to operate. A visit would be permitted only on conditions which safeguarded national security and commercial confidentiality, so that any computer purchase records relating to this Department would, if they raised such issues, be protected.

Horserace Totalisator Board

Mr. Chapman asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if his approval was sought by the Horserace Totalisator Board to participate in satellite information services; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hurd: The Horserace Totalisator Board informed us of its participation in satellite information services. My right hon. Friend's approval was not required.

Police (Numbers)

Mr. Steen asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of the present establishment in the Metropolitan police force is made up of traffic police, criminal investigation department, police on the beat and police dealing with administrative duties; and if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Devon and Cornwall as to that force's comparable percentage.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I shall reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Corbett asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what response he has given to the request from the west midlands police authority for 1,000 extra officers over the next three years and an extra £4 million.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The maximum precept for the authority for 1987-88 will be derived from a formula provided in the Local Government Finance Bill. I met a delegation from the authority on 16 February. The delegation was told that in the Government's view there was no strong case for the maximum precept to be increased. It asked that consideration should be given to an increase of 100 in its authorised police establishment and this request will be considered.

Police Act 1964

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department in how many cases in each of the past seven years damages have been paid after judgment under section 48(2)(*a*) of the Police Act 1964; what has been the average settlement figure for each year; and what was the average damages awarded.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I shall reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many settlements of civil actions against the Metropolitan police have been approved by the

Secretary of State for the Home Department in each of the last seven years under section 48(2)(*b*) of the Police Act 1964.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I shall reply as soon as possible.

Neighbourhood Watch

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the research into the effectiveness of neighbourhood watch undertaken by the Police Foundation will be released as a public document; if he proposes to summarise the findings of the research; and if the contents will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Police Foundation is an independent body. I understand that this research contract is due for completion in May 1988 and that the Police Foundation intends to lodge in the Library a copy of any final publication arising from this work.

Police Stations (Derbyshire)

Mrs. Beckett asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will reconsider the decision to reject the application by Derbyshire county council for a building programme including special interview rooms at police stations for rape victims and abused children; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Derbyshire county council submitted proposals for minor works worth a total of £404,000, of which work to the value of £215,000 was approved. None of the proposals referred specifically to special interview rooms at police stations for rape victims and abused children. If such a proposal were submitted for approval next year, it would be considered in the light of circular 69/86.

Police (Armed Response)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if, pursuant to his answer of 11 February, *Official Report*, column *218*, he will *(a)* name the police forces operating a system of armed response cars and *(b)* give the number of officers deployed in each scheme of armed response; when the patrols were authorised by the relevant police authority; what equipment the response units use; on how many occasions they have been used; what has been the outcome of their involvement; and if any deaths or injuries have occurred associated with their actions.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The police forces operating a system of armed response cars are Nottinghamshire constabulary, West Yorkshire police and Hampshire constabulary. The vehicles concerned are patrol cars each manned by two qualified firearms officers. The number of vehicles deployed at any one time is normally three in Nottinghamshire and two in West Yorkshire and Hampshire. The Nottinghamshire and West Yorkshire vehicles carry two Smith and Wesson model 10 revolvers and one Remington shotgun. The Hampshire vehicles carry two Smith and Wesson revolvers. All weapons are secured in locked boxes which may only be opened on the specific authority of a senior officer. A decision by a chief officer of police to deploy his resources in this way is not one which requires prior authorisation by his police authority but I understand that the police authorities concerned have been informed that the system is in operation. In West Yorkshire the number of operations in which the firearms in these vehicles have been drawn from the box is not recorded separately from other armed operations; in 1986 there were two such occasions in Nottinghamshire and twelve in Hampshire. Shots were fired by police officers in one of these instances in Nottinghamshire and none in Hampshire. There were no deaths or injuries incurred in the course of these operations.

My earlier reply omitted to mention that the Metropolitan police maintain an armed mobile patrol in connection with their responsibilities for protecting the diplomatic community.

Infant Life Preservation Act

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has any plans to seek to amend the Infant Life Preservation Act 1929.

Mr. Mellor: The Government indicated their support for the Infant Life (Preservation) Bill which was introduced in another place this Session and has been committed to a Select Committee there. We have no plans for Government legislation to amend the 1929 Act.

Drunks (Cautioning)

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy towards the use of cautions to drunks to keep them out of court; and if he will give the most recent statistics he has on the effectiveness of the cautioning system.

Mr. Mellor: Our policy is to keep drunkenness offenders out of court whereever possible. Cautioning is encouraged; 26,000 drunkenness offenders were cautioned in 1985, compared with 2,000 in 1983. As my hon. Friend knows, the number found guilty of drunkenness offences has fallen from 107,600 in 1983 to 56,400 in 1985.

Mr. Aurang Zeb

Mr. Madden asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish in the *Official Report* the evidence of his principal officer to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration in the course of his investigation into the circumstances in which Mr. Aurang Zeb was removed from the United Kingdom to Pakistan on 3 April 1986.

Mr. Waddington: I will reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Madden asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the cost of the air fare from the United Kingdom to Pakistan when Mr. Aurang Zeb was removed on 3 April 1986; who paid the cost of his air fare from London to Pakistan; and what agreement was reached between his Department and British Airways on meeting the costs of Mr. Zeb's flight from London to Pakistan.

Mr. Waddington: Mr. Aurang Zeb was removed to Pakistan from the United Kingdom on 4 April 1986. The cost of his air fare for that journey was £272. Mr. Awal Khan, who is Mr. Aurang Zeb's uncle, had paid for his return ticket in advance, and British Airways was directed to remove Mr. Aurang Zeb in accordance with normal practice.

Mr. Madden asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received concerning the removal of Mr. Aurang Zeb, a citizen of Pakistan, on 3 April 1986.

Mr. Waddington: Mr. Aurang Zeb arrived at Heathrow terminal 3 from Pakistan on 3 April 1986. He was refused leave to enter and removed to Pakistan on 4 April 1986. I have received representations twice from the hon. Member for Bradford West who considered that Mr. Aurang Zeb was removed with undue haste and as a consequence, the hon. Member was unable to intervene. He has requested that Mr. Aurang Zeb be brought back to this country for a holiday at public expense. I have also received a letter from my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Sir A. Buck) in support of that request.

Mr. Madden asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will reconsider his refusal to allow Mr. Aurang Zeb, a citizen of Pakistan, who was removed from the United Kingdom on 3 April 1986, to fly from Pakistan to the United Kingdom and from the United Kingdom to Pakistan at public expense; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: I have reconsidered my decision and notified the hon. Member that there is no justification to allow Mr. Aurang Zeb to come to the United Kingdom for a holiday at public expense.

Immigration (Sri Lankans)

Mr. Marlow asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the number of Sri Lankans who have *(a)* entered the United Kingdom and *(b)* left the United Kingdom for each of the last 36 months; and what has been the net migration in each month.

Mr. Waddington: The available statistics, of the number of citizens of Sri Lanka admitted to the United Kingdom, are given in the table. Corresponding data on the numbers embarking are not available.

Sri Lankan citizens admitted[1] to the United Kingdom, 1984 to 1986
Number

	1984	*1985*	*[2]1986*
January	2,080	1,960	2,010
February	1,340	1,450	1,110
March	1,550	1,690	1,500
April	2,250	2,480	1,930
May	2,210	2,540	2,370
June	2,770	2,400	2,400
July	3,950	3,630	3,210
August	4,460	4,060	3,620
September	3,530	3,210	3,720
October	2,130	2,230	2,440
November	1,490	1,490	1,410
December	2,260	1,800	1,690

[1] Excluding those granted temporary admission while subject to further consideration or investigation.
[2] Provisional.

Detained Youths

Mr. Bermingham asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many youths aged *(a)* under 14 *(b)* 14 *(c)* 15 *(d)* 16, respectively, who are currently detained under section 53(2) of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 are being held in penal establishments.

Mr. Mellor [*pursuant to his reply*, 17 February 1987, c. *561*]: The information is given in the table.

Persons aged under 17 detained under section 53(2) of the Children and Persons Act 1933 on 31 December 1986 in Prison Department establishments in England and Wales: by age

Age	*Number of persons*[1]
Under 14	—
14	2
15	[2]9
16	43

[1] Based on central records which are approximate: detailed checking of individual cases would involve disproportionate cost.
[2] Including one female.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

County Palatine

23. **Mr. Pike** asked the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he next proposes to visit the County Palatine.

Mr. Tebbit: On 10 March.

Engagements

Mr. Dalyell asked the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will state his official engagements on Friday 30 January.

Mr. Tebbit: None.

WALES

Labour Statistics

8. **Mr. Rogers** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what are the latest unadjusted figures for unemployment in *(a)* Rhondda, *(b)* Mid-Glamorgan and *(c)* Wales; and if he will give the equivalent figures for 1979 on the most nearly comparable basis.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: On 8 January 1987, the total number of unemployed claimants in Rhondda district, Mid Glamorgan and Wales were 5,190, 33,772 and 176,866 respectively. Unadjusted figures for 1979 are not available on a comparable basis.

17. **Mr. Barry Jones** asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many people were unemployed in May 1979 and to the latest date possible in 1987; and by how much in percentage terms and in figures the unemployed rate has increased for Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: In January 1987, the seasonally adjusted figure for unemployment in Wales was 165,300. The corresponding figure for May 1979 was 73,100. Between the two dates, the unemployment rate rose from 5·9 per cent., to 13·4 per cent. equivalent to 127 per cent.

House Building

12. **Mr. Wigley** asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many houses were built in Wales in 1986 *(a)* by local authorities, *(b)* by housing associations and *(c)* by the private sector; and what were the corresponding figures for 1979.

Mr. Mark Robinson: In 1986, 8,429 dwellings were completed in Wales. Of these, local authorities (including

new towns) accounted for 870, housing associations for 534 and the private sector 7,025. The figures for 1979 were 11,265 completions: 3,326 by local authorities (and new towns), 1,016 by housing associations and 6,914 by the private sector.

New Motorway

15. **Dr. Marek** asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many miles of motorway he expects to open in Wales in 1987.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: None, but 22 miles of new or improved motorway and 93 miles of all purpose trunk road have been provided since 1979.

Gross Domestic Product (Public Expenditure)

16. **Mr. Fallon** asked the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will estimate the proportion of Wales' gross domestic product that is accounted for by public expenditure.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: In 1985-86, identifiable public expenditure in Wales, as conventionally defined, totalled £5,727 million. This represented about 40 per cent. of an estimated provisional figure for Wales GDP (at market prices) in the calendar year 1985.

Factory Building

18. **Mr. Terlezki** asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many factories have been built in Wales during the periods 1975 to 1980 and 1980 to 1987.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: From April 1975 to 31 December 1979, Government agencies completed a total of 434 factory units in Wales. From 1 January 1980 to the end of the current financial year, it is estimated that these agencies will have completed a further 1,800 units. My Department does not hold information on the number of units completed by local authorities and the private sector.

Housing Expenditure

19. **Mr. Harvey** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the level of housing expenditure in Wales in real terms in the years 1985-86 and 1986-87.

Mr. Mark Robinson: The provisional outturn for Gross capital expenditure on housing in Wales in 1985-86 is £185·9 million and the estimated outturn for the current year, at 1985-86 prices as measured by the GDP deflator at market prices, is £213·3 million.

Restart

20. **Mr. Grist** asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many persons have been interviewed for the restart programme; and with what result.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Between July 1986 and February 1987, 57,134 unemployed people were interviewed under the restart programme. Some 92 per cent. of these were offered a job, training, a place on an MSC scheme or other specialist help and 79 per cent. agree to take up this offer. For the remaining 8 per cent., restart, was either no longer required or no suitable offer was available at the time.

WDA (Factories)

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many factories which were built by the Welsh Development Agency over the past seven years are being let, up until the latest available date.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Since April 1979, the Welsh Development Agency has built 1,459 factory units, including extensions. Information on the letting record of these units as a group is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. Eighty five per cent. of the Welsh Development Agency's total factory floor space was let at 31 January 1987; a further 5½ per cent. was earmarked for prospective tenants.

Food (Self-sufficiency)

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the percentage of self-sufficiency for Wales in the production of *(a)* butter, *(b)* milk, *(c)* beef and *(d)* sheepmeat.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: It is estimated that the production of butter in Wales in 1986 was 3·1 times greater than consumption, and production of milk was 3·1 times greater than consumption. Production of beef in Wales in 1986 is estimated to be 3·2 times greater than consumption and production of sheepmeat 2·9 times greater.

Hospital Beds

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of Wednesday 25 February, how many hospital beds are available in National Health Service hospitals in Wales at the latest available date; how many were available as an average for 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mark Robinson: During 1979, the average daily number of available beds was 23,456. The corresponding figure for the year ending March 1986 (the latest available) was 21,999.

Margam Colliery

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with officials of British Coal concerning the proposed opening of Margam colliery.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: I have discussed with British Coal on several occasions a range of issues affecting the south Wales coalfield including the prospect of a new mine at Margam.

EMPLOYMENT

Community Programme

Mr. Leighton asked the Paymaster General what are the numbers to be on the community programme in Kent in future; and what is to be the future of the community programme project at the Sheerness centre for the unemployed.

Mr. Lee: For 1987-88, it is proposed that over the year the average number of filled places on the community programme in Kent should be 2,800. This is subject to discussion with the local area manpower board, in the context of the programme's provisions for next year.

I understand that the community programme project at the Sheerness centre for the unemployed finishes on 11 June 1987. If a request for renewal funding is made at that time, it will be considered in the normal way along with other applications.

Dr. Hampson asked the Paymaster General in which towns in the Yorkshire Humberside region Restart counselling is available for those out of work for six months.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: At present, restart interviews are offered to people reaching six months unemployment in nine pilot areas, one of which is Huddersfield. From April onwards, interviews for such people will be extended throughout the country.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Sheerman asked the Paymaster General if he will publish in the *Official Report* the number of full-time and part-time employees in the labour force in each employment region in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1981, *(c)* 1983, *(d)* 1984 and *(e)* 1985 aged 16 to 19 years, 20 to 24 years, and 25 years and over, showing separately males and females by the standard Department of Employment categories of ethnic origin.

Mr. Lee: The regular quarterly employees in employment series does not identify age or ethnic origin. The labour force survey provides information on a different basis but allows the above analyses. The available information for the years requested is given in the table below. Because of considerations of sample size, it is not possible to provide the information requested by region.

Labour force survey data on employees[1] in Great Britain

Thousands

Year/Ethnic origin	*Aged 16-19*				*Aged 20-24*				*Aged 25+*			
	Male		*Female*		*Male*		*Female*		*Male*		*Female*	
	Full-time[2]	*Part-time[2]*	*Full-time[2]*	*Part-time[2]*	*Full-time[2]*	*Part-time[2]*	*Full-time[2]*	*Part-time[2]*	*Full-time[2]*	*Part-time[2]*	*Full-time[2]*	*Part-time[2]*
1979												
White	966	39	811	72	1,513	10	1,013	112	9,927	221	3,289	3,445
Non-White	32	*	23	*	58	*	38	*	352	*	137	53
of which:												
West Indian/Guyanese	12	*	10	*	14	*	13	*	81	*	48	20
Indian	*	*	*	—	17	—	13	*	118	*	48	13
Pakistani/Bangladeshi	*	—	*	*	12	*	*	—	52	*	*	*
Other	*	*	*	*	15	*	11	*	101	*	38	19
All ethnic origins[3]	1,002	41	838	75	1,578	12	1,056	117	10,327	224	3,441	3,514
1981												
White	816	117	703	176	1,357	16	1,014	115	9,037	261	3,163	3,413
Non-White	22	*	22	*	52	*	41	*	321	*	146	50
of which:												
West Indian/Guyanese	*	*	*	*	12	*	15	*	86	*	56	23
Indian	*	*	*	*	21	—	13	*	114	*	51	13
Pakistani/Bangladeshi	*	—	*	—	*	—	*	—	42	—	*	*
Other	*	*	*	*	13	*	11	*	78	24	33	14
All ethnic origins[3]	840	122	727	181	1,417	18	1,058	121	9,381	268	3,323	3,473
1983												
White	714	108	591	189	1,338	24	1,049	119	8,594	215	3,049	3,181
Non-White	21	*	14	*	51	*	49	*	326	*	150	54
of which:												
West Indian/Guyanese	10	*	*	*	12	*	18	*	73	*	55	21
Indian	*	*	*	*	20	*	16	*	126	*	50	14
Pakistani/Bangladeshi	*	—	—	*	*	—	*	*	45	—	*	*
Other	*	*	*	*	12	*	14	*	82	*	42	18
All ethnic origins[3]	742	114	616	200	1,416	26	1,112	128	9,125	225	3,242	3,271
1984												
White	740	157	619	224	1,367	39	1,048	159	8,578	240	3,073	3,452
Non-White	15	*	19	*	52	*	38	*	313	*	164	63
of which:												
West Indian/Guyanese	*	*	*	*	15	*	15	*	68	*	66	21
Indian	*	*	*	*	18	*	13	*	122	*	58	20
Pakistani/Bangladeshi	*	*	*	*	*	—	*	—	43	*	*	*
Other	*	—	*	*	11	*	*	*	80	*	37	18
All ethnic origins[3]	768	163	652	236	1,445	42	1,104	168	8,998	250	3,279	3,561
1985												
White	630	152	554	239	1,441	38	1,093	173	8,578	222	3,098	3,503
Non-White	15	*	14	*	51	*	33	*	314	*	154	68
of which:												
West Indian/Guyanese	*	*	*	*	17	*	14	*	76	*	61	25
Indian	*	*	*	*	13	*	11	*	96	*	48	18
Pakistani/Bangladeshi	*	*	*	*	*	—	*	—	55	*	*	*
Other	*	*	*	*	14	*	*	*	87	*	43	24
All ethnic origins[3]	654	159	576	252	1,504	44	1,141	180	8,975	234	3,299	3,607

[1] Estimates relate to the Spring of each year. Figures for 1985 exclude those on Government schemes, whereas earlier years include those on schemes if reported as in employment.
[2] An employee is shown as full-time or part-time according to whether he considers his job to be a full or part-time job.
[3] Includes those who did not state their ethnic origin.
* Less than ten thousand.

Mr. Corrie asked the Paymaster General if he will detail, ward by ward, the unemployment figures in Cunninghame district for 1979 and 1983; and what are the latest figures.

Mr. Lee: Following is the available information, which is also in the Library. The table shows the numbers of unemployed claimants in the electoral wards of Cunninghame local authority district for June 1983 and January 1987. The comparison is affected by seasonal factors and changes in the method of collection and compilation of the data. Statistics of unemployment for electoral wards are derived from the ward-based system and are available only from June 1983.

Electoral Ward	*9 June 1983*	*8 January 1987*
Ardrossan North	531	581
Ardrossan South	586	616
Arran	175	260
Beith	312	368
Bourtreehill	407	418
Broomlands	413	442
Dalry	298	321
Dreghorn	283	260
Fairlie, Skelmorlie and Cumbrae	141	250
Garnock East	259	281
Girdle Toll	239	260
Irvine North	442	506
Irvine Townhead	225	222
Irvine Vineburgh	649	596
Irvine West	406	394
Irvine Woodlands	461	535
Irvine Landward	231	242
Kilbirnie North	385	399
Kilbirnie South	405	467
Kilwinning East	503	581
Kilwinning South	533	615
Kilwinning West	289	304
Largs North	187	265
Largs South	121	195
Saltcoats East	547	520
Saltcoats North	507	501
South Beach	358	507
Stevenston North	622	574
Stevenston South	617	661
West Kilbride	260	330

Mr. Frank Cook asked the Paymaster General what is the present number of quarterly signers signing on at unemployment benefit offices in Cleveland at *(a)* Stockton: Bayheath house, Prince Regent street, *(b)* Stockton: Daryl house, Park terrace, *(c)* Billingham: Kingsway house, West precinct, *(d)* Guisborough: Morgan drive, *(e)* Guisborough: Loftus market place, *(f)* Hartlepool: Raby road, *(g)* Middlesbrough: 36 Grange road and *(h)* Middlesbrough: Crown house, Wilson street.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to his reply*, 27 February 1987]: The number of quarterly attenders signing at unemployment benefit offices in Cleveland at the offices listed is as follows:

		Number
(a)	STOCKTON 1 Bayheath House Prince Regent Street	572
(b)	STOCKTON 2 Daryl House Park Terrace	467
(c)	BILLINGHAM Kingsway House West Precinct	378
(d)	GUISBOROUGH 8 Chaloner Street (formerly at Morgan Drive)	192
(e)	LOFTUS 23 High Street	90
(f)	HARTLEPOOL 1 Avenue Road (same building as Hartlepool 2)	447
(g)	HARTLEPOOL 2 Raby Road	487
(h)	MIDDLESBROUGH 1 36 Grange Road	696
(i)	MIDDLESBROUGH 2 Crown House 5 Linthorpe Road	450
(j)	MIDDLESBROUGH 3 Crown House 5 Linthorpe Road	433
	TOTAL	4,212

Industrial Disputes

Mr. Prescott asked the Paymaster General how many working days were lost through industrial disputes per 1,000 employees in employment in each of the years 1974 to 1986; and what was the average figure for working days lost due to industrial disputes per 1,000 employees in employment *(a)* between February 1974 and April 1979, and *(b)* between May 1979 and the latest date for which figures are available.

Mr. Lee: The number of working days lost through stoppages of work due to industrial disputes per thousand employees in employment, in each of the years 1974 to 1986, is shown in the table below. For the periods February 1974 to April 1979 and May 1979 to December 1986, the annualised averages of working days lost per thousand employees in employment were 427 and 494 respectively.

United Kingdom

Year	*Working days lost per thousand employees*[1]
1974	647
1975	265
1976	146
1977	449
1978	413

Year	Working days lost per thousand employees[1]
1979	1,274
1980	521
1981	195
1982	249
1983	179
1984	1,281
1985	299
[2]1986	88

[1] Based on the latest estimates of employees in employment at June (seasonally adjusted).
[2]The figure for 1986 is provisional.

Literacy and Numeracy

Mr. Ashdown asked the Paymaster General, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Yeovil on 24 February concerning expenditure by the Manpower Services Commission on basic literacy and numeracy skills training, if he will publish a table showing a breakdown of such expenditure in 1986-87 by programme or type of provision, and an estimate of the number of persons receiving such training from each programme or type of provision in the year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: The estimated figures for 1986-87 are as follows:

	Expenditure £ million	Number of trainees
Wider opportunities training programme	4·9	3,300
Voluntary projects programme	0·5	5,000

In addition, the community programme and YTS offer literacy and numeracy skills training. However no information is available on the level of expenditure or numbers involved in such training.

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish a table showing the number of persons in each recent year receiving training in basic skills of literacy and numeracy from provision made by local education authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Walden: Information in the form requested is not available centrally. The adult literacy and basic skills unit collects data about the number of people receiving tuition during a given week in each year. The information is as follows:

Tuition from LEAs during a week in	Number of adults
February 1979	57,640
February 1980	56,928
November 1980	63,359
November 1981	73,241
November 1982	[1]76,830
November 1983	82,360
November 1984	84,596
November 1985	[2]104,016

[1] Estimate based on projections from previous years.
[2] This figure includes numbers of adults receiving tuition in English as a second language (collected separately for the first time in 1985).

These figures exclude adults receiving help with basic skills in penal establishments, through Manpower Services Commission programmes, or via voluntary organisations. Information about numeracy provision has been specifically requested only since 1981.

Restart

Dr. Godman asked the Paymaster General what is the latest estimate of the cost of the restart scheme in *(a)* Great Britain, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Strathclyde region and *(d)* Greenock and Port Glasgow.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to his reply*, 26 February 1987, c. *339*]: We estimate that in 1986-87 the cost of the restart programme in Great Britain will be around £53 million. The estimated cost for Scotland is around £5·5 million. It is not possible to make a reliable estimate of the cost of the restart programme in either the Strathclyde region or Greenock and Port Glasgow.

Community Programme

Dr. Godman asked the Paymaster General how much money is budgeted in the current financial year and for 1988-89 for Manpower Services Commission community programme schemes in *(a)* Great Britain, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Strathclyde region, *(d)* the Renfrewshire, Dumbarton and Argyll area manpower board.

Mr. Lee [*pursuant to his reply*, 24 February 1987, c. *193*]: The Government are providing resources for the community programme amounting to £1,038 million in 1986-87, £1,120 million in 1987-88 and £1,145 million in 1988-89.

The Manpower Services Commission does not prepare separate cash budgets for regions and areas. However, based on the proposed number of about 245,000 filled places nationally and Scotland's proposed allocation of about 31,000 places, it is estimated that expenditure attributable to Scotland will be about £128 million in 1986-87, and £141 million in 1987-88. Expenditure attributable to the Strathclyde region will be about £65 million in 1986-87 and within this figure, the amount for Renfrew, Dumbarton and Argyll will be about £21 million. Precise area figures for 1987-88 are not yet available because the planning procedure for determining the distribution of places within Scotland is still in progress.

Figures below national level for 1988-89 are not available at this early stage.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Schools (Annual Meetings)

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will consider producing a circular to be sent to each local education authority providing guidelines for the conduct of the annual meeting of each school.

Mr. Dunn: Section 31(4)*(a)* of the Education (No. 2) Act 1986 provides for the proceedings at the annual parent's meeting to be under the control of the governing body. The Department's circular 8/86, a copy of which is in the Library, contains some guidance of the conduct of these meetings; copies were distributed to local education authorities and to governing bodies.

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received from teachers or their unions about the conduct of school annual meetings.

Mr. Dunn: At a meeting with my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Mrs. Rumbold), representatives of the Secondary Heads Association expressed some concern about the conduct of annual parents' meetings in the event of prolonged and persistent criticism of a named individual teacher. They were referred to the guidance in circular 8/86, and agreed to consider the question later, in the light of experience of the first round of meetings.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Tax Decisions

Mr. Allen McKay asked the Attorney-General if he will take steps to ensure that all decisions of the special commissioners in tax cases are published as soon as they are made; and if he will make a statement.

The Solicitor-General: In December, the Board of Inland Revenue published a consultative document canvassing the issues, and inviting further views, on recommendations made in 1983 by the Keith committee on enforcement powers of the Revenue departments, including its recommendations that selected decisions of the special commissioners of income tax should be reported in anonymised form. The matter will be considered further in the light of comments received on the consultative document.

United States (Distribution Licensing)

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Attorney-General what specific measures he has taken to ensure that legal protection is afforded to Her Majesty's Government's computer purchase records subject to audit by United States Government inspectors in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

The Solicitor-General: No such measures have been taken. There is no question of Her Majesty's Government's records being subject to inspection by United States officials.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

United States (Distribution Licensing)

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what specific steps he has taken to ensure that computer purchase records relating to his Department are not made subject to audit by United States Government inspectors in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: No such measures are necessary. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry made clear in his reply of 19 February to the hon. Member that he will not normally allow audit visits except where he is satisfied that a company wishes to maintain approved foreign consignee status and does not therefore wish the Government to reject an application for a visit. The purpose of any visit, if allowed, would be to check the procedures which United Kingdom firms choosing to use the distribution licence system agree to operate. A visit would only be permitted on conditions which safeguarded national security and commercial confidentiality, so that any computer purchase records relating to this Department would, if they raised such issues, be protected.

Religious Persecution

Mr. Corbett asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the *(a)* Czechoslovak and *(b)* Soviet authorities about the persecution of people solely on the basis of their religious beliefs.

Mrs. Chalker: My hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Renton) stressed our interest in human rights in discussions with the Czechoslovak authorities during his visit to Prague last month. In Moscow in January, he made clear to the Soviet authorities our concern about the persecution of religious believers. He referred particularly to the case of Mr. Alexander Ogorodnikov, who has now been released.

South Africa

Mr. Canavan asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will list the names, political affiliations and backgrounds of people from South Africa who have visited the United Kingdom over the past two years on the invitation of or sponsoring or other kinds of arrangement with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office or the COI.

Mr. Eggar: The only visitors to the United Kingdom from South Africa in the past two years for whom the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has had responsibility have been those who have come under the sponsored visitors scheme. The purpose of the scheme is to enable influential personalities from overseas to obtain first hand impressions of British policies and achievements and to discuss contemporary issues with a range of informed British opinion. The scheme is administered by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and is executed by the Central Office of Information, which is responsible for the setting up of the visitors' programmes.

The list of visitors from South Africa under the scheme in the past two years numbers 44. I will write to the hon. Member with the list of names.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Hanley asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affair, what is the latest estimate of revenue from fishing licences in the Falkland Islands.

Mr. Eggar: The Falkland Islands Government estimate that, by 1 March, they will have received approximately £10 million from fishing licences. Costs of implementation of the Falkland Islands interim conservation and management zone are estimated at £4 million.

SCOTLAND

Scottish Tourist Board

Mr. Henderson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the total public funds made available

to the Scottish Tourist Board in cash and at current prices for each year since 1976; and what is planned for the year 1987-88.

Mr. Lang: The information is given in the table.

Expenditure on Scottish Tourist Board

	Cash £ million	*At 1986-87 Prices £ million*
1976-77	2·323	5·687
1977-78	2·802	6·027
1978-79	3·452	6·700
1979-80	4·215	7·010
1980-81	5·180	7·259
1981-82	6·117	7·783
1982-83	7·135	8·484
1983-84	8·104	9·228
1984-85	10·019	10·945
1985-86	8·673	8·933
[1]1986-87	9·079	9·079
[1]1987-88	9·057	8·731

[1]Budget provision.

Fast Reactors (Research and Development)

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what contribution was made by the South of Scotland Electricity Board to the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority's fast reactor research and development programme in each of the financial years 1985-86 and 1986-87; what is the expected South of Scotland electricity Board budget for this programme in 1987-88, 1988-89 and 1989-90; through whom this money is paid; and if the South of Scotland Electricity Board makes any contribution to fast reactor development programmes apart from that of the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority.

Mr. Lang: I am advised by the South of Scotland Electricity Board that its contribution, via the Central Electricity Generating Board, to design and development work by the National Nuclear corporation on commerical scale fast reactors was £555,000 in 1985-86 and the expected outturn in 1986-87 is £587,000. The board expects to contribute £650,000 in the next financial year and a similar amount in subsequent years although the exact amounts are under discussion. In addition, the board has provided to UKAEA at Dounreay engineering support valued at £54,000 in 1985-86 and £26,000 in 1986-87. The board does not contribute to any other fast reactor work.

Nurses

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report*, for the latest five years for which figures are available, the numbers of nurses, by specialty, employed by each health board.

Mr. John MacKay: For individual health boards the information by specialty is only available as at 30 September 1985 and 31 March 1986. This is contained in the September 1985 and March 1986 editions of Scottish Health Service Manpower, published by the information services division of the Scottish Health Service, Common Services Agency, copies of which are available in the Library. Previously, the information was not held centrally in this form and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The table below shows the number of nurses (in whole-time equivalents) in each specialty on an all-Scotland basis for the years 1982 to 1986.

Nursing Staff in Scotland by broad specialty group: whole time equivalents at 30 September

	1982 WTE	*1983 WTE*	*1984 WTE*	*1985 WTE*	*1986 WTE*
All Nursing Staff	61,979·2	62,395·5	62,027·6	62,562·1	62,873·1
Hospital Staff	56,353·1	56,675·5	56,336·2	56,740·8	56,899·6
General	37,754·2	37,887·7	37,593·4	37,986·9	37,772·3
Mental Illness	10,149·2	10,133·8	10,196·1	10,370·1	10,723·5
Mental Handicap	3,653·6	3,736·9	3,686·9	3,711·2	3,756·1
Maternity	4,796·1	4,917·1	4,859·8	4,672·8	4,647·7
Non-hospital staff	5,626·1	5,720·0	5,691·4	5,821·3	5,973·5
Community	5,386·3	5,475·6	5,465·1	5,625·9	5,769·3
Other	239·8	244·4	226·3	195·4	204·2

The figures for 1986 are provisional.

Rosyth Naval Dockyard

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will specify the planning and environmental precautions to which he will require the Ministry of Defence to adhere in connection with air and water borne discharges from the proposed nuclear refitting facility at the Rosyth naval dockyard.

Mr. Ancram: Proposals by the Ministry of Defence for a nuclear submarine refitting facility at Her Majesty's naval base, Rosyth are presently before my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for determination, and consultations with interested parties continue. I cannot, therefore, anticipate what conclusions my right hon. and learned Friend will reach. Should he decide that the proposals should proceed, he will naturally take account of all relevant planning and environmental considerations in framing the terms of his decision.

Pupil-Teacher Ratios

Mr. Tom Clarke asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the latest pupil-teacher ratios for Scotland and for each local education authority *(a)* including and *(b)* excluding head teachers, in nursery schools, primary schools, secondary schools, special schools and sixth form colleges.

Mr. John MacKay: The latest available information for education authority schools is set out in the table:

Pupil-Teacher Ratios in Education Authority Schools

	Nursery 1984		Primary 1985		Secondary 1985		Special 1984	
	Including Head Teachers	*Excluding Head Teachers*	*Including Head Teachers*	*Excluding Head Teachers*	*Including Head Teachers*	*Excluding Head Teachers*	*Including Head Teachers*	*Excluding Head Teachers*
Borders	18·7	18·7	17·7	21·3	13·3	13·6	6·5	6·7
Central	24·8	32·9	19·3	21·4	13·8	14·0	5·7	6·8
Dumfries and Galloway	29·9	37·2	19·3	23·7	13·1	13·4	5·1	5·7
Fife	26·4	30·2	20·2	22·3	14·0	14·2	7·8	8·7
Grampian	16·4	18·4	19·3	22·0	13·6	13·8	5·9	6·6
Highland	18·3	21·2	18·7	23·5	12·9	13·2	6·7	7·5
Lothian	24·0	32·7	20·2	22·2	13·4	13·6	5·9	6·5
Strathclyde	29·6	55·3	21·6	23·8	13·7	14·0	6·4	7·8
Tayside	31·7	51·0	20·2	23·1	12·9	13·1	5·0	5·5
Orkney	14·2	14·2	15·9	20·1	11·7	12·3	[1]10·9	[1]120·0
Shetland	19·4	19·4	14·4	18·3	10·5	11·1	10·7	10·7
Western Isles	—	—	17·3	24·8	10·7	11·4	5·8	8·4
ALL SCOTLAND	26·0	37·8	20·4	23·0	13·5	18·7	6·2	7·2

[1] One Head Teacher and 0·1 teachers for 12 pupils.
Note: There are no sixth form colleges in Scotland.

Pupil Costs

Mr. Tom Clarke asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing net recurrent cost per pupil in nursery schools, nursery classes and primary schools in Scotland and the proportion of that cost attributed to teachers' salaries.

Mr. John MacKay: The available information is shown in the table below which has been compiled from local authority financial returns for 1984-85. These returns do not differentiate between expenditure on nursery education in nursery schools and in nursery classes.

	Nursery schools and classes	*Primary schools*
	£ at outturn prices	
1. Net expenditure per full-time equivalent pupil	1,193	918
	Per cent.	*Per cent.*
2. Teachers' salaries as a proportion of net expenditure	26·6	49·7

Mr. Tom Clarke asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing average cost for the latest years for which figures are available of a pupil or student in nursery schools, nursery classes, primary schools, secondary schools, independent schools on assisted places scheme for assisted placements, special schools, non-advanced further education and advanced further education in Scotland.

Mr. John MacKay: The available information is given in the table:

Net cost (£ at outturn prices) per full-time equivalent pupil/student

	1984-85	*1985-86*
Nursery schools and classes	1,193	n/a
Primary schools	918	n/a
Secondary schools	1,468	n/a
Independent schools (Assisted Places Scheme)[1]	1,456	1,610
Special Schools	5,694	n/a
Local authority vocational further education[2]	1,875	n/a
Central Institutions[2]	2,664	2,633
Colleges of Education[2]	3,711	3,859

[1] This figure is the average cost to Central Government of an assisted placement under the Assisted Places Scheme.
[2] These figures exclude the cost of tuition fees paid by Government on behalf of individual students.
n/a Figures not yet available.

BBC Scotland (Police Raid)

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will call for a report from the Strathclyde police into the progress of their inquiries following the search of the British Broadcasting Corporation premises in Glasgow; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Rifkind: No.

Sheep

Mr. Maclennan asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has to ensure that the production of sheep in the hills and uplands of Scotland is not jeopardised by expansion of sheep production on better quality farmland.

Mr. John MacKay: There is at present no evidence to show that appreciable expansion of sheep production is taking place on better quality land in Scotland. By paying hill livestock compensatory allowances worth £47 million in 1986-87, of which £22 million is paid on sheep, the Government already recognise that sheep production is more difficult in the hills and uplands. Producers on better quality land outwith the less-favoured areas do not qualify for these allowances. We also recognise the special position of hill and upland farmers by means of the advance payment of sheep annual premium which is made only to our farmers in the less-favoured areas. This year's advance payments, amounting to 75 per cent. of the total, were paid in two instalments in September 1986 and January 1987, and were worth over £14 million.

Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowances

Mr. Maclennan asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received concerning increases in hill livestock compensatory allowances for producers on grade B and grade C land; and what response he has made.

Mr. John MacKay: Shortly after my announcement on 18 December on this matter, I received representations from the National Farmers Union of Scotland. In my announcement I said that, consequent upon the green pound devaluation in May 1986, the maximum of 101 European currency units payable per livestock unit increased in value from £62·48 to £64·19, and that the hill livestock compensatory allowance supplements payable on cows on B and C grade land within the Highlands and Islands Development Board area would be correspondingly increased from 1 January 1987. Producers in these areas are therefore now, as before, receiving the maximum amount permitted under the relevant EEC regulation.

I had a meeting with the president of the union on 5 January 1987, in the course of which he expressed the view that further green pound devaluation was justified in this regard. I made it clear that this question would be considered along with other agrimonetary matters in the course of discussion around the annual price fixing.

North Norway Cod Fishing Quota

Mr. Maclennan asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received concerning the current allocation of the north Norway cod fishery quota; and what reply he has made.

Mr. John MacKay: Representations have been received from the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, the Shetland Fishermen's Associaton, the Shetland Fish Producer's Organisaton Ltd., LHD Ltd., Lerwick and the hon. Members for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace), for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie), for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey), for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. McCartney), for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) and for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan). I am at present considering the matter.

Forestry Commission

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his reply of 17 February, *Official Report*, column *541*, if the Forestry Commission will extend its consultation arrangements with the Nature Conservancy Council to cover all grant applications arising in Britain; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacKay: The Forestry Commission sees no justification for extending its present consultation arrangements with the Nature Conservancy Council to cover all grant applications arising in Britain.

ENERGY

Coal Mines

Mr. Iain Mills asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will announce legislation to provide for an obligatory proportion of the expenditure on new coal mines to be devoted to environmental protection of areas surrounding them.

Mr. David Hunt: No. British Coal already conducts environmental impact studies for all new mine developments and has been prepared to modifiy engineering design, including moving potential mine sites, in order to meet possible environmental disadvantages.

British Coal Houses

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Energy what information he has as to how many pre-stressed reinforced residential properties remain in the ownership of British Coal in England, Wales and Scotland, broken down by district council areas.

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Energy what information is available to him as to how many residential properties in England, Wales and Scotland remain in the ownership of British Coal, broken down by district council areas.

Mr. David Hunt: This is a management matter for British Coal. I am asking the chairman to write to the hon. Member.

US (Distribution Licensing)

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Energy what specific steps he has taken to ensure that computer records relating to his Department are not made subject to audit by United States inspectors in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: No such measures are necessary. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry made it clear in his reply of 19 February to the hon. Member for Leeds, West at columns *751-752* that he will not normally allow audit visits except where he is satisfied that a company wishes to maintain approved foreign consignee status and does not therefore wish the Government to reject an application for a visit. The purpose of any visit, if allowed, would be to check the procedures which United Kingdom firms choosing to use the distribution licence system agree to operate. A visit would only be permitted on conditions which safeguarded national security and commercial confidentiality, so that any computer purchase records relating to this Department would, if they raised such issues, be protected.

Hinkley Point

Mr. Speller asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will take immediate steps to instruct the nuclear installations inspectorate to identify the areas worked on by Mr. Bob Brookes at Hinkley Point nuclear power station and to carry out checks on the pipework welds which may be suspect; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: The nuclear installations inspectorate of the Health and Safety Executive has already asked the CEGB to carry out an urgent investigation into the allegations relating to pipework welds made by Mr. Brookes, and to report to them.

It would be premature to comment until the full facts are known.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Rost asked the Secretary of State for Energy what discussions his Department has had concerning the current

treatment of third party finance, where it is supplied for the purposes of energy saving schemes, in the calculation of public sector borrowing; what has been the outcome of such discussions; and what assessment he has made of the implications of the current treatment of third-party finance for the future contribution of such schemes to energy efficiency improvements.

Mr. David Hunt: The provision of external finance for energy efficiency measures is one element of the service offered by contract energy management companies. Contract energy management is an important option available to enable public sector organisations to improve energy efficiency, and the Energy Efficiency Office has already produced some guidelines on how it can be introduced in local authorities. It is currently considering with the Treasury what further guidance could be provided to clarify the use and assessment of contract energy management in the whole of the public sector.

Coal Industry (Finance)

Sir Alex Fletcher asked the Secretary of State for Energy how much support from public funds of all kinds has been made available to the coal industry since fiscal year 1978-79.

Mr. David Hunt: Between 1978-79 and 1985-86 Government support made available to the Coal Industry by way of Deficit and Operating Grant, Social Grant and payments under the Redundant Mineworkers Payments Scheme amounted to over £7 billion. It is anticipated that a further £1·5 billion will be made available in respect of 1986-87.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Leukaemia

30. **Mr. Willie W. Hamilton** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he intends to publish the full report of the 21-year statistical survey by the Office of Population Censusus and Surveys, concerning the incidence of leukaemia around nuclear installations.

Mr. Newton: The OPCS report "Cancer Incidence and Mortality in the vicinity of nuclear installations, England and Wales, 1959-1980" is expected to be published later this month. Rough copies of the printer's first proof were placed in the Library on 18 February 1987. Also copies may be examined in the OPCS Library at St. Catherines House, 10 Kingsway, London WC2B 6JP.

Disabled People (Discrimination)

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what expenditure has been incurred by his Department since November 1983 in discouraging discrimination against disabled people.

Mr. Major: It is not possible to isolate expenditure for this purpose from that on other aspects of disability.

The Government's policy is to promote the integration of disabled people by increasing public awareness of their problems and abilities and by breaking down the barriers they often face. This is reflected in a whole range of activities carried out not only by Government Departments and other statutory authorities but also in the support the Government give to disability organisations in the voluntary sector.

Departmental Computers

Dr. Hampson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services to which firms his Department has awarded contracts for computer hardware for each year since 1984; and what was the value of each contract.

Mr. Lyell: The following companies have been awarded hardware contracts since 1984. The value of each contract is not disclosed. It would be improper for reasons of commercial confidentiality to do so.

Ace Micro
Albion
Apple Computer (UK)
Apricot (UK)
Artificial Intelligence
AT Computerworld

BNF Metals
Boeing Computer Services
British Olivetti
British Telecom

Camtec
Comart Computers

Datagraphics
Digital Equipment
Digital Microsystems
Drake

Elmoro
Equinox Computer Systems

Hewlett Packard
Honeywell

IBM (UK)
ICL (UK)
Infotron

Logitek

McDonnell Douglas Information Systems
MBS
Memorex
Metier Management Systems

NCC
Newbery Data Recording
Norsk Data
Northern Telecom

Perkin Elmer Data Systems
Plessey Computers
Prime Computer (UK)

Regnecentralen (UK)

Software Sciences
Spider Systems

Techalog Data Systems
Tectime
Timeplex
Torch Computers

Videcom
Vistec Business Systems

Wang (UK)
Wordplex
WPS Systems

Xitan

Y.M. Corporate Services

Zengrange
Zygal Services

Dr. Hampson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what his Department has spent on *(a)* computer hardware and *(b)* computer software for each year since 1984; and what is the projected expenditure for 1987.

Mr. Lyell: The information is as follows:

	Hardware £	*Software* £
Actual expenditure in the financial year 1985-86	38,838,721	2,149,107
Actual expenditure this far in the financial year 1986-87	32,574,930	1,894,188
Estimated expenditure during the financial year 1987-88	70,709,000	6,453,000

Note: Turnkey expenditure has been included with the hardware figures.

Juveniles (Secure Accommodation)

Mr. Sims asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list in the *Official Report* the name and location of each institution offering secure accommodation for juveniles, indicating the number of places provided at each one.

Mrs. Currie: Details of secure accommodation within the child care system as at 1 February 1987 are shown in the table.

Institutions offering secure accommodation for juveniles—1 February 1987

Name	*Location*	*Number of places*		
		Boys	*Girls*	*Either sex*
New Aycliffe (Royston House)	Darlington, Durham	—	—	14
Clavering House	Blaydon, Newcastle-upon-Tyne	—	—	3
Aycliffe School	Darlington, Durham	—	—	36
Keppel's View	Rotherham	—	—	4
East Moor School	Leeds	27	—	—
Dyson Hall	Fazakerley, Liverpool	8	—	—
Red Sands (Oak House)	Nantwich, Cheshire	—	—	6
Derwent House	Liverpool	—	4	—
Blackbrook House School (Laboure House)	St. Helens, Lancashire	—	5	—
Red Bank (Vardy House)	Newton Le Willows, Lancashire	8	—	—
Fylde School (Dales House)	Poulton-Le-Fylde, Lancashire	8	—	—
Fylde Observation and Assessment Centre	Poulton-Le-Fylde, Lancashire	4	—	—
Briars Hey (Orchard House)	Rainhill, Lancashire	—	8	—
Redbank School	Newton Le Willows, Lancashire	26	—	—
Meadowcroft (Lindle Unit)	Preston, Lancashire	—	6	—
Stoke House	Stoke, Coventry	—	—	6
St. John's	Erdington, Birmingham	—	—	4
Moorfield	Sinfin Moor, Derbyshire	—	—	2
Greenacres	Chesterfield, Derbyshire	2	—	—
Kesteven House	Sleaford, Lincolnshire	—	—	4
Amberdale	Stapleford, Nottinghamshire	—	—	8
Salters	Peterborough	—	6	—
Oxenden House	Leighton Buzzard	—	—	6
Woodside	Stevenage, Hertfordshire	—	—	2
Heathercroft	Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire	—	3	—
Cumberlow Lodge	South Norwood	—	6	—
Frant Court	Frant, East Sussex	—	3	—
Little Heath Lodge	Romford, Essex	6	—	—
Middlesex Lodge	Hillingdon	—	8	—
Melanie Klein House	Greenwich	—	6	—
Orchard Lodge	Annerley	8	—	—
Royal Philanthropic School	Redhill	8	—	—
Stamford House	Hammersmith	16	—	—
Lansdowne Children's Centre	Hailsham, East Sussex	—	—	5
Beechfield	Crawley, West Sussex	—	—	6
The Oaks	Guildford, Surrey	—	—	2
Fairfield Lodge	Southampton, Hampshire	—	3	—
Glen House	Southampton, Hampshire	8	—	—
Northbrook School (Atkinson Unit)	Exeter, Devon	—	—	12
Kingswood Special Unit	Kingswood, Bristol	20	—	—
Glenthorne Youth Treatment Centre	Erdington, Birmingham	—	—	28
St. Charles Youth Treatment Centre	Brentwood, Essex	—	—	30
	Total	149	58	178
	Grand Total 385			

Mr. Sims asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has any plans to change the number of secure

places for juveniles made the subject of an order of the court; to what extent their location ensures that juveniles are accommodated within reasonable distance of their home and of the court; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: Apart from the two youth treatment centres managed directly by the Department, the provision of secure accommodation within the child care system is a matter for local authorities. Grant aid for the provision of additional places is available. We are not aware of any firm plans which would have a major effect on the amount or distribution of the overall stock of secure accommodation.

Some secure accommodation is provided in most parts of the country and where possible juveniles are accommodated within a reasonable distance of their homes and the courts. The largest units which are suitable for long stay provision are fewer in number and more widely spread, and juveniles accommodated in them may be some distance from their homes.

Free Milk and Vitamins

Mr. Flannery asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women and children in Sheffield were in receipt of free milk and vitamins in the most recent year for which figures are available.

Mr. Lyell: I regret that the information requested is not collected by individual local offices and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Housing Benefit Scheme (Data Processing)

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the outcome of the meeting between officials of his Department, the Institute of Housing, and seven leading computer companies about the adequacy of current data processing services available to local authorities for the implementation of the new housing benefit scheme; what amount of money he estimates is needed for new computers, programme design and training; and what sum he has so far proposed to meet this purpose.

Mr. Lyell: The meeting referred to was held in order to discuss the draft regulations for the new housing benefit scheme and not to evaluate the implications for local authorities' computer systems of the new scheme. However it did emerge from the discussions that the systems for administering housing benefit are very varied, and individual companies made differing estimates of the extent to which their own particular system would need to be changed. About half the authorities responsible for administering housing benefit do not use any commercially produced systems.

The Government are making available in 1987-88 a cash limited specific grant of £25 million to enable local authorities to prepare for the new housing benefit scheme. Local authorities have been asked to provide by the end of February estimates of the various costs they will need to incur, before final decisions are made on the allocation of the grant.

Benefits

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services why in his answer to the hon. Member for Norfolk, North on 2 February, *Official Report*, column 545, he was unable to give the number of supplementary benefits recipients beyond December 1984; and when he expects figures for 1985 and 1986 to become available.

Mr. Lyell: The information given in my previous reply was based on the supplementary benefit annual statistical inquiries for the years 1979 to 1984. There are no directly comparable figures for 1985, as the sample survey on which the inquiry is based was deferred from December 1985 to February 1986. Results from the February 1986 inquiry are not yet available.

Although not directly comparable, it is however, possible to provide information on recipients at December 1985 from a separate source—the quarterly statistical inquiry. This information is as follows:

Number of supplementary benefit recipients

	(thousands) Numbers
December 1985	4,590

Note: This information is derived from the Quarterly Statistical Inquiry of supplementary benefit and is not perfectly compatible with that derived from the Annual Statistical Inquiries held in December in previous years.

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what would be the saving if no social security, housing, or welfare benefits other than child benefit were paid to any single person whose income was more than £65 per week and to couples married or otherwise whose income was more than £130 per week.

Mr. Major: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the average weekly payment awarded in respect of new claims for supplementary benefit, in the most recent year for which figures are available, in Great Britain broken down by region and for his Department's offices in *(a)* Newham, *(b)* Brighton, *(c)* Slough and *(d)* Watford.

Mr. Lyell: Information is not available in the precise form requested. The table shows the average weekly amounts of supplementary benefit paid to all supplementary benefit recipients in Great Britain, by region, on 12 February 1986, the latest information available. This information cannot be given in respect of smaller areas.

	£
London North	27·97
London South	29·71
Midland	28·29
North Eastern	26·62
North Western	27·65
Scotland	26·79
Wales and South Western	28·85

Source: Supplementary Benefit Quarterly Statistical Inquiry February 1986.

Electrocutions

Mr. Richard Page asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many deaths from electrocutions occurred in the United Kingdom in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mrs. Currie: The number of deaths registered in the United Kingdom in 1985 with an underlying cause of death as accident caused by electric current (International Classification of Diseases 9th revision E925) was 74.

Disposable Syringes

Mr. Speller asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what assessment he has made of the cost of supplying free disposable syringes to diabetics on the same basis as the issue of disposable syringes to known drug addicts; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: As my right hon. Friend announced on 18 December 1986, it is intended to establish a number of special schemes for drug misusers in different parts of the United Kingdom which will include the exchange of used and possibly infected needles and syringes: their location and number have yet to be finalised. Such schemes are not appropriate for people with diabetes and no assessment of the cost of supplying syringes on such a basis has, therefore, been made. The whole question of issue of disposable syringes to diabetics is currently under review.

Pensioner Incomes

Mr. Christopher Hawkins asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the change in pensioners' incomes in real terms in the periods 1974 to 1979 and 1979 to the latest available date.

Mr. Major: The total average net incomes of pensioners increased by 0·6 per cent. a year in real terms between 1974 and 1979, and by 2·7 per cent. a year from 1979 and 1985, the latest available date.

Source: Family Expenditure Survey 1974, 1979, 1985.
Note: FES figures based on "tax units" which may represent either single pensioners or married couples.

Maternity Payments

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what plans he has to ensure that maternity grant will be paid for babies born up to and including Sunday 21 June 1987 whose mothers are entitled to claim the grant up to and including 5 April 1987 under the 11-week rule, but have not done so.

Mr. Lyell: The Social Security Act 1986 provides that maternity grant will not be payable for babies due after 5 April 1987, unless they are born before that date. The current rule which permits claims to maternity grant eleven weeks in advance of expected confinement will not therefore have the effect assumed in the question.

Mr. Garrett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in North Tyneside claimed the maternity grant in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: Information on the number of claimants to maternity grant is not available in the form requested. But in the 12 months ending 31 December 1986 the following numbers of claims to maternity grant were made at the Department's local offices which cover North Tyneside although the boundaries are not conterminous:

	Numbers
Newcastle (East)	1,459
North Shields	1,108
Wallsend	889

Mr. Lofthouse asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in Pontefract, Castleford and Knottingley claimed the maternity grant in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: Information on the number of claimants to maternity grant is not available in the precise form requested.

Pontefract, Castleford and Knottingley are covered by the Department's local offices at Castleford and Pontefract, although their boundaries are not conterminous with the areas in the question. The numbers of claims to maternity grant received at these two local offices during the 1986 calendar year were as follows:

	Numbers
Castleford	1,138
Pontefract	958

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in Stoke-on-Trent, South claimed the maternity grant in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: Information on the number of claimants to maternity grant is not available in the precise form requested.

The Stoke-on-Trent, South constituency is covered by the Department's offices at Stoke (North), Stoke (South) and Newcastle (Staffs) and their boundaries are not conterminous with the constituency. The numbers of claims received for maternity grant at these local offices during the calendar year 1986 were as follows:

	Numbers
Stoke (North)	2,605
Stoke (South)	1,807
Newcastle (Staffs)	1,572

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in Stoke-on-Trent, South received maternity allowance in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: Information is not available in the form requested, but in the 12 months ending April 1986, the latest year for which figures are available, the following numbers of claims to maternity allowance were made at the Department's offices which cover Stoke-on-Trent, South although the boundaries are not conterminous:

	Numbers
Newcastle (Staffs)	1,265
Stoke North	1,640
Stoke South	1,661

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in the city of Hull and the Kingston upon Hull, North constituency, respectively, claimed the maternity grant in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: Information on the number of claimants to maternity grant is not available in the precise form requested.

The city of Hull and the Kingston upon Hull, North constituency are covered by the Department's local offices at Hull (East) and Hull (West) although their boundaries

are not conterminous. The numbers of claims for maternity grant received at the Hull local offices during the 1986 calendar year were as follows:

	Numbers
Hull (East)	3,443
Hull (West)	2,862

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in the city of Hull and the Kingston upon Hull, North constituency, respectively, received maternity allowance in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: Information is not available in the form requested. But in the 12 months ending April 1986, the latest year for which figures are available, the following number of claims to maternity allowance were made at the Department's offices which cover both the City of Hull and the North Hull constituency although the boundaries are not conterminous:

	Numbers
Hull (East)	1,929
Hull (West)	1,927

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how many women in Calder Valley received maternity allowance in the last year for which figures are available;

(2) how many women in Halifax received maternity allowance in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: Information is not available in the form requested, but in the 12 months ending April 1986, the latest year for which figures are available, 1,748 claims to maternity allowance were made at Halifax, the Department's office which covers both Calder Valley and Halifax although the boundaries are not conterminous.

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in Dewsbury received maternity allowance in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: Information is not available in the form requested, but in the 12 months ending April 1986, the latest year for which figures are available, the following numbers of claims to maternity allowance were made at the Department's offices which cover Dewsbury although the boundaries are not conterminous.

	Numbers
Dewsbury	1,379
Huddersfield	1,678

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in Huddersfield received maternity allowance in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: Information is not available in the form requested, but in the 12 months ending April 1986, the latest year for which figures are available, 1,678 claims to maternity allowance were made at the Department's office at Huddersfield although the boundaries are not conterminous.

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in Calder Valley claimed the maternity grant in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Mr. Michie) on 18 February at column *702*.

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in Batley and Spenborough received maternity allowance in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: Information is not available in the form requested, but in the 12 months ending April 1986, the latest year to which figures are available, 1,379 claims to maternity allowance were made at Dewsbury, the Department's office which covers Batley and Spenborough although the boundaries are not conterminous.

Human Tissue Act 1961

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received seeking legislation amending the Human Tissue Act to allow hospitals and medical authorities to take the organs of all those who have not opted out during their lifetime.

Mr. Newton: Since August 1984 we have received letters on this subject from 15 hon. Members, mostly forwarding correspondence from their constituents, and from about 13 other people.

Mobility Allowance

Mr. Nicholls asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what recent representations he has received about the qualifications for receipt of mobility allowance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Major: We regularly receive representations about the various aspects of the qualifying conditions for mobility allowance. Recently, a large proportion has been in support of extending the medical eligibility criteria to include disabled people who can walk but who are not independently mobile. Many of these representations have referred to deaf-blind people in particular.

Fraud

Mr. Clelland asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what were the total amounts of money involved in claims which were the subject of *(a)* prosecutions and *(b)* convictions for offences of fraud against his Department in each of the years since 1979.

Mr. Lyell: The information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Liverpool (Ministerial Visit)

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the visit to Liverpool by the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie).

Mrs. Currie: I visited Liverpool on Friday 27 February to take part in an interview for Liverpool Radio City, and to undertake other engagements.

Parliamentary Questions (Replies)

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to reply to the questions of the hon. Member for Burnley *(a)* on contracted out treatment of private patients, for answer on 12 February and *(b)* on hospitals in the Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale health authority, for answer on 16 February.

Mr. Newton: I refer the hon. Member to my replies to him on Wednesday 25 February and Thursday 26 February.

Project 2000

Mr. Redmond asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what response he has made to the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing Midwifery and Health Visitors Project 2000 on the reform of nursing education, a copy of which has been sent to him.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he received the Project 2000 proposals about nurse education from the Royal College of Nursing; and what is his policy on the recommendations made in the Royal College of Nursing paper.

Mr. Newton: I refer the hon. Member and my hon. Friend to my reply to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) on 24 February at column *235*.

Nurses

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many nurses left their employment in the most recent annual period for which figures are available; how many were recruited in the same period; and what information he has on the reasons given by nurses for leaving the service.

Mr. Newton: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. McCrindle) on 26 January at columns *105-106*.

AIDS

Mr. Wallace asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether tests are carried out to ensure that AIDS is not passed on to any child conceived as a result of in vitro fertilisation.

Mr. Newton: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Hospitals (Ministerial Visits)

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Social Services which hospitals the Minister for Health, the hon. Member for Braintree (Mr. Newton) proposes to visit in the Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale health authority area on 6 March.

Mr. Newton: Hartley Hospital, in Colne. I regret that the time available makes it impossible for me to visit other hospitals in the area on this occasion.

Family Income Supplement

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will outline the present arrangements for gathering proof of earnings for the purpose of family income supplement claims and indicate what changes will be made to these procedures with the implementation of family credit.

Mr. Major: Under the present family income supplement scheme, claimants are asked to supply wage slips in support of their claim, normally for the five pay weeks preceding the date of claim or two months in the case of the monthly paid. Where wage slips are not supplied or the information on them is inadequate, information is sought from the employer. In practice, most claimants fail to provide wage slips, or the correct ones. The White Paper, "Reform of Social Security", Cmnd. 9691, indicated that the Government had decided that evidence of normal earnings in family credit cases will be sought direct from employers. We are still considering whether this will be necessary on every claim.

Hospital Beds

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Social Services, pursuant to his answer of Wednesday 25 February, how many hospital beds are available in National Health Service hospitals in England at the latest available date; how many were available as an average for 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Dubs) on 10 February 1987 at columns *201-204*.

Manchester Royal Infirmary (Casualty Department)

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has about the closure of the casualty department at Manchester Royal infirmary.

Mrs. Currie: The accident and emergency department at Manchester Royal infirmary has not closed. For a 48-hour period from 4.30 pm on Tuesday 24 February those patients attending the department who required emergency in-patient treatment were allocated beds in other hospitals serving Manchester in line with standing arrangements.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Thurnham asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what measures are being taken to reduce hospital waiting lists in the Bolton area.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to the reply*, 3 February 1987, c. *585*]: I understand that Bolton district health authority has taken action to reduce waiting lists and times for hospital treatment particularly by providing additional operating sessions in general surgery and arranging treatment by other health authorities in orthopaedics. The North Western regional health authority has reported to my right hon. Friend on the district's plans for further progress within existing resources, including arranging additional sessions in ophthalmology. On 17 February my right hon. Friend announced that the North Western regional health authority will receive £2·295 million from the first year's allocation from the waiting list fund. Three projects costing more than £170,000 will be funded in Bolton district health authority. This will enable the treatment of over 1,100 extra cases from in-patient lists, including 130 cataract operations to be carried out in the private sector, and increased activity in general surgery.

Mental Handicap Hospitals

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will name those mental handicap hospitals which have firm dates for closure; and if he will give a breakdown by region of these hospitals showing the anticipated dates and the numbers of residents to be discharged;

(2) if he will list by region the mental handicap hospitals which have not yet made any firm plans for closure; and if he will give the number of residents residing in these hospitals for the last three years for which figures are available.

Mrs. Curtie [*pursuant to her reply*, 16 December 1986, c. *466-67*]: The primary objective of policy on services for mentally handicapped people is the development of better, and more locally based, services. The reduction in size of some hospitals and the closure of others should be a consequence of achieving that aim, and should be accompanied by the development of alternative, and more homely, National Health Service or other residential facilities for mentally handicapped people who need residential care. As well as alternative longer-term residential care, overall alternative provision must cater for the large number of people receiving respite care, assessments and so on.

The information given in the table is of closures planned up to 1995. Column (i) lists hospitals where public consultation has been completed and closure has been agreed, with the target date by which the health authorities aim to have arranged suitable placements for all residents so that the hospital may then close. Column (ii) lists hospitals where replacement facilities are being planned with a view to health authorities being in a position to be able to close during the year shown, subject to the results of consultation. A final closure date will depend on many factors, including the availability of suitable alternative services.

The table gives numbers of residents (short-term and long-term) on 31 December 1985 (the latest available figures), rather than numbers of residents to be discharged. We would expect admissions as well as discharges to be made to many of these hospitals for some time to come.

Mental handicap hospitals currently planned to close by 1995

Region	*Hospital*		*Numbers of residents on 31 December 1985*	*Planned closure date*
	(i)	*(ii)*		
Northern	None			
Yorkshire		Whixley	129	1993-94
		Claypenny	244	1990s
Trent	Dronfield		17	1987
		Mastin Moor	135	1989
	Ridgeway		42	1987
		Aston Hall	333	mid 1990s
	Makeney		56	1988
		Glengate	144	1987
	Kibworth Hall		125	1988
		Harmston Hall	285	1993-94
		Fleet	108	1988-89
		Ransom	50	1988-89
		Balderton	267	1992-93
		Grenoside	112	1989
		Rivermead	95	1992
		Lightwood House	71	1994
East Anglian		Hales	105	1989
North West Thames		Leavesden	1,017	mid-1990s
North East Thames	Leytonstone	195	1993	
		South Ockendon	632	1993
South East Thames	Darenth Park		548	1988
		Eastry	119	1991
		Lenham	66	1987
	Goldie Leigh		47	1988
		Laughton Lodge	76	1990
	Pouchlands		62	1989
	Highland Court		37	1986-87
	Eversley House		19	1987
		Hill House	46	1990
	Lanthorne		22	1987-88
		Cheyne	33	1988
South West Thames		Forest	202	1990
Wessex		Cold Harbour	133	1990
		Buderop	100	1991
		Coldeast	353	1994

Region	Hospital	Numbers of residents on 31 December 1985	Planned closure date
	(i) (ii)		
Oxford	Wayland	115	1994
South Western	None		
West Midlands	Lea Hospital	181	1993
	Coleshill	200	1993
	Abbeyfields	93	1993
	Dean Hill	58	mid-1990s
	Ridge Hill	127	mid-1990s
	Middlefields	156	mid-1990s
Mersey	Mary Dendy	262	1989
North Western	Ormskirk	23	1988
	Offerton House	118	1990
	Swinton	41	1987
	Calderstones	915	1993
	Royal Albert	610	1995
	Brockhall	1,106	1995

[1] 31 October 1985 figures supplied by Trent regional health authority.

National Health Service

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list all those district health authorities which have *(a)* ceased and *(b)* reduced expenditure on private contract services for each category of private contract work for the National Health Service in the last five years.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 January 1987, *c. 119*]: Tables giving the information the hon. Member seeks have been placed in the Library.

Severe Disability Premium

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will define the term household for the purposes of eligibility for the severe disability premium; and if the presence of *(a)* an adult lodger or *(b)* an adult subtenant of the claimant will disqualify the claimant from the premium;

(2) if a disabled person receiving attendance allowance will be eligible for the severe disability premium if the only other adult member of the household is unable to provide assistance to that person on account of age or disability;

(3) if a disabled person receiving attendance allowance will be eligible for the severe disability premium for weeks in which the only other adult member of the household is absent from home;

(4) if the presence in the household of a student over 18 years in full-time education for whom no non-dependent deduction from housing benefit is currently made will disqualify a disabled person in receipt of attendance allowance from the severe disability premium;

(5) if a disabled person receiving attendance allowance will be eligible for the severe disability premium for weeks in which the only other adult member of the household has an infectious illness and would endanger the life of the disabled person if he or she provided the care and assistance required by that person.

Mr. Major [*pursuant to his reply*, 22 January 1987, *c. 711-12*]: The intention is that the severe disability premium would not be payable if, among other conditions, the claimant had a partner or a non-dependant over the age of 18 living in the same household. The only exception to this would be where the other person was receiving attendance allowance. The circumstances or age of the non-dependant or partner would not otherwise be relevant. It would also not be subject to whether or not a housing benefit non-dependant deduction was actually made, so the presence in the household of a student over 18 treated as a non-dependant would normally debar someone from receiving the premium. In deciding whether or not someone was to be regarded as a non-dependant, either for housing benefit purposes or in order to determine eligibility for the severe disability premium, it would be necessary to establish whether he or she was a member of the same household as the claimant. Where they did not reside together because, for example, one was a sub-tenant living in self-contained accommodation (including separate cooking but not necessarily separate bathroom facilities) they would not be regarded as being members of the same household, and one would not therefore be classified as a non-dependant in relation to the other. Where they did reside together, as might, for example, be the case with a lodger, they would normally be treated as members of the same household unless the arrangement between them was on a purely commercial basis and they were not close relatives.

People would normally be regarded as still members of the same household during short absences, particularly if there was an intention to return. Where this was not the case, the claim would be reassessed.

Finally, a person employed by a charity or other organisation (but not a local authority) who lived with the claimant in order to care for him or his partner would not be regarded as a non-dependent where a charge was made for the service by the organisation concerned.

We intend that the draft housing benefit regulations which have been issued to the local authority associations for consultation will be amended to make these points clear.

We are separately assessing alternative proposals to the severe disability premium put to us by organisations representing disabled people.

TRANSPORT

Channel Tunnel

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with the Chairman of British Rail about the future of the line between Folkestone and Dover in the light of the Channel tunnel project.

Mr. David Mitchell: None. I understand that the Channel tunnel project will not affect services between Folkestone and Dover.

Docklands Light Railway

Mr. Spearing asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is his latest estimate of the cost of building the western extension of the Docklands light railway; and what sum, or proportion of the total, will be met from public funds.

Mr. David Mitchell: The latest estimate of the cost of building the western extension of the Docklands light railway is approximately £130 million at outturn prices. The proportion of this sum to be met from public funds will depend on the outcome of negotiations curently taking place between London Regional Transport and the consortium proposing to develop the site at Canary Wharf.

Roads

Mr. Roy Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the motorway and trunk road schemes for which he intends to award a contract in the year ending 31 March 1987 but which are expected to remain outstanding at that date.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Contracts expected to be let in 1986-87 were listed in my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) on 20 June 1986 at columns *664-5*. Of the 34 contracts, four are expected to remain outstanding at 31 March 1987. They are:

Scheme	
A19 Peterlee Flyover	Tenders to be invited in June or July 1987; Contract planned to be let in August 1987.
A34 Hanford Grade Separated Junction	Tenders to be invited in March 1987; Contract planned to be let in May 1987.
A49 Leominster Bypass	Tenders invited and are due back in April 1987; Contract planned to be let in May 1987.
A418 Leighton to Linslade Bypass	Scheme hs been delayed by a challenge in the High Court.

Three schemes additional to those listed were let in 1986-87, as follows:

A1 Chepstow Bridge
A48 Baldersby Junction Improvement
A69 Hexham to Corbridge Remedial Works

Buses

Mr. Amess asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many independent bus companies are now operating on deregulated bus routes in the United Kingdom.

Mr. David Mitchell: there are 1,727 independent bus operators now running registered local bus services.

National Travel Survey

Mr. Mudd asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to be able to announce the results of the last national travel survey.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I expect the first results from the 1985-86 national travel survey to be published before the end of this year.

Roads (White Paper)

Mr. Mudd asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the next roads White Paper to be published.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We are currently engaged in a review of our road programme. We expect to publish our conclusions in the spring.

London Buses

Mr. Spearing asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will tabulate in the *Official Report* for each of the bus districts of London Regional Transport, information available to him on the passenger mileage travelled and bus mileage run for each of the years 1984, 1985 and 1986, respectively, showing separately the figures for routes run by (i) London Buses on its own behalf, (ii) London Buses as contractor for London Regional Transport and (iii) other contractors, respectively, together with totals, and totals for the London Regional Transport area.

Mr. David Mitchell: The information is not available in the form requested. Since many bus journeys and bus routes are not exclusive to any one of the six operating districts which make up London Regional Transport's subsidiary, London Buses, it would not be practicable to disaggregate total mileages. Information is available as follows:

Passenger miles

Millions

	1984-85	*1985-86*	[1] *1986-87*
London buses total[2]	2,620	2,580	2,550
LRT tendered total	—	20	150
Total LRT area	2,620	2,600	2,700

[1] Forecast.
[2] Excluding LRT tendered.

Bus miles

Millions

	1984-85	*1985-86*	*1986-87*
All London Buses' Greater London local services except LRT tendered	160	155	146
London Buses' Greater London local services tendered by LRT	—	1	5
Other operators' Greater London local services tendered by LRT	—	1	5
Total Greater London local services under direct LRT control	160	157	156
London Buses' out-county and commercial	6	6	4
Other operators' out-county under LRT tenders	—	—	1
Total LRT and London Buses	166	163	161
Other operators with services in Greater London under LRT agreement			
—supported	6	6	4
—unsupported	3	3	3
Total Greater London local services	169	167	164

Railway Accidents

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the railway accidents notified to him in the Warrington area since May 1983.

Mr. David Mitchell: If the hon. Member would care to write to me, telling me exactly what places he includes in the term "Warrington area" and exactly what types of accidents he wants listed, I will provide it as soon as possible.

United States (Distribution Licensing)

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Transport what specific steps he has taken to ensure that computer purchase records relating to his Department are not made subject to audit by United States Government inspection in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moore: No such measures are necessary. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry made clear in his reply of 19 February to the hon. Member at columns *751-52* that he will not normally allow audit visits except where he is satisfied that a company wishes to maintain approved foreign consignee status and does not therefore wish the Government to reject an application for a visit. The purpose of any visit, if allowed, would be to check the procedures which United Kingdom firms choosing to use the distribution licence system agree to operate. A visit would only be permitted on conditions which safeguarded national security and commercial confidentiality, so that any computer purchase records relating to this Department would, if they raised such issues, be protected.

ENVIRONMENT

Football Clubs (Merger)

Mr. Raynsford asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from the Professional Footballers' Association about the employment implications of the proposed merger of Fulham and Queen's Park Rangers football clubs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received regarding the proposed merger of Fulham and Queen's Park Rangers football clubs.

Mr. Tracey: Neither my right hon. Friend nor I have received any direct representations from the Professional Footballers Association about this proposed merger. Press reports suggest that several interested organisations wish to express their concern to the Government—a concern that I would share over the loss of any historic football club or ground.

Estate Action

Mr. Watts asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many dwellings were renovated with the assistance of Estate Action in 1986; and how many he expects to be renovated in the current year.

Mr. John Patten: I have approved Estate Action schemes in 1986-87 benefiting nearly 53,000 dwellings. Of these, nearly 1,000 will be brought back into use to house the homeless. The scale of these benefits will increase significantly in 1987-88, when the resources we are making available through Estate Action will increase by 50 per cent. to £75 million.

Green Belt

Mr. Amess asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if there are any plans to extend the areas of green belt land in Essex.

Mr. Waldegrave: The initiative for making any such extension lies with the county council in preparing proposals for alteration to the county structure plan, which are expected to be submitted to my right hon. Friend for approval later this year.

Agricultural Land

Mr. Evans asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many applications for development of agricultural land were referred to his Department in 1984, 1985 and 1986, respectively.

Mr. Waldegrave: I take it that the hon. Gentleman is seeking information on the reference of applications to my right hon. Friend for decision under section 35 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971. (Local planning authorities are required to consult the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food about certain applications before they reach their own decisions on them).

The information is not readily available in the form requested. However, in evidence presented during the Environment Committee's inquiry into "Planning: Appeals, Call-in and Major Public Inquiries" in 1985-86,

we reported that, in 1984, of some 427,000 planning applications made, 42 were referred to my right hon. Friend under section 35. Of these only three were subject to specific objection on agricultural grounds.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Speller asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he plans to seek power to purchase compulsorily sites for nuclear waste disposal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: No.

Homeless Families

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Environment on what basis his Department decided that two years should be the maximum period for which homeless families will be allowed to occupy units of temporary accommodation provided under the 1988 Housing Corporation programme.

Mr. Tracey: The aim is to get families out of bed-and-breakfast accommodation while the local authority finds permanent rehousing; two years is long enough for authorities to make the necessary arrangements. Many families should be able to move on within one year.

West Yorkshire Residuary Body

Mr. Harrison asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if the West Yorkshire residuary body has notified his Department of the capital receipts received for the sale of properties and land which previously belonged to the West Yorkshire metropolitan county council.

Mr. Chope: The West Yorkshire residuary body currently estimates that it will receive £2·75 million in 1986-87 and £3 million in 1987-88 from the sale of land and property. Firm figures will not be available until the residuary body's accounts for the respective years have been audited and certified.

Mr. Harrison asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if the West Yorkshire residuary body has notified his Department of the number of bids made for the purchase of the county hall, situated in the city of Wakefield, West Yorkshire; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: No. Marketing is still in progress.

Shared Ownership

Mr. Wolfson asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will make a statement on the do-it-yourself shared ownership scheme; and if he intends to increase the maximum purchase price allowed under do-it-yourself shared ownership regulations;

(2) what representations he has received about the do-it-yourself shared ownership scheme and the maximum purchase price allowed under do-it-yourself shared ownership regulations;

(3) if he will estimate the cost of increasing the maximum purchase price allowed under the do-it-yourself shared ownership regulations by *(a)* 35 per cent., *(b)* 40 per cent. and *(c)* 45 per cent., respectively; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: I shall shortly be reviewing the value limits to apply from 1 April 1987 for all housing association shared ownership schemes in the light of representations from my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey), the National Federation of Housing Associations and several individual representatives. New provision for do-it-yourself shared ownership schemes is restricted to discretionary funding by local authorities within their HIP allocations, which precludes effective estimating of the effects of increased value limits.

Mr. Wolfson asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will consider allowing unlimited do-it-yourself shared ownership purchases over an extended area within the county of Kent; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: Local authorities are already free to operate unlimited do-it-yourself ownership schemes on a voluntary basis independently of housing associations. I have no plans to remove the value limits in respect of shared ownership operated through housing associations.

Television Sets (Palace of Westminster)

Mr. Tim Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many colour television sets there are in the Palace of Westminster; and what is the television licence fee payable in respect of them.

Mr. Chope: There are 41 colour television sets in the Palace of Westminster provided from the Department's funds. Television licences are a matter for the relevant House authorities.

Home Insulation

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what response he has made to the request from Melton borough council for an additional £3,000 allocation under the homes insulation scheme.

Mr. John Patten: The Department has not yet responded to the council.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Rost asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what he estimates would be the increase, in percentage terms, in the fabric heat loss to a heated factory of 10,000 sq m constructed with a single metal skin, compared with the same factory building constructed to a minimum current Building Regulations (England and Wales) standards.

Mr. John Patten: If the factory were built entirely with a single metal skin with an insulation value (u value) of 6·5, rather than 0·7 in accordance with the present requirements, the percentage increase in the fabric heat loss would be about 830 per cent.

Brookwood Lye, Woking (Public Inquiry)

Mr. Onslow asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to conclude his consideration of the claim by the Brookwood Lye action group for ex-gratia payments to cover costs incurred by it at the re-opened public inquiry relating to land at Brookwood Lye, Woking; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tracey: I regret that consideration of the action group's claim has been delayed. If the group would provide the information requested in the Department's

letter of 3 February 1987 in respect of its costs at the abortive first inquiry, an offer will be made as soon as possible.

Anti-fouling Paint

Mr. Steen asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will set an early date for banning the manufacture of anti-fouling paint containing tributyl tin;

(2) what steps he will be taking to enforce the ban he announced on 24 February of the use of anti-fouling paint containing tributyl tin.

Mr. Waldegrave: Regulations which will ban the retail sale of anti-fouling paints containing TBT, and which will also prevent products containing TBT being used to treat fish farm nets and cages, are being drafted at present. It is the Government's intention to introduce these regulations as soon as practicable, following a consultation period as required under the Control of Pollution Act. The regulations would be enforced in England and Wales by local authority trading standards officers who would inspect retail outlets and paint manufacturers' premises. Similar arrangements would apply in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Mr. Steen asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will issue advice to all yacht clubs and other interested organisations setting out in simple language the Government's position on tributyl tin in anti-fouling paints, stating from what date it becomes illegal to use it and giving advice on the enforcement of the ban and inviting their co-operation.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Department is already in contact with the Royal Yachting Association, with yachting and boating magazines, and with other interested parties, to ensure that the Government's current position on tributyl tin is well known and widely publicised. Further information will be issued at the time that the new regulations are implemented.

Residential Homes

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce regulations to require unregistered residential care homes to be inspected by the local environmental health and fire prevention officers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tracey: [*pursuant to his reply*, 27 February 1987]: Where local authorities consider premises to be houses in "multiple occupation", they have a duty under the Housing Act 1985 to inspect them from time to time. They also have a duty to secure adequate means of escape from fire in the larger ones (three storeys or more, with aggregated floor space over 500 sq m) and a discretionary power in respect of the remainder.

The Department's circular 12/86 recommends that on this aspect inspection should be carried out jointly by officers of the local authority and the fire authority, and the Act requires the local authority to consult the fire authority before serving any notice requiring works.

Annex B of the circular, copies of which are in the Library, also summarises the provisions of other legislation on means of escape from fire which may be applicable to residential care homes.

Regional Development Plans

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will now publish the regional development plans for the north-west of England.

Mr. Tracey [*pursuant to his reply*, 26 February 1987]: My right hon. Friend is consulting local authorities in the Merseyside and Greater Manchester areas about the preparation of strategic guidance for the unitary development plans which they will be preparing under the provisions of the Local Government Act 1985. Proposals for a wider coverage of regional planning guidance were included in the consultation paper, "The future of development plans", published by the Department last September, on which comments are invited by 14 March.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Graduate Attachment Scheme

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about the graduate attachment scheme.

Mr. Tom King: A pilot graduate attachment programme administered by the Northern Ireland Small Business Institute and sponsored by the Department of Economic Development commenced on 5 January 1987. The 26-week programme provides 25 places for unemployed graduates who are receiving practical and meaningful work experience with companies in the small business sector to enhance their prospects of managerial employment.

Departmental Computers

Dr. Hampson asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what his Department has spent on *(a)* computer hardware and *(b)* computer software for each year since 1984; and what is the projected expenditure for 1987.

Mr. Tom King: The information is as follows:

	Hardware £	*Software* £
1985-86	3,671,225	1,259,133
1986-87	9,322,374	1,122,550
1987-88[1]		

[1] The total projected expenditure is approximately £14 million.

Dr. Hampson asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to which firms his Department has awarded contracts for computer hardware for each year since 1984; and what was the value of each contract.

Mr. Tom King: The companies listed have been awarded contracts totalling in aggregate more than £10,000. For reasons of commercial confidentiality the value of each is not disclosed.

1985-86
Advec Ltd.
AES
Apricot UK Ltd.
Aston Technology
BIC Systems Ltd.
Business and Scientific Services Ltd
Chevron Computing Ltd.
Comart Ltd
Datatech
Digital Equipment Co. Ltd.
Equinox
Hewlett-Packard Ltd
IBM Ltd
ICL (UK) Ltd
Logicom
McDonnell Douglas Information Systems Limited
PC Consultants
Plessey

Rank, Xerox
Sperry Rand
Sysscan
Wang
Wordplex (UK) Ltd.

1986-87
Advec
AES
Apricot UK Ltd
BIC Systems Ltd
BMDS
CEM Ltd
Chivron Computing Ltd
Comart Ltd.
Digital Equipment Co. Ltd.
Hewlett-Packard Ltd.
IBM Ltd.
ICL (UK) Ltd.
Logicom
McDonnell Douglas Information Systems Limited
Mexisystems
Olivetti
PC Consultants
Rank Xerox
Richardsons
Sysscan
Wang
Wordplex (UK) Ltd.

Housing

Mr. O'Brien asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the outcome of the consultations between the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and tenants on the Cromac estate and the Sandy Row and Lower Newtownards area; and what percentage of tenants wish to retain the service provided by the district heating schemes.

Mr. Needham: This is a matter for the Housing Executive in the first instance but I understand from the chairman that, of 273 tenants (69 per cent.) in the Cromac area who responded to consultation, 88 (32 per cent.) were in favour of removal and 178 (65 per cent.) were against with seven (3 per cent.) undecided. I also understand that having considered both the results of the consultation and economic and management considerations, the Housing Executive will be proposing that district heating in the Cromac estate be removed. I await a formal proposal from the Executive and shall write to the hon. Member when I have reached a decision.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Shareholders

Mr. Amess asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the number of individual shareholders in companies in Britain in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1986.

Mr. Howard: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) on 25 February 1987 at column *295*.

United States (Distribution Licensing)

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) whether, pursuant to his reply of 19 February, United States audit inspectors will have access to the United Kingdom or overseas customer records of those United Kingdom companies which hold approved foreign consignee status or a United States distribution licence; and if he will make a statement;

(2) whether, pursuant to his answer of 19 February, *Official Report*, column *751*, approved foreign consignee status involves United Kingdom companies in supplying *(a)* their United States supplier or *(b)* the United States Department of Commerce, with details of their domestic or overseas customers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: The purpose of any visit, if allowed, would be to check the procedures which United Kingdom firms choosing to use the United States distribution licence system agree to operate. Such a visit would be subject to conditions which safeguarded commercial confidentiality.

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his reply of 19 February, what status he now accords the COCOM agreements; what adjustments he intends to make to the COCOM lists; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: Agreements reached in COCOM are unaffected. The United Kingdom will continue to participate fully in the review of control lists and to give effect under United Kingdom law to agreed changes.

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will place in the Library copies of any United States distribution licence system regulations and foreign consignee status regulations which apply to United Kingdom high technology companies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made clear on 19 February at columns *751-52*, we reject extraterritorial re-export controls and regulations connected with them. Nonetheless, and for the information of Members, I am taking steps to place the relevant United States regulations in the Library of the House.

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer of 19 February, *Official Report*, column *751*, what steps he proposes to take to prevent the loss of approved foreign consignee status *(a)* resulting in the loss of all United States supplies to the affected company or *(b)* resulting in the company going on the United States denials list; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: Any United Kingdom firm which decides to give up its approved foreign consignee status because it does not want to receive an audit visit should still be able to use the United States system of individual export licences. There is no prima facie reason why this should lead to loss of United States supply or the company being placed on the United States denials list.

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer of 19 February, *Official Report*, column *751*, what special terms and conditions are imposed on United Kingdom companies who *(a)* hold approved foreign consignee status or *(b)* hold a United States distribution licence, and who are suppliers to the United Kingdom nuclear weapons industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: Under United States regulations, the distribution licence system cannot be used for the export of controlled goods destined for the nuclear weapons industry and other related sensitive nuclear end uses.

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what specific measures he has taken to ensure that the provisions of *(a)* United Kingdom law, *(b)* EEC law and *(c)* the European convention on human rights are not affected by recently imposed United States re-export controls; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: I do not know of any recently imposed United States re-export controls which affect the position under the laws referred to or under the European convention on human rights.

Ministerial Decisions (Public Interest)

Mr. Bill Walker asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what criteria he uses in deciding the degree to which the public interest is involved in matters falling for decision by him.

Mr. Channon: There are no absolute criteria. The matters taken into account depend on the circumstances of the case and the relevant legislation.

Industry (Public Funds)

Sir Alex Fletcher asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how much support from public funds of all kinds has been made available to the shipbuilding industry since fiscal year 1978-79;

(2) how much support from public funds of all kinds has been made available to the steel industry since the fiscal year 1978-79;

(3) how much support from public funds of all kinds has been made available to manufacturing industry since the fiscal year 1978-79;

(4) how much support from public funds of all kinds has been made available to the aerospace and aero-engines industries since the fiscal year 1978-79;

Mr. Giles Shaw: I will reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

British Steel Corporation

Mr. James Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement regarding the future of the British Steel Corporation Clydesdale works in Mossend; and whether any merger is planned for the foreseeable future.

Mr. Giles Shaw: There is substantial excess capacity in the seamless tubes sector. BSC's response to this is primarily a matter for the Corporation's management; and no proposals have been put to the Department in respect of actions, such as a merger, which would require the Secretary of State's consent.

Chlorofluorocarbons

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give figures for *(a)* the annual production in the United Kingdom and *(b)* the annual import to the United Kingdom of chlorofluorocarbons 11 and 12.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I regret that figures for production of chlorofluorocarbons 11 and 12 in the United Kingdom are commercially confidential and that import statistics are unavailable.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give figures for the annual export from the United Kingdom of chlorofluorocarbons 11 and 12.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I regret that these figures are not available.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of propellants used for non-industrial aerosols in the United Kingdom are accounted for by chlorofluorocarbons.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I regret that this information is not available.

Securities and Investments Board

Mr. Canavan asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry why the draft Securities and Investments Board rules published on 12 February did not form the subject of prior consultations with the small independent intermediaries affected by the rules; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: The proposed rules submitted to my right hon. Friend on 10 February by the Securities and Investments Board, as I made clear at the time, reflected the results of consultation on earlier drafts published by the board. As my right hon. Friend made clear, comments made to the Department about the proposed rules will be fully considered in deciding whether to recommend to Parliament the transfer to the board of powers under the Financial Services Act 1986.

Mr. Canavan asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his assessment of the implications of the implementation of the draft Securities and Investments Board rules as published on 12 February for the ability of small independent intermediaries to carry on trading; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: My right hon. Friend is currently considering the rules and supporting material submitted by the Securities and Investments Board on 10 February. The position of small intermediaries will be one of the matters to which he will have regard in deciding whether to recommend to Parliament the transfer to the board of powers under the Financial Services Act 1986.

Satellites

Mr. Nellist asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what contracts for new satellites have been placed by Her Majesty's Government in each of the past 10 years; with which companies; and for what total value.

Mr. Pattie: In the past 10 years, three contracts, one in each of the years 1981, 1985 and 1986, have been placed by Her Majesty's Government for the supply of a total of five Skynet 4 military communications satellites: three (Skynet 4A, 4B and 4C) for the Ministry of Defence; two (NATO IVA and IVB) for NATO. All three contracts have been placed with British Aerospace with Marconi Space Systems as principal sub-contractor. The total value of the three contracts is some £200 million.

THE ARTS

Royal Opera House

Mr. Fisher asked the Minister for the Arts under which vote and sub-head expenditure was made relating to the purchase of land in Covent Garden in 1975 for the benefit of the Royal Opera House.

Mr. Luce: Class X, vote 27, sub-head A1, 1974-75 Estimates.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Public Expenditure

Sir William Clark asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total of public expenditure on the

agricultural, manufacturing and merchant shipping industries, respectively, in 1984-85; what proportion these expenditures bore to these industries' respective contributions to the gross domestic product; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: Information is not readily available in the precise form requested. Estimates which are available, for calendar years 1984 and 1985, are given in the table:

		(1) General Government Expenditure £ million	*(2) Industry's Contributions to GDP £ million*	*(1) as proportion of (2) per cent.*
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	1984	2,194	5,971	37
	1985	2,821	5,485	51
Manufacturing	1984	2,443	69,545	3·5
	1985	2,432	76,800	3

Source: Based on United Kingdom National Accounts, 1986 (tables 2.1 and 9.4).
Agriculture makes up most of agriculture, forestry and fishing. Figures for merchant shipping are not available.

Free Ports

Mr. Alton asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will consider reducing the free ports documentary requirements for United Kingdom goods to the level applicable in bonded warehouses.

Mr. Brooke: Bonded warehouses are premises approved for the storage of goods subject to excise duty or both customs and excise duty. Officially approved documents are used for the receipt and delivery of United Kingdom goods and comprehensive records of receipt, storage, processing and delivery are required. United Kingdom goods taken into a free zone require less documentation, having only to be entered into the operator's record on receipt and to be the subject of a customs declaration on delivery.

Mr. Alton asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will allow British free ports to hold goods under tempory importation agreements.

Mr. Brooke: British free zones are already allowed to hold temporarily imported goods under the conditions laid down in article 28 of the Council regulation EEC/3599/82 which is directly applicable in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Alton asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will consider removing the need for British free ports to have an inward processing relief certificate for duty-free operations; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: No. Specific authorisation for inwards processing relief, whether in the British free zones or generally elsewhere, is required by EC legislation. Its purpose is to guard against the use of third country goods when similar Community products are available. Removing the need for authorisation could damage the interests of Community producers.

Mr. Alton asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his policy on British free ports in the light of the recent report by Mr. Timothy F. Beyer Helm a copy of which has been forwarded to him; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: The Government do not propose to change their policy on the free port experiment in the light of Mr. Helm's report. A review of the practical operation of free zones, including the present VAT requirements, was announced in the White Paper "Building Businesses . . . Not Barriers".

Jamaica (Debt)

Mr. Bowen Wells asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the latest arrangements that his alternate director agreed to in relation to the indebtedness of Jamaica and its ability to meet its obligations to the International Monetary Fund, International Bank of Reconstruction and Development, and International Development Association.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Jamaica is at present current in its obligations to the International Monetary Fund, the International Bank of Reconstruction and Development and the International Development Association. Its requests for a standby arrangement and compensatory financing facility are to be considered by the IMF executive board on 2 March. Discussions of the executive board are confidential.

Statutory Minimum Wage

Mr. Cyril Smith asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the additional cost to the Exchequer and to local Government, in wages and salaries per annum, of a statutory minimum wage of £116 per week; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Eurotunnel

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the approval given by Her Majesty's Government to the consideration by the staff of the European Investment Bank of a loan for Eurotunnel is subject to any conditions regarding the timing of the completion of the loan in relation to the date of enactment of the Channel Tunnel Bill; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: The EIB is fully aware that the completion of any loan could not take place before the Channel Tunnel Bill has been enacted.

Income Tax

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will state the cost to the Exchequer if

income tax thresholds were raised to £65 per week for a single person and £130 per week for a couple, married or otherwise.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Energy Saving Schemes

Mr. Rost asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has yet reached any decision on the exclusion of third party finance, where it is supplied for the purposes of energy saving schemes, from the calculation of the public sector borrowing requirement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: The Treasury supports the introduction of cost-effective energy conservation measures in the public sector estate; and is considering with the Department of Energy guidance for public sector bodies to clarify the use and assessment of contract energy management schemes. The impact which third party schemes have on the PSBR depends on the particular characteristics of the schemes concerned.

Tobacco Industry

Mr. Allen McKay asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reason Her Majesty's Customs and Excise has imposed on cigarette manufacturers a limit on cigarette manufacture and distribution from 1 February to the date of the Budget.

Mr. Brooke: To protect the tobacco products duty revenue from forestalling, by excessive deliveries prior to and in anticipation of the Budget, the Commissioners of Customs and Excise have placed restrictions on the quantities of cigarettes and hand-rolling tobacco which may be delivered on payment of duty. No restrictions have been placed on manufacturing operations. Full details are set out in Customs and Excise news release No. 1143 of 2 October 1986, and notice 85C, copies of which I am placing in the Library. Essentially, the arrangements permit daily deliveries between 1 February and 19 March (two days after the Budget) to be about one and a half times the daily average in 1986.

Tax Fraud

Mr. Clelland asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many persons were *(a)* prosecuted and *(b)* convicted for offences of fraud against Her Majesty's Inland Revenue and Her Majesty's Customs and Excise in each of the years since 1979.

Mr. Norman Lamont [*pursuant to his reply*, 23 January 1987, c. *62*]: The details in respect of the Inland Revenue are:

	Persons prosecuted	*Convictions*
1979-80	150	142
1980-81	189	172
1981-82	176	146
1982-83	142	134
1983-84	159	148
1984-85	239	233
1985-86	254	242

In addition the number of convictions obtained by the police in each of the years since 1979 for tax frauds in connection with the construction industry tax deduction scheme was:

	Number
1979-80	10
1980-81	15
1981-82	27
1982-83	3
1983-84	5
1984-85	8
1985-86	74

For Customs and Excise, comprehensive information in the form requested is not held centrally, and could be assembled only at disproportionate cost. The following table shows numbers of persons prosecuted and convicted for a variety of Customs and Excise offences, including fraud, in cases handled by specialist investigation staff. Cases dealt with by other Customs and Excise staff are not included.

	Number of persons prosecuted	*Number of persons convicted*
1979-80	856	819
1980-81	802	739
1981-82	1,065	1,008
1982-83	1,010	944
1983-84	1,462	1,349
1984-85	1,201	1,092
1985-86	1,271	1,104

Privatisation

Mr. Blair asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table like that published in a written answer on 27 January at columns *229-30* showing for the years 1974-75 to 1978-79 the actual proceeds of public sector sales of assets outside the central privatisation proceeds.

Mr. MacGregor [*pursuant to his reply*, 27 February 1987]: Figures for sales of land and existing buildings for the years 1976-77 to 1978-79 are as follows:

£ million

	1976-77	*1977-78*	*1978-79*
DOE—Housing	81	169	383
DOE—Other environmental services	36	32	66
Ministry of Defence	18	26	30
Home Office	12	10	17
Other	33	63	94
Total	180	300	590

Figures prior to 1976-77 are not readily available.

Mr. Blair asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish in the *Official Report* the opening and closing price on the first day of trading of the shares sold in the privatisation share issues, together with, in each case, the number of shares sold.

Mr. Norman Lamont [*pursuant to his reply*, 27 February 1987]: The table gives the information requested on the number of shares and the closing prices on the first day of trading. Opening trading prices are not centrally available.

Government share sales		Number of shares[1]	Closing trading price on first day (pence)
1. British Petroleum	(a) 1977	66,800,000	368·0
	(b) 1979	80,000,000	154·0
	(c) 1983	130,000,000	206·0
2. British Aerospace	(a) 1981	100,000,000	171·0
	(b) 1985	146,852,746	245·0
3. Cable and Wireless	(a) 1981	133,285,000	97·0
	(b) 1983	100,000,000	98·0
	(c) 1985	146,110,819	303·0
4. Amersham International	1982	44,860,000	188·0
5. Britoil	(a) 1982	255,230,028	81·0
	(b) 1985	242,589,490	122·0
6. Associated British Ports	(a) 1983	19,600,000	138·0
	(b) 1984	19,400,000	102·0
7. Enterprise Oil	1984	212,000,000	100·0
8. Jaguar	1984	177,880,000	179·0
9. British Telecom	1984	3,012,000,000	93·0
10. British Gas	1986	4,025,500,000	62·5
11. British Airways	1987	720,200,000	109·0

[1] Includes in certain primary offers for sale, shares retained to meet employee applications for free shares and bonus distributions.

Output

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the output per head of the working population, excluding the extraction of oil and gas from both the numerator and the denominator, in each year since 1972.

Mr. MacGregor [*pursuant to his reply*, 26 February 1987]: The information requested is given in the following table:

Output per head of working population excluding[1] Class 13 (1980=100)

	Output
1972	98·7
1973	102·8
1974	101·2
1975	98·4
1976	99·1
1977	100·5
1978	102·9
1979	103·7
1980	100·0
1981	98·3
1982	99·7
1983	102·3
1984	103·4
1985	105·4
1986	107·1

[1] Based on mid-year estimates of working population.

Mortgage Tax Relief

Mr. Cabora asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received concerning the eligibility of loans for the installation and erection of swimming pools and tennis courts for mortgage interest tax relief.

Mr. Norman Lamont: My right hon. Friend receives a number of representations on mortgage interest tax relief, but few concern the items which the hon. Gentleman mentions.

Mr. Cabora asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action he intends to take to prevent tax relief on mortgage or home improvement loans being provided for non-eligible items.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The Inland Revenue already carries out checks on borrowers' mortgage interest relief claims, and on the lenders to ensure that they are operating the MIRAS arrangements properly. These compliance procedures will continue to be kept under regular review.

Mr. Christopher Hawkins asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what is the cost to the Exchequer of mortgage interest relief claimed in respect of marginal rates of income tax above the basic rate;

(2) if he will estimate the cost to the Exchequer of raising the limit for mortgage interest relief by steps of £1,000 from £30,000 to £40,000 in respect of relief at basic rate only.

Mr. Norman Lamont [*pursuant to his replies*, 26 February 1987]: The direct revenue cost of mortgage interest tax relief at rates in excess of the basic rate in 1986-87 is estimated to be about £270 million.

Assuming no consequential changes to the distribution of mortgages outstanding, the direct revenue cost, in a full year at 1986-87 levels, of an increase in the ceiling for mortgage interest relief in respect of relief at basic rate only is estimated to be:

Ceiling £	Cost £ million
31,000	20
32,000	40
33,000	60
34,000	75
35,000	90
36,000	105
37,000	115
38,000	130
39,000	140
40,000	150

The cost of an increase in the ceiling at 1987-88 levels would probably be significantly higher than the estimates above, both because the number of new home loans over £30,000 has been increasing recently and because an increase in the ceiling might stimulate additional borrowing. The cost of relief at excess over basic rate and of an increase in the ceiling for 1987-88 will also depend on the level of interest rates in that year as well as on the 1987-88 income tax rates and bands.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Soft Fruit

Mr. Maclennan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has made to the European Commission regarding frontier prices for trading in soft fruit for processing and the arrangements for policing this trade.

Mr. Donald Thompson: We have made frequent representations to both the Council and the Commission of the European Communities about frontier prices of semi-processed soft fruit. In doing so, we have stressed the need for the Commission to take effective measures to stop low-priced imports undermining the Community market. Steady improvements have been achieved in the price agreements negotiated by the Commission with the main suppliers (Poland and Yugoslavia).

Those agreements are voluntary, but my Department monitors imports closely and we are ready to press the Commission to introduce safeguard measures, as it did in the case of raspberry pulp last year, if this appears to be necessary to avoid disruption of the market.

Rhizomania

Mr. Andrew Stewart asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has considered further measures to avoid risk of rhizomania disease.

Mr. Jopling: Yes. I have considered carefully the need for additional arrangements to minimise the risk of rhizomania disease reaching our beet crops through soil imported with potatoes and other vegetables for processing. I am pleased to announce that consultations with the interests concerned will now take place with a view to introducing statutory controls relating to land on which solid or liquid waste from the processing of imported potatoes and other vegetables may be discharged. The consultations will also explore the possibility of reducing the 2 per cent. soil tolerance allowed on imports of potatoes. These additional controls would supplement the range of measures we have already introduced to avoid the risk of rhizomania disease becoming established here.

Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance

Mr. Steen asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he hopes to arrange for an inspection of Court Gate farm, Harbourneford, South Brent, south Devon, for hill livestock compensatory allowance, in view of the letter of 27 February 1986 from Mrs. V. Large of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Exeter, stating that she was arranging for a Ministry surveyor to inspect the land in the near future (ref. 10/279/18 HY).

Mr. Donald Thompson [*pursuant to his reply*, 27 February 1987]: An inspection has been arranged for the week of 9 March. I will write to my hon. Friend about this case.

Seal Culling

Mr. Hancock asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has any proposals for a seal cull this year.

Mr. Gummer [*pursuant to his reply*, 27 February 1987]: Under the Conservation of Seals Act 1970 the authority to issue a licence under which seals may be culled in England and Wales rests with the Home Secretary.

My Department has an interest in any effect that seals may have on fisheries. In order to obtain information on which to assess the impact of seals on fisheries we make a financial contribution to the research carried out by the Sea Mammal Research Unit (SMRU) which includes monitoring the populations around our coasts. I am advised that the seal population around the Farne Islands, the major population on the English coast, has remained relatively stable in recent years. In response, however, to complaints about increasing seal damage from fishermen operating with fixed nets off the north east coast of England we have, in addition to the ongoing work of the SMRU, commissioned Hull university to carry out a survey to assess the extent of such damage. This work is still in progress. I have no plans to seek the Home Secretary's authorisation for a seal cull this year.

Intervention Stocks

Mr. Clay asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give details of quantities and type of food held within EEC intervention food stores and their location in *(a)* Sunderland, *(b)* Gateshead, *(c)* Newcastle upon Tyne, *(d)* North Tyneside and *(e)* South Tyneside.

Mr. Gummer [*pursuant to his reply*, 27 February 1987]: At 31 January 1987 the stocks held were as follows:

(tonnes)

	Skimmed milk powder	*Butter*	*Beef*	*Feed wheat*	*Barley*
Sunderland	—	—	—	—	—
Gateshead	—	856	241	—	—
Newcastle upon Tyne	240	—	—	497	10,345
North Tyneside	—	3	—	—	—
South Tyneside	—	1,173	—	—	—

Oils and Fats (Taxation)

Mr. Craigen asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the proposal by DS VI of the European Commission to introduce a tax on oils and fats; and what is his estimate of the likely increase in consumer costs on food and drink if the proposal is approved.

Mr. Gummer [*pursuant to his reply*, 27 February 1987]: I consider that the budgetary problems of the oils and fats regime should be tackled by internal measures to control support costs rather than by the Commission's proposed oils and fats tax. The latter might increase average retail food prices by about three quarters of 1 per cent.

DEFENCE

DROPS

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether there were any specific trials objectives set for the Multilift chainlift system when it was bought for trials; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer my right hon. Friend to the answer which I gave him on 9 February 1987 at column *102*.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence in respect of the 1975 Multilift chainlift system, which piece of hard level terrain it was envisaged the system might pick up its bulk loads from; which piece of hard level terrain it might deliver these loads to; what concepts there were for the construction of these bulk loads at the first location and their dismantling at the second location; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I have nothing to add to the answers which I gave my right hon. Friend on 9 February 1987 at column *103*.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence what bulk loads the 1975 Multilift chainlift system was thought to be suitable for transporting; what potential role was envisaged for it; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Multilift equipment in question was purchased in 1975 to enable the Army Department to try out the chainlift system as part of its consideration of the possible use of demountable body systems for the movement of containerised bulk loads.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence what benefits were expected in 1975 to accrue from the movement of bulk loads exclusively between locations or hard level standing; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In 1975 the Army Department was seeking to establish whether increased productivity could be obtained by the use of bulk load handling systems.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether the DROPS combination selected in 1983 for use as LMLC on roads was legal for use on roads in peacetime; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Yes.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence what criteria governed the choice of *(a)* an offroad truck that was legal for use on roads and *(b)* a road-going truck-trailer combination that was not legal for use on roads in peacetime; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Both truck choices are legal.

Equipment Trials

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the practice of his Department in cases where costs of acquiring trials equipment have been incurred, with regard to keeping records of trials performances, compiling trials reports and producing subsequent conceptual papers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The results of trials conducted in the Ministry of Defence are recorded and usually incorporated into a formal report. Lessons learned in trials are incorporated in the reports and may, as appropriate, contribute to subsequent concept papers along with other material.

United States (Distribution Licensing)

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Defence what specific steps he has taken to ensure that computer purchase records relating to his Department are not made subject to audit by United States inspectors in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No such measures are necessary. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry made clear in his reply of 19 February to the hon. Member at columns *751-752* that he will not normally allow audit visits except where he is satisfied that a company wishes to maintain approved foreign consignee status and does not therefore wish the Government to reject an application for a visit. The purpose of any visit, if allowed, would be to check the procedures which United Kingdom firms choosing to use the distribution licence system agree to operate. A visit would be permitted only on conditions which safeguarded national security and commercial confidentially, so that any computer purchase records relating to this Department would, if they raised such issues, be protected.

United States (Distribution Controls)

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Defence if technology and data transferred to the United Kingdom by Boeing Incorporated under the airborne warning and control system offset arrangements will be subject to audit inspections by United States Government inspectors in the United Kingdom monitoring compliance with re-export controls; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No, unless a distribution licence is involved. The AWACS contract itself makes no provision for distribution licences to be used as a part of the offset arrangements.

RAF Squadron Leader (Press Statement)

Mr. Marlow asked the Secretary of State for Defence if, pursuant to his answer of 12 February, *Official Report*, column *304*, any disciplinary action has been taken against the Royal Air Force squadron leader who made an unauthorised statement to the press.

Mr. Freeman: No, although all officers have been reminded of their obligations in this respect.

Project Zircon

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Defence if, pursuant to the answer of 16 February, *Official Report*, column 367, he will specify the title under which expenditure so far incurred on Project Zircon has been separately and specifically identified, where it has been so identified.

Mr. Younger: It is not the practice to publish such information.

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 6 February, *Official Report*, column 880, what is his understanding as to the precise definition of the phrase expect to consult, in relation to the Comptroller and Auditor General's handling of sensitive defence projects on which expenditure has been incurred which would normally justify its being reported to the Public Accounts Committee; what is his understanding as to the degree of discretion which this term allows the Comptroller and Auditor General in deciding whether to inform the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee about such a project; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It would not be proper for me to comment on dealings between the Comptroller and Auditor General and the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee.

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Defence for what reason Project Zircon has been excluded from his Department's major project statement to the Committee of Public Accounts; who, outside his Department, was informed of this exclusion and when; when his Department first informed the Public Accounts Committee that it reserved the right to withhold certain projects from the major projects statement; how many projects have been so withheld since 1982; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The project to which the hon. Member refers was excluded from the major project statement on grounds of national security. I refer the hon. Member to my answer to her on 2 February 1987 at column *517* and confirm that in the case to which she refers the National Audit Office was informed in the time scale indicated in that answer. My Department has made no general statement to the Public Accounts Committee regarding the exclusion of projects from the major project statement. Since the major project statement was introduced in 1982 my Department has included in successive statements all projects which fell clearly within the cost and other criteria for inclusion, the sole exclusion being the project to which the hon. Member refers.

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's practice with regard to conveying to the Comptroller and Auditor General the degree of security sensitivity attached to a particular project which is the subject of his audit examination; at what stage and by what method this is done; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In conducting their audit activities the staff of the Comptroller and Auditor General have access to departmental files, and can therefore see from the security classifications accorded to their contents the degree of security sensitivity attached to particular projects.

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answer of 24 February, if he will propose to the Committee of Public Accounts that the arrangements surrounding the major projects statement be revised so that all projects which qualify for inclusion in it on expenditure grounds but which are currently excluded on grounds of national security or the public interest should be notified to the Chairman of the Committee; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No.

Trident

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will break down figures for expenditure on the Trident programme into its constituent parts, showing separately *(a)* expenditure on any communications programme identifiable and *(b)* any component costing 5 per cent. or more of the total.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The main cost elements of the Trident project are as follows:

	Per cent.
Submarines (less weapon system equipment)	31
Weapon system equipment including tactical system	21
Missiles	12
Shore construction	7
Warhead, miscellaneous, unallocated contingency etc.	30

As I indicated in my reply of 23 February at column *139* to the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours), communications equipment forms part of the tactical weapon system. The whole weapon system equipment accounts for 21 per cent. of the overall Trident project estimate.

Trackway (Marketing)

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answer of 17 February, if he will list each of the difficult questions raised by the matter of the unlawful marketing of trackway by the Singapore Government; and if he will indicate how near each is to resolution.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The questions under consideration involve issues of tactics and timing together with an in-depth analysis of the laws and practice relating to copyright in Singapore. Under the circumstances I am not prepared to comment further.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 3 March 1987

NATIONAL FINANCE

Debt Rescheduling

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list in the *Official Report* all the agreements concerning rescheduling of debts made between the United Kingdom and each other developing country since 1979.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Since 1979 the United Kingdom has signed 76 agreements concerning rescheduling of debts with other countries, the dates of which are listed below. These include agreements made by the Export Credits Guarantee Department and the Overseas Development Administration. There are a further 24 agreements under negotiation or to be negotiated following multilateral agreements.

Debt Rescheduling Agreements made between United Kingdom and other Countries since 1979

Country	*Date Agreement Signed*
Bolivia	21 January 1987
Brazil	13 December 1984
	31 December 1984
Central African Republic	18 April 1986
Chile	29 April 1986
Costa Rica	12 March 1984
	25 September 1984
	30 January 1986
Cote D'Ivoire	10 January 1985
	17 October 1986
Cuba	22 July 1983
	3 October 1985
	12 November 1986
Ecuador	18 June 1984
	29 January 1986
Jamaica	27 December 1984
	13 May 1985
	27 December 1985
	6 February 1986
Liberia	26 October 1982
	26 January 1984
	8 October 1984
Madagascar	4 April 1982
	21 May 1983
	7 January 1985
	18 December 1985
Malawi	7 July 1983
	29 August 1984
Mauritania	9 July 1986
Mexico	31 January 1985
Morocco	17 October 1984
	20 August 1986
Mozambique	13 August 1986
Niger	11 October 1984
	7 March 1985
	28 September 1986
Peru	27 April 1979
	12 December 1979
	12 March 1984
Philippines	4 February 1986
Poland	2 July 1981
	30 November 1985
	7 August 1986
Romania	26 November 1982
	8 December 1983
Senegal	1 September 1982
	11 January 1984
	12 November 1985
	12 November 1985
Sierra Leone	30 June 1980
	17 October 1985
Somalia	14 August 1986
Sudan	25 August 1980
	25 August 1983
	25 January 1984
	18 June 1986
Togo	27 April 1982
	9 February 1984
	5 February 1985
Turkey	20 December 1979
	5 December 1986
	17 June 1983
Uganda	17 June 1983
	10 November 1983
Yugoslavia	6 December 1984
	7 February 1986
Zaire	26 September 1979
	28 July 1983
	28 July 1983
	14 November 1984
	7 July 1986
Zambia	30 December 1983
	15 February 1985
	31 July 1985
	20 August 1986
	31 October 1986

VAT (Prescriptions)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received relating to the respective liability of *(a)* dispensing doctors and *(b)* chemists to value added tax in relation to prescriptions.

Mr. Brooke: None.

Safety Regulations

Mr. Nellist asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will investigate the non-availability of copies of the Safety Representatives and Safety Committee Regulations 1977 (S.I., 1977, No. 500); if he will ensure that an early reprint by Her Majesty's Stationery Office is arranged; and if he will make a statement as to why these regulations are currently not available at certain of Her Majesty's Stationery Office's bookshops.

Mr. Brooke: The Safety Representatives and Safety Committee Regulations 1977 are numbered S.I. 1977 No. 500 and were published in March 1977. The most recent reprint was in October 1985 and current stocks are sufficient to meet expected demand.

Copies are normally available at all HMSO bookshops except Belfast, which does not stock them as the regulations do not apply to Northern Ireland. There may have been very occasional times when individual shops were temporarily out of stock for short periods, but on such occasions orders would be taken for fulfilment when replacement copies arrived.

European Community Budget

Mr. Raffan asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the latest situation concerning the European Community budget for 1987.

Mr. Brooke: The president of the European Parliament declared the 1987 community budget adopted on 19 February. The adopted budget is unchanged from that proposed by the Budget Council on 13 February, which I described to the House in my answer of 17 February to the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Hirst) [*Official Report*, c. *542-3*.]

Mr. John MacGregor [*pursuant to his reply*, 17 February 1987, c. *545*]: The information requested is given in the following table in respect of the royal ordnance factories, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, the royal dockyards and the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority. The other bodies were not constituted on a trading basis in 1974-75 and details of their turnover in the form requested are not available.

	Turnover 1974-75		
	(a) *Central Government*	*(b)* *United Kingdom Public Sector (excluding central Government)*	*(c)* *Export*
	Per cent.	*Per cent.*	*Per cent.*
Royal Ordnance Factories *(Note 1)*	56	—	44
Her Majesty's Stationery Office *(Note 2)*	69	27	2
Royal Dockyards *(Note 3)*	100	—	—
United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority *(Note 4)*	80	—	—

Notes

1. The royal ordnance factories were vote-funded for the first three months of 1974-75 and financed by means of a trading fund from 1 July 1974. They were vested in Royal Ordnance plc on 2 January 1985.
2. Two per cent. of HMSO turnover was accounted for by sales direct to the general public from HMSO bookshops.
3. A very small element of royal dockyard turnover (exact proportion not available) was for overseas Governments and civilian customers.
4. Some 80 per cent. of the net costs of UKAEA's activities in 1974-75 was funded by central Government. Information on exports and the public sector is not available in the form requested.

TRANSPORT

Roads

Mr. Roy Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing for each metropolitan district and each London borough the estimated highways capital and highways maintenance expenditure for 1986-87.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The information requested is in the following tables:

Capital and maintenance expenditure on roads by London boroughs and Metropolitan districts 1986-87

London Boroughs	*Capital budget £ million*	*Maintenance budget £ million*
	(a)	*(b)*
City of London	2·390	4·187
Inner Boroughs		
Camden	2·488	7·156
Greenwich	3·842	8·032
Hackney	2·826	3·742
Hammersmith and Fulham	0·310	4·981
Islington	1·078	3·070
Kensington and Chelsea	0·761	4·356
Lambeth	3·044	8·241
Lewisham	1·664	6·719
Southwark	2·675	6·909
Tower Hamlets	2·254	8·403
Wandsworth	7·640	4·515
Westminster	5·271	9·746
Outer Boroughs		
Barking and Dagenham	2·000	3·221
Barnet	1·715	8·483
Bexley	4·880	4·236
Brent	1·006	3·397
Bromley	2·338	9·321
Croydon	1·294	7·438
Ealing	6·064	6·125
Enfield	9·091	5·629
Haringey	2·443	3·481
Harrow	3·443	1·714
Havering	5·783	5·059
Hillingdon	11·278	5·667
Hounslow	1·818	2·541
Kingston-upon-Thames	10·684	3·644
Merton	4·938	5·491
Newham	3·994	4·163
Redbridge	4·314	5.115

London Boroughs	Capital budget £ million	Maintenance budget £ million
Richmond-upon-Thames	0·938	4·609
Sutton	2·037	3·558
Waltham Forest	2·329	3·908

Source:
(a) Authorities' 1986 Transport Policies and Programmes.
(b) Authorities' Return of Expenditure and Rates 87.

Capital and maintenance expenditure on roads by London boroughs and Metropolitan districts 1986-87

Metropolitan districts	Capital budget £ million	Maintenance budget £ million
Greater Manchester	*(a)*	*(b)*
Bolton	1·290	3·930
Bury	2·072	1·892
Manchester	11·961	9·837
Oldham	0·720	4·632
Rochdale	1·310	2·636
Salford	3·661	4·514
Stockport	3·807	4·781
Tameside	1·400	4·181
Trafford	4·072	5·809
Wigan	5·705	6·049
Merseyside		
Knowsley	0·841	5·192
Liverpool	9·069	13·070
St. Helens	0·748	3·849
Sefton	1·031	8·288
Wirral	1·370	7·103
South Yorkshire		
Barnsley	2·068	5·130
Doncaster	1·871	8·179
Rotherham	1·440	7·383
Sheffield	7·119	11·728
Tyne and Wear		
Gateshead	1·320	7·220
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	2·054	7·517
North Tyneside	0·626	7·011
South Tyneside	3·559	5·071
Sunderland	6·692	6·783
West Midlands		
Birmingham	18·424	19·106
Coventry	2·183	6·518
Dudley	2·805	5·512
Sandwell	3·876	7·093
Solihull	0·894	4·620
Walsall	3·913	4·508
Wolverhampton	6·878	4·414
West Yorkshire		
Bradford	8·914	6·793
Calderdale	0·999	6·566
Kirklees	4·040	7·938
Leeds	4·166	17·252
Wakefield	1·699	7·617

Source:
(a) Authorities' 1986 Transport Policies and Programmes.
(b) Authorities' Return of Expenditure and Rates 87.

Mr. Maclean asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the places on the motorway system where extra access or egress roads have been built subsequent to completion of the motorway, showing in each case the purpose of such extra roads.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I shall write to my hon. Friend shortly.

Market Harborough Bypass

Sir John Farr asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is the timetable for the Market Harborough A6 bypass; and when he expects construction to commence.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The anticipated date for publication of draft orders later this year is dependent on the analysis of further ground investigation work which has recently been carried out.

A public inquiry could, if it proves necessary, be held in early 1988. This would allow construction to start in 1989.

Kingston Bagpuize Bypass

Mr. Jackson asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to hold the public inquiry in respect of the bypass at Kingston Bagpuize in Oxfordshire.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We hope to hold a public inquiry, if needed, about six to nine months after the publication of the draft orders planned for this summer.

Motor Cycles (Identity Marking)

Mr. Greg Knight asked the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what representations he has received concerning the identity marking of motor cycle frames;

(2) if he has any plans to encourage or require the marking of motor cycle frames with identification numbers to be listed in registration documents.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Construction and Use Regulations require vehicle identification numbers to be marked on a plate on motorcycles up to 150cc if first used between 1 August 1977 and 1 January 1982 or up to 125cc if first used after 1 January 1982. Regulations made under the Vehicles (Excise) Act 1971 require a frame number to be quoted when application is made to register any motorcycle for the first time.

As a result, virtually all motorcycles are marked with an identification number. The Department cannot trace representations on this subject.

London Coach Terminal

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on progress on the development of a new coach terminal for central London; and if he will make it his policy that the costs of building and running such a terminal will be on commercial terms to the operators.

Mr. David Mitchell: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Mr. Wheeler) on 17 November last. I am still considering what would be an appropriate form of inquiry and hope to make a further statement shortly. I am also considering, with LRT, the opportunities for private funding of any coach terminal that may be developed.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Television Producers

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has as to the percentage of television production currently provided by independent producers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: The most recent information about the origin of programmes shown on United Kingdom television is contained in the annual reports of the BBC and IBA for 1985-86, copies of which are in the Library. The Government are discussing with the BBC and IBA means of achieving its target of 25 per cent. of original material on BBC and ITV being supplied by independent producers within about four years.

Missing Children

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what evidence is available to him of a link between child prostitution and runaways; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will set up and fund a research project endeavouring to establish the number of runaway children reported missing throughout the United Kingdom, and to investigate the number of homeless children involved in child prostitution in the metropolitan area;

(3) if he will convene an urgent meeting of chief constables throughout the United Kingdom with a view to establishing what information they have about runaway children; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The police are aware of the dangers to runaway children, including the risk that they may become involved in crime, and endeavour to assist them within the limits laid down by the law. Police forces keep records for operational purposes of persons reported missing. Chief officers do not consider that collecting further statistical information would offer them any practical assistance, and research to establish reliable estimates of the numbers of homeless children involved in prostitution would be extremely difficult, given the illegal and covert nature of the activity.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer of 26 February, *Official Report*, column *345*, to the hon. Member for Leicester, East if he will take steps to establish a unit to collate for the future statistics relating to missing children from each police force area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No. We are not persuaded that such a unit would be justified on operational grounds.

Child Destruction

Mr. Nicholls asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the gestational age of the foetus in each of the cases where prosecutions have been brought during the last five years on charges of child destruction under the Infant Life (Preservation) Act; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave him on 2 March.

Prison Population

Sir Edward Gardner asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the change in the size of the prison population in England and Wales from February 1985 to September 1986; and what information he has about the relevant figures for other member states of the EEC.

Mr. Mellor: Between 28 February 1985 and 30 September 1986 the population of Prison Department establishments increased by 1,800 (4 per cent.), which is equivalent to about 2,000 after allowing for normal seasonal variation. Information on the prison population in other member states of the European Community is published twice a year by the Council of Europe in its Prison Information Bulletin, copies of which are held in the Library.

The information for different countries is not comparable because the definitions of prisons and prisoners vary between countries and such differences may have a substantial effect on the comparisons. However, the most recent information indicates substantially greater growth in the three years ending February 1986 in every country in the EEC except Germany and Spain when compared with England and Wales.

Independent Broadcasting Authority

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what use he has made of his powers in relation to the appointment of a medical advisory panel to the Independent Broadcasting Authority under section 16(5) of the Broadcasting Act 1981; what criteria he uses in deciding which professional organisations he shall require the Independent Broadcasting Authority to consult on the appointment of a medical advisory panel; what steps he has taken to monitor the results of such consultation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: My right hon. Friend is informed by the IBA of the bodies consulted on each occasion that a prospective appointment is to be made to the panel. We would wish to be satisfied that these consultations ranged widely across the relevant professional bodies. It is the duty of the authority and not the Government to take into account the views of the bodies consulted. The membership of the medical advisory panel is published in the annual report of the IBA.

Crimes of Violence

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the average figures served for life sentences imposed for offences of murder in the years 1960, 1970, 1975, and each year from 1980 to 1985.

Mr. Mellor [*pursuant to his reply*, 26 February 1987, c. *340*]: Information on the number of persons sentenced for murder is published annually in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales," supplementary tables volume 2, (in table S2.1*(a)* under offence classification 1).

The readily available information on time spent under sentence in Prison department establishments is given in the table, which also shows the numbers received in each year who were still in custody on 31 December 1986. The corresponding information for persons received in 1960 is not readily available.

AIDS

Sir Dudley Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps are taken to ensure the accuracy of the registering of deaths which have occurred as a result of the individual concerned having contracted AIDS; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

Clinicians are invited to report, confidentially, to the communicable disease surveillance centre, all cases of AIDS, including deaths from the disease. These reports show that up to the end of 1986 there were 285 deaths due to AIDS in England and Wales. Over the same period there were 220 deaths registered in England and Wales where cause of death has been given as AIDS or a similar term has been mentioned on the death certificate. The reasons for the discrepancy are currently being investigated.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Public Records

Mr. Dalyell asked the Attorney-General when the Lord Chancellor intends to make available all public records relating to the Anglo-French-Israel negotiations before the 1956 Suez crisis.

The Solicitor General: The Lord Chancellor has already done so. As far as is known, all public records relating to Suez have been available in the Public Record Office since 2 January last, except for the small proportion approved for extended closure or retention under the usual criteria. No records have been withheld because they contain information about Anglo-French-Israeli negotiations.

Social Security (Decisions)

Mrs. Beckett asked the Attorney-General how long after the appeal hearing social security commissioner's decision No. CU/387/85 was sent to the claimant; and what was the reason for the delay.

The Solicitor-General: The appeal was heard on 29 August 1986 and the decision was sent to the claimant on 6 February 1987. The decision was a matter for the commissioner in the exercise of his independent judicial functions, but the Lord Chancellor is seeking information from the chief social security commissioner.

Mrs. Beckett asked the Attorney-General what is the average delay between a Social Security Commissioner's oral hearing and notification of the decision to the claimant.

The Solicitor General: The average time is misleading since it is distorted by the existence of a small number of abnormally long delays. However, for decisions issued during January and February 1987 the average time from oral hearing to notification was three and a half months.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

New Zealand (EC obligations)

Mr. Warren asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has on the performance of other European Community countries of their obligations to New Zealand; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: So far as agriculture is concerned, we know of no obligations between other member states and New Zealand, entered into bilaterally. There are two major Community agreements with New Zealand, which concern access for imports into the Community of butter and sheepmeat.

Cereal Stocks

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the volume of on-farm stocks of cereals in Lincolnshire was at 31 December 1983, 1984, 1985 and 1986.

Mr. Gummer: Information for Lincolnshire could be provided only at disproportionate cost. End of month regional estimates of on-farm stocks of cereals in England and Wales according to MAFF region for December 1983 and by standard statistical region for December 1984, 1985 and 1986 are contained in the MAFF cereals stocks surveys for the months in question. Copies are in the Library of the House.

Farm Rents

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will state the average farm rent in pounds per acre in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* England for each year since 1979.

Mr. Gummer: Government statistics are presented in metric terms. The table below gives average farm rents for *(a)* Great Britain and *(b)* England. The land tenure system of Northern Ireland is not generally comparable with Great Britain. Consequently no information can be provided for the United Kingdom as a whole.

Average Farm Rents (£ per hectare)

Year	*Great Britain*	*England*
1979	35·54	42·13
1980	41·93	50·01
1981	49·21	58·36
1982	56·51	66·14
1983	63·32	73·93
1984	69·65	81·27
1985	75·40	88·01
1986[1]	80·72	95·75

[1] provisional

EC Food Aid

Mrs. Beckett asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will now give instructions that the European Economic Community butter to be distributed should be handled on a standard basis throughout the country and that a pound of butter should be given to someone who produces an order book for retirement or invalidity pension; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Distribution arrangements, including amounts distributed to each person and verification of eligibility are for the various charitable organisations concerned. I see no case for further specific guidance and I regard it as right that we should proceed on the basis that the charitable organisations use their own discretion.

Milk

Mr. Deakins asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will specify the main points of difference at the February European Economic Community Agriculture Council on new arrangements for milk.

Mr. Gummer: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 24 February to my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Sir P. Mills) (*Official Report*, c. *242*.)

Pea Bacterial Blight

Dr. Michael Clark asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has reached decisions on future action against pea bacterial blight; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jopling: My Department has taken firm steps to combat pea bacterial blight since infection was found in the fodder pea crop in the summer of 1985.

Our longer-term aim has been to minimise infection by bringing pea bacterial blight within the seed certification scheme. A review carried out in the light of the results of crop inspections and laboratory tests on fodder pea seed last year has confirmed this as the right course. We therefore propose to amend the seed certification scheme so that, from 1 July 1987, home-produced seed submitted at breeders, pre-basic, basic and C1 levels will be certified only if tests have shown the stock to be free from pea bacterial blight. At the same time, we shall extend the existing controls on imported fodder pea seed to the C1 category.

Pea bacterial blight will, at least for the present, continue to be a notifiable disease. This will enable the incidence of the disease to be monitored.

Pesticides

Sir Richard Body asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations have been made by Her Majesty's Government to the European Economic Commission about proposed legislation concerning the export of pesticides without prior informed consent.

Mr. Waldegrave: I have been asked to reply.

In discussions about the proposed EC regulation concerning the export from the import into the Community of certain dangerous chemicals, the United Kingdom has put forward the arguments set out in the explanatory memorandum which was deposited in Parliament on 3 November 1986.

SCOTLAND

Grampian Region

87. **Mr. Robert Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people are unemployed in the Grampian region of Scotland.

Mr. Lang: On 8 January 1987, the latest date for which information is available, the number of unemployed claimants in the Grampian regional authority was 25,192.

East Fife Regional Road

Mr. Henderson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on progress of the East Fife regional road; and what he now estimates will be its final completion date and cost.

Mr. Ancram: This scheme is being built in four separate phases. Phase I was completed and opened to traffic in September 1985. Phase II is under construction and is due for completion in late May of this year. Phases III and IV —which are planned to be constructed concurrently— will be the subject of a public local inquiry to be held at the end of March. Depending on the outcome of the inquiry, it is hoped that work will start early in 1988 and be completed within a two year period. The total cost of the road is likely to be of the order of £36 million.

Fife Regional Council (Capital Allocations)

Mr. Henderson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what capital allocations have been made, and used, for educational purposes by Fife regional council in each of the last five years.

Mr. John MacKay: The information is given in the table:

Fife regional council

£000s at outturn prices

Education capital allocation			*Actual capital expenditure on education*
Year	*Allocation originally notified*	*Final level of consent*	
1982-83	1,535	2,119	2,587
1983-84	1,255	1,121	1,710
1984-85	2,320	2,320	2,991
1985-86	3,885	3,615	4,788
1986-87	5,665	5,192	5,124
1987-88	4,080	n/a	n/a

Notes:

(1) The 'final level of consent' is after any adjustments for underspending or overspending in the previous year; any transfer of resources from other programmes; and any supplementary allocations which may have been made.

(2) All figures exclude capital financed from current revenue.

(3) The expenditure figures for 1985-86 are provisional and those for 1986-87 are estimates based on the authority's forecast of capital payments in the current year.

Women Judges

Mr. Tom Clarke asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many of the 24 judges of the court of session appointed under the Maximum Number of Judges (Scotland) Regulations 1986 are women.

Mr. Lang: None.

Health Boards (Rates)

Mr. Henderson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the amount of rates paid by each Scottish health board to *(a)* regional councils, *(b)* islands councils, *(c)* district councils and *(d)* in total for each of the last 10 years.

Mr. John MacKay: Information held centrally relates to payments in lieu of rates made by each health board to its local rating authority. No breakdown between regional and district council rates is available. The information is spread over a number of headings in health boards' annual accounts. I shall write to the hon. Member once the information has been collated. A copy of the letter will be placed in the Library.

PRIME MINISTER

Margarine and Cooking Oils

Q88. **Mr. Teddy Taylor** asked the Prime Minister if she will raise at the next meeting of the European Council the impact on consumers in the EEC of the Commission's proposals for a tax on margarine and cooking oils; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I hope that the Commission's oils and fats tax proposal will be withdrawn before the next European Council meeting in June. The right way to control the growing cost of the Community's oils and fats regime is to reduce support prices, not to tax the consumers.

10 Downing Street (Official Dinner)

Q130. **Mr. Pollock** asked the Prime Minister when she last hosted an official dinner at No. 10 Downing street.

The Prime Minister: I last gave an official dinner at No. 10 Downing street on Thursday 8 January.

USSR (Visit)

Q149. **Mr. David Atkinson** asked the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on her forthcoming visit to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Renton), Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, to my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) on 18 February at column *693*.

Manpower Services Commission

Q180. **Dr. Godman** asked the Prime Minister if she has any plans to change the role and functions of Manpower Services Commission managing agents of community programme schemes.

The Prime Minister: The role and functions of community programme managing agents are kept under review by the Manpower Services Commission. There are at present no plans for changes.

Crown Estate Commissioners

Mr. Kennedy asked the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on ministerial accountability for the Crown Estate Commissioners in respect of policy decisions taken by them.

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland are accountable for any directions that might be given to the Crown Estate Commissioners as to the discharge of their functions under the Crown Estate Act 1961. The commissioners are required to provide the Treasury with accounts and other returns and with estimates of future receipts and expenditure. Treasury approval is also required for the salary of the commissioners and the numbers and conditions of service of their staff.

Engagements

Mr. Pike asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 3 March.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 3 March.

Mr. Janner asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 3 March.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 3 March.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House I shall be having further meetings later today. This evening I hope to have an audience of Her Majesty the Queen.

ENVIRONMENT

Labour Mobility (Housing)

86. **Mr. Holt** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what new initiatives the Government are introducing to stimulate and assist individuals and families to relocate in areas of housing shortage following the successful obtainment of permanent employment.

Mr. Tracey: Five million pounds of the Housing Corporation's programme for 1987-88 will be allocated to the provision of grants of up to 30 per cent. of the cost of housing association schemes to provide shared accommodation for young single people moving into an area to take up employment. Recent measures in the Housing and Planning Act are intended to enable shared ownership schemes to become more widely available using private finance. These schemes can be particularly helpful to home owners moving into an area of higher house prices. The new Act also increases the scope for approved landlords to offer assured tenancies to widen the choice in the private rented sector. The powers proposed in the Local Government Bill to enable local authorities to give financial assistance towards the provision of privately rented housing will be a further encouragement to mobility, for public sector tenants the well established national mobility scheme, tenants exchange scheme and key workers schemes run by local authorities are available.

Council Spending (Ealing)

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from residents in the London borough of Ealing concerning the policies and spending of Ealing council.

Mr. Chope: The Department has received representations from residents in the London borough of Ealing complaining about the extent of the rate increases being proposed.

PRC Homes

Mr. Stern asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of PRC homes eligible for assistance have been repaired to date; and approximately what proportion he expects to have been repaired by 31 March 1988.

Mr. Tracey: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave on 4 February to my hon. Friend the Member for Epping

Forest (Sir J. Biggs-Davison) at column *723* concerning progress under the housing defects legislation. Evidence available to the Department suggests that some 23,000 private owners of PRC properties were eligible for assistance. Although it is not possible to forecast reliably the position at 31 March 1988 we expect to see substantial progress on repairs over the next year.

Association for Children's Play and Recreation Ltd.

Mr. Spearing asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultations he intitated on, and what response was made to, his proposal that the functions of the charitable body, the Association for Children's Play and Recreation Ltd., should be assessed by the Sports Council.

Mr. Tracey: In addition to discussions with the two organisations directly involved and with other interested Government Departments, the views of the Association of County Councils, the Association of District Councils and the Association of Metropolitan Authorities were sought. Written comments were also received from voluntary organisations. All the organisations consulted accepted that some degree of change was necessary if arrangements for children's play were to be improved, though several have expressed misgivings about the proposed merger. I remain convinced that this option offers a secure future for children's play and I welcome the fact that negotiations between the Sports Council and Play Board are well advanced.

New Towns

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the powers to be provided for the local government and Parliamentry Commissioners to investigate complaints against the Commission for the New Towns and the New Towns Corporation.

Mr. John Patten: As foreshadowed in paragraph 11 of its White Paper (Cmnd. 9563, July 1985), the Government are currently seeking powers, through the Parliamentary and Health Service Commissioners Bill, to extend the general jurisdiction of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration to the Commission for the New Towns and new town development corporations, with the exception of their housing functions which will be a matter for the Commission for Local Administration. Separate powers to give effect to this extention of their jurisdiction will be introduced when an appropriate opportunity arises.

Rented Housing

Mr. Raynsford asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table in the *Official Report* showing the total number of homes which he estimates were available to rent in England *(a)* from local authorities, *(b)* from housing organisations, *(c)* from other public authorities, *(d)* from private landlords, and *(e)* in total in each of the years from 1957 to 1986.

Mr. Tracey: The available estimates are:

Stock of rented dwellings: England
Thousands of dwellings

	Rented from			*Total rented stock*
	LAs and NTs	*HAs*	*Private owners and other tenures*[1]	
April				
1961	3,339	4,424		7,763
December				
1966	4,016	3,683		7,699
1967	4,145	3,569		7,714
1968	4,267	3,455		7,722
1969	4,390	3,354		7,744
1970	4,506	3,202		7,708
1971	4,587	3,122		7,709
1972	4,605	3,013		7,618
1973	4,635	2,911		7,546
1974	4,743	2,811		7,554
1975	4,872	2,707		7,579
1976	4,990	2,619		7,609
1977	5,096	2,547		7,643
1978	5,157	2,476		7,633
1979	5,187	2,404		7,591
1980	5,171	2,341		7,512
1981	5,117	411	1,876	7,404
1982	4,952	432	1,799	7,183
1983	4,837	451	1,726	7,014
1984	4,755	474	1,656	6,885
1985	4,677	493	1,587	6,757
1986[2]	4,606	507	1,516	6,629

[1] "Private owners and other tenures" include dwellings occupied by virtue of employment whether in public or private ownership, and before 1981 included housing associations.
[2] provisional.
Note: For statistical purposes the stock estimates are expressed to the nearest thousand, but should not be regarded as accurate to the last digit. Estimates are based on data from the Censuses of 1961 to 1981 and those for the years before 1971 are not strictly comparable.

Right to Buy

Mr. Caborn asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to revise, in line with inflation, the £50 maximum limit for fees that may be payable to a local authority for services incurred under the right to buy provisions of the Housing Act 1980.

Mr. Tracey: The limit is under review and I will let the hon. Member know the outcome.

Homeless People

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the latest 12-month period which is available for the total number of people who applied to be treated as homeless; how many were accepted as homeless under the Homeless Persons Act; and how many were offered non-permanent accommodation.

Mr. Tracey: On the basis of information provided to the Department by local authorities, in the period 1 October 1985 to 30 September 1986, inquiries under the homelessness legislation were completed for 217,740 households, and authorities accepted responsibility to accommodate 101,280 households. The Department does not collect information on the number of households

placed in temporary accommodation. However, information published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy shows that in the financial year 1985-86 authorities placed at least 39,432 households in temporary accommodation.

Urban Programme

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the amount of money that will be devoted to the urban programme for inner cities in 1987-88 compared with the previous year; and what is the percentage change in real terms from 1986-87 to 1987-88.

Mr. John Patten: Provision for the urban programme (including urban development grant and urban regeneration grant) in 1987-88 is £324 million, compared with £317 million in 1986-87. This is a reduction of 1·5 per cent. in real terms. Provision for the urban group of programmes as a whole, however, (including urban development corporations and derelict land grant) is increased by £54 million, or an increase of 7·3 per cent. in real terms.

Homes Insulation

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what level of housing insulation grant he plans to make available to householders who are not claiming housing benefit or supplementary benefit.

Mr. John Patten: None. Under the proposed new homes insulation scheme which I announced on 19 December at column *756* grants would only be available to eligible householders who are in receipt of housing benefit or supplementary benefit. Our aim is to target help on those who most need it.

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make 100 per cent. home insulation grants available to any householder claiming either housing benefit or supplementary benefit.

Mr. John Patten: No. The proposed new scheme would withdraw the general grant at 66 per cent. but would extend the 90 per cent. grant to all householders who are in receipt of housing benefit or supplementary benefit (provided the other conditions of the scheme are met).

We would normally expect householders to have a stake in this sort of expenditure, to help to ensure that the total amount of expenditure is reasonable.

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total expenditure level on the homes insulation scheme in 1986; and what is the expected level for 1987.

Mr. John Patten: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, the Member for Surbiton, (Mr. Tracey) to the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) on Friday 13 February at column *380*.

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of those householders who claimed home insulation grants in 1986 were claiming housing benefit or supplementary benefit.

Mr. John Patten: This information is not available.

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has made of the percentage of householders in dwellings without loft insulation claiming either housing benefit or supplementary benefit.

Mr. John Patten: Precise information is not available, but the Government believe it is sensible to target assistance towards the costs of loft insulation on the households least able to afford it for themselves. On 19 December last, I therefore announced our intention to extend the scheme of 90 per cent. grants for this purpose to all on housing benefit or supplementary benefit.

Local Authority Expenditure

Mr. Hardy asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the total costs incurred by commerce and industry as a result of the reduction in the share of local authority expenditure met from central funds since 1979, including his estimate of such costs for the current financial year.

Mr. Chope: The level of Exchequer grant is determined each year in relation to estimated local authority relevant expenditure and it is not possible to know what local authorities would have spent if a different proportion of relevant expenditure were met by grant. However if grant were paid at 60 per cent., the percentage at settlement in England for 1979-80, of the estimated relevant expenditure set out in each of the rate support grant settlements from 1979-80 to 1986-87, then the total available would be about £10½ billion more than shown in those reports; this would have been financed from central taxation. Assuming this amount was in fact simply met by rates about 40 per cent. would have come from industrial and commercial ratepayers.

New Towns Act 1981

Mr. Hoyle asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his reply of 23 February, *Official Report*, column *96*, if he will publish in the *Official Report*, the text of the direction issued in March 1985 to Warrington and Runcorn Development Corporation under section 43 of the New Towns Act 1981.

Mr. John Patten: The text of the direction issued in March 1985 to the Warrington and Runcorn development corporation and Warrington borough council under section 43 of the New Towns Act 1981 is as follows:

NEW TOWNS ACT 1981

DIRECTION UNDER SECTION 43(1) WITH RESPECT TO THE NEW TOWN OF WARRINGTON

Whereas the condition mentioned in section 43(2)*(b)* of the New Towns Act 1981 is satisfied with respect to the new town of Warrington;

Now therefore the Secretary of State for the Environment in exercise of his powers under section 43(1) of the said Act, hereby directs the Warrington and Runcorn Development Corporation and the Warrington Borough Council (being the council of a district within which the area of the new town of Warrington is situated) to enter into consultations with him, with each other and with the council of any other district within which any part of the area of the new town or any dwellings of the new town or any associated property is or are situated, with a view to a transfer scheme being made in respect of the new town of Warrington by the Warrington and Runcorn Development Corporation and the Warrington Borough Council.

Any expression which is used in this direction and which is also used in the said Act shall, unless the context otherwise requires, have the same meaning as it has in that Act.

Signed by authority of the
Secretary of State
A. J. C. Simcock,
an Assistant Secretary in the
21 March Department of the Environment.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will take a decision on the selection of prospective sites for the deep burial of long-lived radioactive wastes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: Responsibility for identifying potential sites for the disposal of intermediate level radioactive wastes rests with UK NIREX Ltd. Heat-generating wastes will be vitrified and stored for at least 50 years before disposal, so the question of site selection for these wastes does not currently arise.

Council Rents

Mr. Raynsford asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing the average council rent level as a percentage of *(a)* average earnings and *(b)* the state retirement pension for a single pensioner and a pensioner couple in each of the years from 1970 to 1986.

Mr. Tracey: The estimated figures are as follows:

Average local authority and new town unrebated rents

	As per cent. of average earnings[1]	*As per cent. of state retirement pension*[2]	
		Single person	*Married couple*
England and Wales			
1970	7·6	45·4	28·0
1971	7·5	49·6	30·6
1972	7·5	45·8	28·4
1973	8·2	51·0	31·6
1974	7·9	48·4	30·0
1975	6·8	35·9	22·5
1976	6·6	35·9	22·5
1977	7·0	36·1	22·5
1978	6·6	33·4	20·9
England			
1979	6·3	32·9	20·5
1980	6·2	33·0	20·6
1981	8·1	42·1	26·3
1982	8·7	45·6	28·5
1983	8·3	42·7	26·7
1984	8·2	43·2	27·0
1985	8·1	43·5	27·2
1986	7·8	42·8	26·7

[1] Average earnings for men aged 21 and over working full-time in all occupations. *Source:* Department of Employment "New Earnings Survey".

[2] Basic state retirement pension based on national insurance contributions. *Source:* DHSS.

Derelict Land Grant

Mr. Steen asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many acres of derelict land have been brought back into use for each year since the derelict land grant scheme was first introduced.

Mr. John Patten: This information is not available. However, the following areas of derelict land in England have been reclaimed with the aid of derelict land grant:

	Area (acres)
1974-75	2,235
1975-76	3,221
1976-77	2,129
1977-78	3,912
1978-79	3,115
1979-80	3,053
1980-81	3,465
1981-82	4,303
1982-83	3,567
1983-84	3,369
1984-85	3,317
1985-86	2,594

Note: Comparable information for earlier years is not available.

Notting Hill Housing Trust

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how much grant was paid to the Notting Hill Housing Trust in each of the last 10 years; how much is being sought by this body for 1987-88; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tracey: Notting Hill Housing Trust has received revenue deficit grant, in respect of its accounting periods, as follows:

Period ended	£
30 September 1977	883,393
30 September 1978	639,182
30 September 1979	610,418
31 March 1981 (18 months)	1,314,939
31 March 1982	1,051,496
31 March 1983	232,707
31 March 1984	1,051,118
31 March 1985	818,103
31 March 1986	[1]260,054
31 March 1987	[2]416,000

[1] Estimated.

[2] Projected.

The association has not indicated the likely size of any claim in respect of the period ending 31 March 1988.

The NHHT has received subsidy under the Housing Finance Act 1972, in respect of financial years, as follows:

Financial year	£
1976-77	3,568
1977-78	3,068
1978-79	2,568
1979-80	2,068
1980-81	1,568
1981-82	1,068
1982-83	568
1983-84	[1]68

[1] Final payment.

The NHHT has received extra-statutory development loss grant payments as follows:

Date of payment	£
2 March 1983	330,266
22 November 1983	10,800
19 March 1985	[1]6,529

[1] Final payment.

Registered housing associations may receive payments of housing association grant in respect of specific housing projects. HAG is paid through the Housing Corporation and through local authorities, and details of payments to individual associations are not kept centrally.

CIVIL SERVICE

Rayner Reviews

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley asked the Minister for the Civil Service what are the total cumulative savings arising as a result of the Rayner reviews to date.

Mr. Luce: Cumulative savings of around £1 billion have been made since 1979 as a result of efficiency scrutinies. Currently, savings are running at some £300 million a year with further annual savings of about £100 million in the pipeline.

WALES

Companies

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the number of companies which have been established in Wales over the past seven years; and if he will give a breakdown of the countries from which they came.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The main countries of origin of the 258 new manufacturing plants opened in Wales since 1 January 1980 for which an origin has been assigned (new start-up manufacturing plants are not assigned a geographical origin) are as follows:

	Number
United Kingdom (excluding Wales)	129
Wales	79
Direct Overseas[1]	50
Of which	
United States of America	16
West Germany	9
Eire	3
Other EEC	3
Japan	6
Canada	3
Other	10

[1] The country of origin of a new manufacturing plant is not necessarily the country of ultimate ownership; new overseas manufacturing plants opened since 1980 for which the origin is an overseas-owned plant already in production in the United Kingdom are assigned an origin within the United Kingdom.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will provide the latest available figures as to how many people are employed by foreign companies in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The latest estimate is that about 44,000 people are employed in overseas-owned manufacturing plants now in production in Wales.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Natural History Museum

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has recently met relevant trades unions to discuss the proposed introduction of admission charges to the natural history museum.

Mr. Walden: No. Admission charges are a matter for the trustees of the museum.

Microcomputers

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what contribution to teaching is made by microcomputers in *(a)* secondary schools and *(b)* primary schools.

Mrs. Rumbold: The contribution microcomputers can make is large: I am sending my hon. Friend the reports of the subject associations which illustrate what can be done, both in primary and secondary schools.

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has as to the use made by schools of microcomputers.

Mrs. Rumbold: My Department has recently published a survey on this, a copy of which is in the Library.

Outturn Expenditure

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science, further to his reply to the hon. Member for Yeovil on 20 February, *Official Report*, column *840*, concerning the proportions of expenditure covered by education support grants and in-service training grants, what administrative arrangements ensure that such grants cover the intended proportion of outturn expenditure; what proportion has total outturn expenditure borne to total approved budgeted expenditure for each programme in each relevant year; what amounts of grants have been paid in each year to cover outturn expenditure in excess of approved budgeted expenditure for each programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: In the case of both these grants, the Secretary of State approves ahead of the year in question a specific sum of expenditure in each local education authority to be eligible for grant. He pays grant at a fixed percentage on that approved expenditure, or such lower expenditure as the local education authority claims. If the authority spends more than the approved sum, the Secretary of State does not increase the grant; and he does not ask authorities to inform him of out-turns which are higher than the approved sum.

EC (COMETT Programme)

Mr. Duffy asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he is assisting the University of Sheffield in its recent endeavours to establish university enterprise training partnerships (UETP) under the European Economic Community's COMETT programme, and in particular its attempts within this programme to place Yorkshire and Humberside students into companies and industries in other European Economic Community member states.

Mr. Walden: The Government wish to encourage applications for COMETT funding from United Kingdom higher education institutions and has set up an information centre to assist the relevant interests, a service which is open to all higher education institutions including the university of Sheffield.

Mr. Mason asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on progress made by the COMETT action programme of the European Community in education and training for technology; what grants have been made available from the European

Economic Community to stimulate co-operation between universities and enterprises in respect of training in the field of technology; to what extent the university of Sheffield has been assisted by his Department in the development of these schemes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Walden: COMETT was adopted by the EC Council of Ministers on 24 July 1986. The closing date for the first round of applications is 31 March 1987 and decisions on these are expected in late July. This is the first EC programme to offer specific support for co-operation between higher education institutions and enterprises in training for technology. The Government wish to encourage United Kingdom higher education institutions to apply for EC funding under the COMETT programme. On his question regarding the university of Sheffield I refer the right hon. Member to my answer to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Duffy) earlier today.

ENERGY

Power Stations (Cost)

Dr. Michael Clark asked the Secretary of State for Energy what is the estimated cost of building *(a)* a nuclear power station, *(b)* a coal or oil-fired power station and *(c)* an oil burning station, of the same generating capacity.

Mr. Goodlad: I shall ask the CEGB to write to the hon. Member.

Electricity Prices

Mr. Hardy asked the Secretary of State for Energy what action he is taking within the European Economic Community to seek to ensure that electricity prices charged to industry by member countries are fair and transparent; what representations he has made to the Commission about the compatibility of electricity prices in France with the treaty of Rome; what action Her Majesty's Government propose to take on this matter within the general agreement on tariffs and trade; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: The Council of Ministers has agreed principles governing electricity pricing on the Community. The Commission has confirmed that it will ensure the application of the treaty of Rome to pricing in the electricity sector and will bring to the Council's attention any malpractices.

Mr. Hardy asked the Secretary of State for Energy what price is paid for the electricity imported from France by the Central Electricity Generating Board; and what information he has about the extent to which this price covers the total cost of production.

Mr. Goodlad: The detailed terms on which electricity is traded between the CEGB and Electricité de France are commercially confidential. The CEGB has, however, stated that its present arrangements provide for a two-year supply at a cost of up to 20 per cent. cheaper than could be generated on average in the United Kingdom. The costs of production are a matter for Electricité de France.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Business Improvement Scheme

88. **Mr. Galley** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to what extent the resources for the business improvement scheme have been allocated and spent; and if he will make a statement on the future of the scheme.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The business improvement services package of schemes operates only in England and Wales. Broadly similar schemes operate in Scotland and Northern Ireland. £53,950,000 has been allocated to BIS in specified areas in England. At the end of November 1986, 68 per cent. of this amount had been fully committed in response to applications, and 28 per cent. of it actually paid to applicants. But I am keeping the future of the BIS under review.

Power Manufacturing Industry

Mr. Blair asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will estimate the projected number of jobs in the power manufacturing industry from 1987 to 1990.

Mr. Giles Shaw: It is not possible to forecast the number of jobs in the power manufacturing industry in the future. In common with all manufacturing industry, this will depend on the orders which are secured. It is estimated that around 40,000 are currently employed in power manufacturing.

Trade Descriptions Act 1972

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he informed Parliament about the need to repeal the Trade Descriptions Act 1972 for reasons of European Economic Community law; if European Economic Community decisions on the matter required unanimity; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: I explained the background to this matter in answers to my hon. Friends the Members for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) and for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) on 1 December last year, at columns 434 and 426. The need to repeal the Trade Descriptions Act 1972 results from threatened action by the European Commission under article 169 of the EC treaty, based upon legal precedents established in the European Court of Justice on the interpretation of article 30 of the treaty. Decisions of the European Community, as such, are not involved.

EC-Japan (Trade)

Mr. Malins asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish a table showing imports, exports and the resulting trade balance between the European Community and Japan, for each year since 1980, including 1986, in relation to the following goods (i) motor cars, (ii) video cassette recorders, (iii) compact disc players, (iv) electronic typewriters, (v) photocopying machines and (vi) machine tools.

Mr. Alan Clark: Data on electronic typewriters are not readily available. Figures for the other goods are in the following table:

European Community (12) Trade with Japan
United States $ million

	Exports	*Imports*	*Crude balance*
Passenger cars (SITC 781)			
1980	324·6	3,232·9	−2,908·4
1981	240·3	3,156·2	−2,915·9
1982	279·1	2,660·6	−2,381·5
1983	343·1	3,116·6	−2,773·5
1984	382·5	3,272·5	−2,890·0
1985	500·4	3,284·3	−2,783·9
1986[1]	870·0	5,320·0	−4,450·0
Video cassette recorders (SITC 76381)			
1980	1·1	686·3	−685·2
1981	1·0	1,264·4	−1,263·4
1982	0·4	1,093·3	−1,092·8
1983	1·0	1,817·6	−1,816·6
1984	[2]1·0	1,284·9	−1,283·9
1985	1·1	1,279·7	−1,278·6
[1]1986	3·0	1,380·0	−1,377·0
Compact disc players (Nimexe 921120)			
1980	..	..	..
1981	..	..	..
1982	..	..	..
1983	..	..	..
1984	0·2	22·0	−21·8
1985	6·4	84·1	−77·7
[1]1986	3·0	212·0	−209·0
Photocopying machines (SITC 75182)			
1980	23·4	362·0	−338·6
1981	4·5	422·7	−418·2
1982	8·3	457·8	−449·5
1983	5·2	513·1	−507·9
1984	1·3	545·9	−544·6
1985	1·5	658·3	−656·8
[1]1986	2·0	820·0	−818·0
Machine tools (SITC's 728, 736)			
1980	214·3	379·1	−164·8
1981	197·9	362·4	−164·5
1982	208·6	345·1	−136·5
1983	157·8	311·0	−153·1
1984	164·2	414·8	−250·6
1985	188·1	585·0	−396·8
1986	..	..	..

.. Not readily available.
[1] Provisional estimate.
[2] Adjusted to allow for return of equipment.
Source: OECD (via DRI).
Eurostat (via WEFA).

Industrial Development

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the amount granted in national selective assistance under section 8 of the Industrial Development Act 1972 and the Industrial Development Act 1982 to Scotland, Wales and the regions of England in each year since 1979-80 at constant 1986 prices.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Cumulative expenditure by region from 1 April 1979 to 31 March 1986 for certain forms of assistance under section 8 of the Industry Act 1972 and the Industrial Development Act 1982 is as follows:

Region	*Amount (£,000)*
Scotland	42,916
Wales	25,805
North East	11,218
Yorkshire and Humberside	59,521
East Midlands	55,553
West Midlands	69,749
South East	128,200
South West	35,311
North West	87,108
Northern Ireland-mixed	3,045
Total	518,426

The forms of assistance included are the following schemes: wool textiles (parts 1 and 2), ferrous foundries, machine tools, clothing, paper and board, non-ferrous foundry, instrumentation, drop forging, printing machinery, textile machinery, poultrymeat processing, footwear, accelerated project, selective investment, support for major projects, redmeat slaughterhouse, electronic components, microelectronics industry support 1, coal firing, fibre optics and opto-electronics, private sector steel, small engineering firms investment (1 and 2), advanced manufacturing technology, computer aided design and test equipment, innovation linked investment, quality assurance and support for the microelectronics industry.

The more detailed information requested by the hon. Member could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Company Inspectors

Mr. McCrindle asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many company inspectors are employed by his Department; if, in the light of recent events affecting the City, he has any plans to seek to increase the powers available to them; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: There are 20 specialist departmental officers engaged full-time on investigations, mainly under section 447 of the Companies Act 1985, in the companies investigation branch of my Department.

In addition, the Department engages outside inspectors as required to make inquiries under sections 432 and 442 of the Companies Act 1985, and to inquire into insider dealing allegations. At present there is a total of 20 such inspectors.

Powers of inspectors were widened by the Companies Act 1981 and the Financial Services Act. There are no plans for further change.

Consumer Protection Bill

Mr. Rowe asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress he has made in consulting interested parties on the proposals on misleading price indications put forward in the context of the Consumer Protection Bill by the National Consumer Council, the Retail Consortium and enforcement officers.

Mr. Howard: My Department issued a consultation paper to interested parties on 27 February. Copies have been placed in the Library.

Maritime Mortgages

Mr. Squire asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will consider modernising the system of registering maritime mortgages to enable a prospective mortgagee to record a notice of intent to make an advance secured by mortgage to be registered within the ensuing 14 days.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I have been asked to reply.

The Government recognise the need for a facility of this sort, but legislation will be needed to give it effect. I hope there will be a suitable opportunity in the next Session.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

USSR (Entry Visas)

Mr. Temple-Morris asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether any progress is being made towards a reciprocal agreement with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics over the granting of multiple entry visas for the British business community in Moscow and the trade representatives of the Soviet Union in London; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: I have no progress to report. We shall continue to pursue this issue with the Soviet authorities.

Diplomats (Traffic Offences)

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Leicester, East of 14 January, *Official Report*, columns *201-3*, he will indicate for each diplomatic mission the number of cars which accounted for the number of fixed penalty notices cancelled; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: I regret that the information requested is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Agents Provocateurs

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what guidance the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary issues to his force about the use of agents provocateurs.

Mr. Scott: The Chief Constable issues guidance to the Royal Ulster Constabulary in accordance with paragraph 1.92 of the Home Office consolidated circular on crime and kindred matters, which advises that no member of a police force should counsel, incite or procure the commission of a crime. A copy of the consolidated circular is in the Library.

Prisoners (Statistics)

Mr. J. Enoch Powell asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will analyse by date of birth and length of imprisonment the 34 prisoners who at the end of the current year will still be detained during the Secretary of State's pleasure.

Mr. Scott: The information is as follows:

Date of birth	*Period served (years)*
1954	
9 May	13
1955	
5 January	11
27 November	6
1956	
21 March	13
24 June	
19 July	11
25 November	8
30 November	12
1957	
10 February	7
11 February	11
12 February	12
26 June	9
16 August	12
9 September	11
12 September	
11 October	
1958	
18 February	10
28 February	11
29 March	10
26 May	7
7 September	10
17 September	11
25 September	12
27 November	10
30 November	
1959	
6 April	
23 April	9
11 September	7
10 October	10
1960	
9 May	7
26 December	9
1962	5
3 March	
1963	
22 August	
1967	
22 February	2

Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what were the proposals on the draft Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 and the Flags and Emblems (Display) Act (Northern Ireland) 1954 put forward by the Irish side of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference at its meeting in Belfast on 8 December 1986; and what response was made by the British side.

Mr. Tom King [*pursuant to his reply*, 26 February 1987, c. *385-86*]: At the meeting of the Intergovernmental Conference on 8 December the Irish expressed views on some aspects of the proposal for a draft public order order which we published on 1 December. We took account of those views and of many others in our decision to lay the draft public order order before the House. I do not believe it would be appropriate to go beyond the joint statement issued after the meeting of the Intergovernmental Conference in detailing the Irish Government's comments. But the Irish Government publicly welcomed the proposal for the draft public order order.

EMPLOYMENT

Engineering Industry Training Board

8. **Mr. Pike** asked the Paymaster General what has been the Government's response to the industry consultation paper recently published by the Engineering industry training board.

Mr. Trippier: The Government welcome the lead that the board is taking in reviewing what needs to be done to tackle the training issues in the engineering industry. I am meeting the chairman of the EITB tomorrow (4 March) when I shall be discussing with him the industry's response to the options in the information paper.

39. **Mrs. Golding** asked the Paymaster General what steps he is taking to help the engineering industry training board improve the volume of engineering training.

Mr. Trippier: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Members for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) and for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth) on 16 December 1986 at column *1039*.

Small Firms Counsellors

15. **Mrs. Roe** asked the Paymaster General what steps he is taking to encourage female business people to become small firms counsellors.

Mr. Trippier: I am anxious to see a larger number of business women as small firms service counsellors. To that end, I have sought to raise awareness through contact with various women's organisations, with the press, and also through advertising in magazines read by professional women. As a result of this, I am pleased to say that the service is expecting 30 applicants to be interviewed in the near future.

Leisure Industry

20. **Mr. Fry** asked the Paymaster General how many persons are currently employed in the leisure industry; and how this compares with 1983 and 1980.

Mr. Trippier: There is no generally agreed definition of the leisure industry in terms of the standard industrial classification, but the number of employees in sectors which most directly serve tourism and leisure activities was just over 1·3 million in September 1986, an increase of 10 per cent. over September 1983 and of 11 per cent. over September 1980.

Knitwear Industry

23. **Sir John Farr** asked the Paymaster General if he will take steps to improve the training and retraining facilities for those in the knitwear industry.

Mr. Trippier: Employers have the responsibility for determining and meeting the training needs of the knitwear industry. This was a responsibility willingly accepted by industry when the statutory training board was abolished. The successor body, the knitting and lace industries training resources agency (KLITRA), is actively developing strategies to meet those training needs. The Government through the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) have a close working relationship with the agency and provide some financial support to promote the development of training and retraining initiatives.

Basildon

24. **Mr. Amess** asked the Paymaster General if he will give the latest figures for unemployed people, and the percentage of unemployed, in Basildon.

Mr. Lee: On 8 January 1987, there were 8,695 unemployed claimants in the Basildon local authority district. Unemployment precentage rates are calculated only for self-contained labour markets; the smallest areas are travel-to-work areas.

Special Employment Measures

27. **Mr. Prescott** asked the Paymaster General how many people he projects will be on special employment measures in June 1987 and September 1987.

Mr. Lee: It is not possible to predict with any certainty how many people will be on the employment, training and enterprise measures run by my Department and the Manpower Services Commission in any particular month. However, in 1987-88 we expect over a milion people to have been helped by these measures.

Service Sector Jobs

32. **Mr. Weetch** asked the Paymaster General what was the net loss or gain in service sector jobs in Britain and the East Anglian region, respectively, in 1986.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: There are no figures for job gains and job losses.

Between September 1985 and September 1986 (the latest year for which figures are available) there was a net increase in the number of employees in employment in the service industries in Great Britain of 303,000. In the same period there was a comparable increase for East Anglia of 20,000.

Community Programme

18. **Mr. Kennedy** asked the Paymaster General to what extent the distribution of resources within the community programme take account of regional variations in overhead costs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: Community programme resources allow funding of up to £440 per participant place for operating costs expenditure. This maximum figure applies equally to projects in all parts of the country.

21. **Mr. Leighton** asked the Paymaster General what plans he has for the future development of the community programme in relation to 18 to 25-year-olds.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The community programme is currently available in most places to those people aged 18 to 25 who have been unemployed for six months or more. However, we believe that the new job training scheme is a better route back into employment for unemployed people under 25 in their own interest, and as good quality JTS expands it will be the preferred scheme for this age group. The community programme can then provide more places for the longer-term unemployed. At the moment, therefore, in the nine original job training scheme pilot areas eligibility for those aged 18 to 25 is the same as for other unemployed people, namely, that they should have been unemployed for 12 months or more.

33. **Mrs. Dunwoody** asked the Paymaster General how many people find work after completing the community programme.

69. **Mr. Haynes** asked the Paymaster General what proportion of community programme participants enter into jobs after leaving the scheme.

Mr. Lee: Latest survey results show that 54 per cent. of former community programme participants had had at least one job during the 10-month follow-up period, some 35 per cent. were in employment at the 10-month point, with a further 3 per cent. in training.

Apprentice Training

34. **Mrs. Shields** asked the Paymaster General how many 1986 school leavers have begun apprentice training; and if he will give comparative figures for 1979 and 1983.

Mr. Trippier: This information is available only in part; figures for 1986 school leavers are not available. In 1979, just over 90,000 school leavers in England and Wales began apprentice training. The comparative figure for 1983 is 28,000 which is increased to 57,000 if an estimate of apprentices and other long-term trainees on YTS is included in the total. Comparable figures are not available for Scotland.

The numbers entering traditional apprenticeships are becoming increasingly irrelevant as a measure of the real level of skills training being undertaken as industry's skill needs change. For many industries, including the expanding new technology sector, apprenticeship is not the usual means of achieving full skills status. YTS is now established as a major route into work and training for school leavers.

Job Training Scheme

16. **Mr. Kenneth Carlile** asked the Paymaster General how many people have received training under the job training scheme; and what proportion of these have since found jobs.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: 1,992 people had joined the new job training scheme up to 23 February. The Manpower Services Commission will be carrying out regular follow-up surveys of leavers to determine what proportion of leavers find jobs.

17. **Dr. Godman** asked the Paymaster General if he will make a statement on the job substitution effects of the job training scheme.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: In additional to vocational training. The job training scheme will involve short periods of practical experience often with more than one employer and interspersed with periods of directed training. Substitution is therefore likely to be small.

31. **Mr. Duffy** asked the Paymaster General how many places have been filled on the job training scheme.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The number of people taking part in the new job training scheme at 23 February was 1,569.

35. **Ms. Clare Short** asked the Paymaster General if he will make a statement on the expansion of the job training scheme.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I refer the hon. Member to the statement that I made to the House on 28 January at column 337.

45. **Mr. Sheerman** asked the Paymaster General what impact he expects the job training scheme to have on the unemployment figures in each month to December 1987.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) earlier today.

58. **Mr. Wareing** asked the Paymaster General how many people are presently receiving training under the new job training scheme within the pilot areas; and what percentage of them are disabled.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: At 23 February the number of people on the new job training scheme was 1,569.

Up-to-date information on the percentage of those who are disabled is not available. However, a survey of a sample of trainees in early January showed that some 13 per cent. had a health problem or disability which affected the type of work that they could do.

84. **Mr. Tom Clarke** asked the Paymaster General what assessments have been made of the outcome of the pilot job training schemes.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The experiences and attitudes of new JTS participants in the pilot areas will be assessed in a survey carried out by an external research organisation.

76. **Mr. Wallace** asked the Paymaster General how many hours of training and work experience are anticipated on the job training scheme; and what is the minimum number of hours for each.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Training programmes will be designed for each individual according to his or her personal needs and the needs of the labour market. They may last from three to 12 months. They consist of integrated directed training and practical experience. In an average six-month programme there will be a minimum of 300 hours of directed training. The remainder of the time will be spent on linked practical experience.

71. **Mr. Ernie Ross** asked the Paymaster General what indications he has so far received from the pilot areas concerning the progress of the job training scheme.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: All the early indications show that in terms of the take-up, the range of training and practical experience on offer and the attractiveness of the scheme to unemployed people, the new job training scheme will be a success.

Job Creation

22. **Mr. George Howarth** asked the Paymaster General how many and what type of new jobs have been created since 1983.

Mr. Lee: There are no figures for job gains and job losses.

Between March 1983 and September 1986, the latest date for which figures are available, the civilian employed labour force (the sum of employees in employment and the self-employed) in Great Britain has changed as shown in the table, which presents estimates which are not adjusted for seasonal variation.

Changes in the size of the civilian employed labour force in Great Britain—March 1983 to September 1986

	Thousands[1]
Agriculture, forestry and fishing [0]	+9
Metal goods, engineering, vehicles [3]	−231
Other production industries [1, 2, 4]	−125
Construction [5]	+61
Distribution, hotels, catering, repairs [6]	+544
Transport and communication [7]	+21
Banking, finance, insurance etc [8]	+501
Other services [9]	+535
Total	+1,315

[1] Not seasonally adjusted.

Numbers in brackets denote divisions of the standard industrial classification 1980.

If adjusted for seasonal variation the total increase becomes 1,128,000.

37. **Mr. Livsey** asked the Paymaster General if he will list the proportion in each region of new jobs created since 1983.

Mr. Lee: There are no figures for job gains and job losses.

Between September 1983 and September 1986 (the latest date for which figures are available), the civilian employed labour force in the regions of Great Britain changed as shown in the table:

	Change	*Percentage change*
South East	443,000	6
East Anglia	105,000	13
South West	96,000	5
West Midlands	96,000	4
East Midlands	74,000	5
Yorkshire and Humberside	68,000	3
North West	17,000	1
North	43,000	4
Wales	−2,000	—
Scotland	12,000	1

77. **Mr. McWilliam** asked the Paymaster General what percentage of the total unemployed are aged 25 years or less; and what initiatives the Government are pursuing in order to provide full-time employment at average rates of pay for those affected.

Mr. Lee: On 8 January 1987, 34·4 per cent. of unemployed claimants in the United Kingdom were aged under 25 years. All of the employment, training and enterprise measures run by my Department and the Manpower Services Commission are part of a wider strategy for encouraging enterprise and employment.

Small Firms (Marketing)

40. **Mr. Cash** asked the Paymaster General what steps he is taking to encourage marketing expertise in the small firms sector.

Mr. Trippier: In conjunction with Business in the Community, I am initiating a marketing week for small firms in 1987. The week will start on 8 June and stimulate a wide range of locally-based events with a marketing flavour. In addition, a series of seminars on marketing aimed at the small firms sector will be launched in marketing week. The seminars will be organised by the Institute of Marketing and sponsored by the Department of Employment, the Manpower Services Commission and Lloyds Bank.

The Government operate a wide range of schemes to encourage marketing expertise in the small firms sector, including the Department of Trade and Industry's support for marketing scheme which offers subsidised marketing consultancy to small and medium-sized firms in both the manufacturing and service sectors.

New Work Scheme

41. **Mr. Park** asked the Paymaster General how many people are being helped under the new workers scheme; and what proportion of these are disabled.

Mr. Lee: Some 34,000 young people are currently in jobs supported under the new workers scheme. There are no available statistics on the number of those who are disabled.

Small Business Sector (Investment)

42. **Mr. Bruce** asked the Paymaster General if he will make a statement on the level of investment by pension funds and insurance companies in the small business sector.

Mr. Trippier: Full records of investment by pension funds and insurance companies in small businesses are not available. Statistics for the United Kingdom venture capital industry show that they provide over 50 per cent. of the finance for private independent venture capital funds. A study undertaken for the National Association of Pension Funds, "An investigation of unquoted holding of United Kingdom financial institutions", showed that in a 1983-84 sample of United Kingdom pensions funds, representing about half the total in terms of asset value, 0·67 per cent. of their total assets were invested in unquoted securities of all kinds. For insurance companies, the proportion was 0·5 per cent. I believe that there is scope for pension funds and insurance companies to consider a greater involvement in the funding of small businesses with high growth potential.

London Retraining Centres

43. **Mr. Tom Cox** asked the Paymaster General if he will list the retraining centres for people unemployed in London.

Mr. Trippier: Manpower Services Commission officials are aware of about 150 organisations in London which have trained unemployed people under the Government's adult training schemes. A list will be placed in the Commons Library.

Land Use

44. **Mr. Adley** asked the Paymaster General if he will make a statement on *(a)* the employment and *(b)* the tourism consequences of the recent changes in Government policy on land use.

Mr. Trippier: The draft circular on development involving agricultural land, which was published on 9 February by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, proposes that in deciding development proposals affecting agricultural land the agricultural implications should be considered together with, the environmental and economic aspects; and that full regard should be had both to the need to promote

economic activity that provides jobs and to the need to protect green belts, national parks, areas of outstanding natural beauty, and other areas of good countryside. The draft circular has been sent to the local authority associations, business organisations and others, seeking comments by 10 April.

The revised policy should frequently make it easier than under the present policy (which was narrowly focused on the protection of land for agricultural purposes) to permit environmentally acceptable development. Proposals in the tourism sector are often necessarily of that character. The encouragement given by the draft circular to the re-use of redundant agricultural buildings and the lifting of agricultural occupancy conditions which have outlived their usefulness are likely to be of particular assistance to developments for tourism purposes.

More generally, the preservation of the countryside depends upon creating the conditions in which the enterprise of individuals can be translated into jobs and prosperity in the rural economy.

Manufacturing Industry

26. **Mr. Michie** asked the Paymaster General how many full-time and part-time workers were employed in manufacturing industry in 1979 and for the latest year available.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: In June 1979 there were 7,107,000 full-time and part-time employees in the manufacturing industries in Great Britain. A separate estimate for part-time employees is not available for 1979.

In June 1986, the figure was 5,148,000, of whom 346,000 were part-time employees.

Some of the decrease in the figures will be the result of the reclassification of jobs such as industrial cleaning, catering, computer services and road haulage, previously done by manufacturers' own employees and now done by subcontractors. This developing feature of our economy has the effect of exaggerating the extent of the move from manufacturing to service sector employment.

46. **Mr. Stan Thorne** asked the Paymaster General what was the net loss or gain of manufacturing jobs in Britain and the north-west region, respectively, in 1986.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: There are no figures for job gains and job losses.

Between September 1985 and September 1986 (the latest year for which figures are available) there was a net decrease in the number of employees in employment in the manufacturing industries in Great Britain of 142,000. In the same period there was a comparable decrease in the north-west region of 21,000.

Some of the decrease in the figures will be the result of the reclassification of jobs such as industrial cleaning, catering, computer services and road haulage, previously done by manufacturers' own employees and now done by subcontractors. This developing feature of our economy has the effect of exaggerating the extent of the move from manufacturing to service sector employment.

Small Firms (Management Training)

48. **Mr. Patrick Thompson** asked the Paymaster General what steps he is taking to encourage management training in small firms.

Mr. Trippier: I am anxious to encourage management training in small firms because it is a route to success. While responsibility for undertaking management training and development rests with small businessmen themselves, training providers can stimulate demand for it by the development of training packages specifically designed to meet the needs of those running small firms. These considerations have also been central to the development of the Manpower Services Commission's training for enterprise, managing company expansion, and open tech programmes and the new management development projects, all of which contain significant elements to support management training in small firms.

To encourage those concerned to take advantage of the wide range of training programmes, including management training, now provided by the private and public sector, the Manpower Services Commission has targeted small firms for priority marketing and ran a series of seminars in 1986-87 to convince owner/managers of the importance of training.

Self-Employed People

36. **Mr. Simon Hughes** asked the Paymaster General if he will make a statement on regional variations in the numbers of self-employed.

Mr. Trippier: Estimates of the numbers self-employed in each region are recorded on page 40 of the supplement published with the February edition *Employment Gazette*, a copy of which is in the Library. In each region there were more self-employed in 1985, the latest year for which firm estimates are available, than in 1979.

50. **Mr. Hirst** asked the Paymaster General what is his most recent estimate of the number of self-employed in the United Kingdom; and what was the comparable number in May 1979.

Mr. Lee: In September 1986, the latest date for which figures are available, there were an estimated 2,775,000 self-employed people in the United Kingdom. In June 1979 (figures are not available for May) the number was 1,925,000.

Minimum Wage and Training Levy

51. **Mr. Greg Knight** asked the Paymaster General what representations he has received in favour of introducing a national minimum wage policy and a 1 per cent. training levy on gross turnover of companies.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We have received a few letters from hon. Members and members of the public about a national minimum wage, but nothing on a 1 per cent. training levy.

Labour Mobility

52. **Mr. Dixon** asked the Paymaster General if he will make a statement concerning the success or otherwise of Government schemes to help the unemployed move in order to find jobs.

Mr. Lee: The travel to interview scheme was introduced nationally last June and it helps four or five times as many people with the cost of attending job interviews in other areas as the job search scheme which it replaced.

We abolished the employment transfer and free forward fare schemes last April because neither of them

was a cost-effective way of reducing unemployment or of filling vacancies for which suitable long-term unemployed people could not be found locally.

Restart Scheme

28. **Mr. Stern** asked the Paymaster General if he has any plans to make available to restart scheme trainees financial assistance with fees for short-term local authority-provided training courses which are relevant to their work under the scheme.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: A proportion of the people attending the one-week restart courses go on for further training. They are eligible for a wide range of training provision supported by the Manpower Services Commission, some of which may be delivered by local authorities.

53. **Mr. Ashton** asked the Paymaster General how many people have been called for interview under restart to date; and what percentage have gone on to receive full-time employment as a result.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: By 8 January 1987, 1,032,340 people had been called for interview. We have no means of knowing what proportion have gone on the full-time employment as a result. Some have been placed directly following their restart interview. But others will have found jobs after taking up one of the opportunities offered at the interview such as job clubs or training courses.

82. **Mr. Campbell-Savours** asked the Paymaster General how many people have been interviewed to date under restart; and what proportions have been placed into the community programme, the enterprise allowance scheme, the job training scheme and jobs, respectively.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: By 8 January, 779,051 people had been interviewed under the restart scheme. We have no means of knowing precisely how many have since found jobs or other opportunities which might lead to employment. However, 75 per cent. of participants agreed to pursue the offer made to them at their restart interview.

Local Employer Network Schemes

54. **Mr. Colvin** asked the Paymaster General how many local employer network schemes have now been established.

Mr. Trippier: The first 13 networks should be in place by the end of this month. The response from employers, employer organisations and others has been encouraging.

Tourism

55. **Mr. Robert C. Brown** asked the Paymaster General how many jobs he estimates will be created by tourism in 1987; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Ipswich (Mr. Wetch) on 3 February 1987 at columns 605-6.

83. **Mr. Butterfill** asked the Paymaster General what is the cost of creating a job *(a)* in the tourism sector through the use of section 4 grants under the Development of Tourism Act 1969 and *(b)* through other Government schemes.

Mr. Trippier: According to a recent study by Department of Employment economists, the cost averages from £6,000 in the local area (a radius of five miles from the project) to £4,000 in the region (a radius of 50 miles). These figures represent the gross cost per net full-time equivalent job at 1984 prices.

It would not be appropriate to compare these averages with cost per job estimates for the scheme made by other researchers, which use different definitions and methods. Nor, for similar technical reasons, is it proper to compare them with cost per job estimates for other Government schemes.

Enterprise Allowance Scheme

14. **Dr. Marek** asked the Paymaster General what kind of business advice is given to people participating in the enterprise allowance scheme during the year in which they receive assistance.

Mr. Trippier: All people joining the scheme must attend a day-long seminar at which basic business concepts are explained. They are given information about sources of business advice such as the small firms service, local enterprise agencies the Welsh and Scottish Development Agencies, bank managers, solicitors, accountants and others as well as details of business training available locally.

25. **Mr. Powley** asked the Paymaster General what is the up-to-date number of jobs that have been created by the enterprise allowance scheme.

Mr. Trippier: Information is not available in the form requested. Since the scheme began, to the end of January 1987, 205,921 people had joined the scheme to start their own businesses. Recent survey evidence based on a sample of enterprise allowance scheme participants indicates that 68 per cent. of businesses are still trading 18 months after start-up and at that stage for every 100 businesses still surviving 91 additional jobs have been created.

38. **Mr. Silvester** asked the Paymaster General what representations he has received concerning amendment to the enterprise allowance scheme.

Mr. Trippier: The Government continually receive representations, both from individuals and from organisations, suggesting changes in the rules and procedures of the scheme. All are seriously considered and, where appropriate, acted upon.

56. **Mr. Richard Page** asked the Paymaster General how many people have taken up the enterprise allowance scheme since its inception.

Mr. Trippier: At the end of January 1987, 205,921 people had taken up the enterprise allowance scheme since it commenced.

Skill Shortages

49. **Mr. Heathcoat-Amory** asked the Paymaster General what steps he is taking to identify skill shortages and provide equivalent training places.

Mr. Trippier: It is the responsibility of employers to identify their skill requirements and to invest in training to meet their needs. Nevertheless, the Government fund a wide range of initiatives to help improve the supply of skills, including the YTS and the new job training scheme which my right hon. and learned Friend announced on 28

January, and to help to improve information both about skill supply and demand and also training needs and availability. Recent steps include the development of a computerised local labour market information to gather data on employers' training needs; the establishment of a skills unit to provide more effective analysis and information on changing skill requirements; the establishment of local employer networks; and the pilots of training access points. We frequently review all provision to see whether more effective assistance can be given in the task of re-skilling Britain.

59. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett** asked the Paymaster General what are his latest estimates of the high technology skill shortages facing British industry.

Mr. Trippier: The most recent survey of skill shortages in manufacturing industry estimates that some 5 per cent. of firms responding expect output over the next four months to be limited by a shortage of professional engineers and 2 per cent. of firms expect output to be limited by shortages of computer and management services occupations. Most difficulties were in recruiting people with experience.

Labour Statistics

19. **Mr. Greenway** asked the Paymaster General how many people have been unemployed for *(a)* six months and *(b)* a year or more compared with a year ago; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: In the year to January 1987, the number of people unemployed for over six months has fallen by about 10,000 and the number unemployed for over a year has fallen by about 20,000.

29. **Dr. McDonald** asked the Paymaster General what is the current level of unemployment in *(a)* Thurrock and *(b)* the south-east.

Mr. Lee: On 8 January 1987, the numbers of unemployed claimants in the Thurrock local authority district and the South East region were 7,419 and 774,062 respectively.

47. **Mr. Yeo** asked the Paymaster General what is the total number of people employed in Britain as a proportion of the number of adults aged between 16 and 65 years.

Mr. Lee: It is estimated from the labour force survey conducted in the spring of 1985 that at that time there were 23,350,000 persons aged 16 and under 65 in paid employment, representing 66·9 per cent. of all persons aged 16 and under 65 in Great Britain.

60. **Mr. Hardy** asked the Paymaster General what is his estimate of the actual number of people who are currently seeking employment.

Mr. Lee: According to the results of the labour force survey in the spring of 1985, there were 2·81 million people in Great Britain without a job who had sought work in the week prior to the survey.

66. **Mr. Stott** asked the Paymaster General what is the number of 18 to 25-year-olds who are unemployed.

Mr. Lee: On 8 January 1987, the number of unemployed claimants between the ages of 18 and 24 (not available aged 25 years) in the United Kingdom was 970,551.

75. **Mr. Fisher** asked the Paymaster General how many people have been unemployed for more than 12 months at the latest available date; and what percentage of the total unemployed this represents.

Mr. Lee: On 8 January 1987, the number of claimants in the United Kingdom who had been unemployed for over 12 months was 1,334,430 which represents 40·5 per cent. of the total unemployed.

Mr. Nellist asked the Paymaster General how many young people, under 25 years of age, are unemployed in Coventry, the west midlands and nationally; of those how many have been unemployed for more than one, two, three, four and five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: The following information is in the Library. The table shows the numbers of unemployed claimants aged under 25 years in the Coventry local authority district, the west midlands region and the United Kingdom on 8 January 1987, who had been unemployed for the durations requested.

	Unemployed claimants aged under 25 years		
	Coventry local authority district	*West Midlands region*	*United Kingdom*
Over one year	3,578	36,072	303,378
Over two years	1,914	17,655	142,686
Over three years	1,100	9,993	78,213
Over four years	590	5,753	42,734
Over five years	256	2,770	19,832
All durations	9,164	116,457	1,132,792

Yorkshire and Humberside

61. **Mr. Lawler** asked the Paymaster General what has been the increase in self-employment and new businesses in Yorkshire and Humberside since 1979.

Mr. Trippier: The number of self-employed persons in Yorkshire and Humberside is provisionally estimated to have risen by 108,000, from 134,000 in June 1979 to 242,000 in September 1986.

The number of businesses registered for VAT in the Yorkshire and Humberside region is estimated to have risen by approximately 9,200, from 102,000 at the end of 1979 to 111,200 at the end of 1984. These are the most up-to-date figures currently available.

Local Enterprise Agencies

62. **Mr. Bellingham** asked the Paymaster General how much financial assistance is currently available from Her Majesty's Government for help with financing local enterprise agencies.

Mr. Trippier: Government support for local enterprise agencies in England is, in the main, channelled through my Department, the Department of the Environment, the Home Office and the Development Commission. The total support available from these sources is expected to be approximately £3·7 million this financial year.

Motor Industry (Management Training)

63. **Mr. David Atkinson** asked the Paymaster General if he will make a statement about management training in the motor industry.

Mr. Trippier: I am pleased that the road transport industry training board is treating management training as a major priority and is seeking to work closely with all the appropriate professional bodies. I will be attending the North West regional launch of their new management development programme in Manchester on 3 April.

YTS

30. **Mr. Hunter** asked the Paymaster General what proportion of YTS trainees in Hampshire have obtained full-time employment within a reasonable time of the completion of their training; and what proportion have been employed by the employers with whom they were training.

Mr. Trippier: The Manpower Services Commission conducts a regular follow-up survey of all YTS leavers. Of those who left YTS schemes in Hampshire between April 1985 and March 1986, 65 per cent. were in full-time work some three months after leaving. Of these, just over half (54 per cent.) were employed by the employer with whom they trained.

64. **Mr. Favell** asked the Paymaster General whether he proposes to increase the number of YTS places in the public sector.

Mr. Trippier: At 31 January 1987 there were 453,000 YTS contracted places of which over 126,000 were in the public sector. The number of YTS places is decided annually in the light of the number of young people expected to come forward for training, and there are no plans at present to change the general balance of places on the programme.

68. **Mr. Clelland** asked the Paymaster General how many people are presently engaged in YTS in Britain.

Mr. Trippier: On 31 January 1987, the latest date for which figures are available, there were 335,787 young people in training on YTS in Great Britain.

Union Rule Books

65. **Mr. Gregory** asked the Paymaster General what information he has as to which trade unions have altered their rule books to comply with the Government's trade union legislation since 1979.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave him on 11 November 1985, *Official Report*, columns *51-52*. Since November 1985 a further seven unions had rules approved by the certification officer in order to hold political fund review ballots. These were:

Ceramic and Allied Trades Unions
Fire Brigades Union
General Union of Associations of Loom Overlookers
National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers
National Union of Mineworkers
Rossendale Union of Boot Shoe and Slipper Operatives
Scottish Carpet Workers Union

In addition the certification officer is required to approve rules governing political funds for unions setting up new funds. He has done so in the following cases:

National Union of Hosiery and Knitwear Workers
Inland Revenue Staff Federation
Broadcasting and Entertainment Trades Alliance
Communication Managers Association
National Communications Union (Clerical Group)

Unions which, since November 1985, are reported to have decided to make changes in their rule books to comply with the election provisions of part I of the Trade Union Act 1984 are:

National Association of Colliery Overmen Deputies and Shotfirers (Yorkshire Area)
General Municipal Boilermakers and Allied Trades Union
Inland Revenue Staff Federation
Union of Communication Workers
Banking Insurance and Finance Union
National Union of Railwaymen
Prison Officers Association
United Road Transport Union
Union of Shop Distributive and Allied Workers
National Union of Seamen
Association of Cinematograph Television and Allied Technicians

Jobcentres (Staffing)

67. **Mr. Cunliffe** asked the Paymaster General how many staff are to be allocated to job-broking activities in jobcentres and how many to providing assistance for the long-term unemployed.

Mr. Lee: Staff are allocated to programme activities at national and regional level rather than to specific activities within jobcentres or to locations. Managers use the staff available to deliver the various jobcentre services effectively and economically, taking into account local circumstances.

Retirement Age

70. **Mr. Janner** asked the Paymaster General if he will estimate how many jobs would be made available if men were entitled to retire at 60 years of age.

Mr. Lee: It is not possible to predict with any accuracy the number of jobs which would be made available if the state pension age for men was reduced to 60 years of age. The outcome would depend in part on the number of men over 60 who chose to retire, and in part on the decisions of employers on whether to recruit new workers to fill the vacancies. Our best estimate is that some 500,000 jobs would be made available, not all of which would be filled from the unemployment count.

Industrial Relations Legislation

72. **Mr. Allen McKay** asked the Paymaster General what legislation he proposes in the field of industrial relations in the near future; and if he will make a statement.

85. **Mr. Patchett** asked the Paymaster General if he has any plans to introduce further legislation on trades unions.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I refer the hon. Members to the statement that I made to the House on 24 February at column 146.

Earnings

73. **Mr. James Hamilton** asked the Paymaster General what was the average percentage increase in earnings among the top and bottom 10 per cent. of workers in Britain in 1986; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn) on 3 February at column *606*.

Small Firms (Business Expansion Schemes)

74. **Mr. Leigh** asked the Paymaster General what he is doing to assist the launch of locally based business expansion schemes so as to boost the small firms sector.

Mr. Trippier: In recent years, there have been valuable initiatives to provide venture capital for unquoted companies, including the establishment of local business expansion scheme funds. Some local enterprise agencies have assisted such initiatives and "marriage bureaux" to bring together potential investors and small companies and I hope that this will continue. I will encourage further development of locally-based funds in all areas through my contacts with the venture capital industry and other organisations.

Adult Training Scheme

78. **Mr. Wainwright** asked the Paymaster General if he will make a statement on the National Audit Office report on the operation of the Manpower Services Commission's adult training scheme.

Mr. Trippier: I welcome the National Audit Office's report, which confirms that training provided under the Manpower Services Commission's adult training strategy promises to be significantly more cost-effective than TOPS and to reach a wider range of trainees; that the introduction of CALLMI, MSC's new computer-assisted local labour market information database, can be expected to improve the matching of training provision with local skill requirements; and that the setting up of the national council of vocational qualifications is an important step in the direction of securing a nationally recognised framework of competence-based qualifications, which will be a valuable aid to the effective working of the labour and training markets. I also welcome the report's constructive criticisms about the achievement of still better value for money. We have already made substantial progress since the period covered by the report, and will continue to seek further improvements.

Co-operatives

79. **Mr. Alton** asked the Paymaster General what measures his Department is taking to encourage the growth of co-operatives.

Mr. Trippier: Co-operatives can benefit from a number of schemes introduced by the Government to help and encourage small businesses, such as the loan guarantee scheme and the enterprise allowance scheme. In addition, the Co-operative Development Agency, which is sponsored by my Department, seeks to stimulate the growth of co-operatives by providing help and advice to co-operatives and to people wishing to set up such enterprises. The number of co-operatives has increased from less than 500 in 1982 to more than 1,400 in 1986.

80. **Mr. Austin Mitchell** asked the Paymaster General if he will make a statement on his policy towards adult training in the light of the report by the National Audit Office.

Mr. Trippier: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Wainwright) earlier today.

Leicester Job Club

81. **Mr. Peter Bruinvels** asked the Paymaster General how many unemployed people in Leicester have benefited from the Leicester job club in securing employment; and how this compares with other job clubs.

Mr. Lee: Seventy long-term unemployed people passed through the three Leicester job clubs up to 6 February 1987. 43 (61 per cent.) found jobs. An additional nine people (13 per cent.) either found temporary work on the community programme or went into training or the enterprise allowance scheme.

These success rates are in the line with the national averages of 60 per cent. and 13 per cent. respectively.

Advertising Budget

57. **Mr. James Lamond** asked the Paymaster General what is the budget for advertising of the Department of Employment and the Manpower Services Commission for the last and the current financial years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The budget for television, radio and press advertising of employment and training schemes and programmes, for the Department of Employment and the Manpower Services Commission, for the last and the current financial years is broadly as follows:

	1985-86 £	*1986-87*[1] £
Department of Employment		
Television	—	9,310,478
Press and Radio	1,255,373	2,944,810
Uncommitted	—	1,900,00
Manpower Services Commission		
Television	9,676,257	15,700,000
Press and Radio	2,178,823	5,350,000
Uncommitted	—	3,539,000

[1] Planned, committed and anticipated.

The Department of Employment expenditure on advertising represents about 0·5 per cent. of the total expenditure of £3,000 million by the Department of Employment and the Manpower Services Commission on the employment, enterprise and training programmes. The MSC expenditure on advertising represents about 1 per cent. of the expenditure of around £2,500 million on programmes operated both directly by the MSC and on behalf of the Department of Employment.

DEFENCE

DROPS

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence what were the terms of the statement of operational requirement referred to in his Department's press release announcing the demountable rack off-loading pick up system contracts in December 1986; at what stage in the procurement process the demountable rack off-loading pick-up system was the subject of a general staff target; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The statement of requirements was a broad statement of the logistic DROPS concepts, tasks, performance and other relevant characteristics. The GST for DROPS was formally approved in 1982 with the start of the procurement process.

Research Projects

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many research projects in universities and other institutions of higher education have so far received funding under the joint grant scheme with the research councils.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: So far 62 applications have been approved for funding, and payments have been made in 23 of these.

Royal Ordnance Factories

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will state the number of contracts and research agreements the royal ordnance factories have in universities and other institutions of higher education.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There are currently no contracts or agreements let with universities and other institutions of higher education on behalf of ROFs Burghfield and Cardiff. Contracts or agreements made by Royal Ordnance plc are a matter for the company.

Major G. Whiteley (Publications)

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether it was with his authority that Major G. Whiteley, BA, MEd, MSc, RAEC, published, "The Just War, Tradition and the Falklands Conflict" in the journal of the Royal United Services Institute of December 1986; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stanley: Authority to publish this article was given by the Ministry of Defence in accordance with the normal procedures, subject to the inclusion of a disclaimer that the views expressed were those of the author personally and did not necessarily reflect official policy or thinking.

Minehunters and Frigates

Sir David Price asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) on the basis of the Government's current public expenditure programme as defined in Cm. 56, how many single role minehunters will be in service, fully manned and fully operational, for each of the next five financial years; and what are the consequences of this commitment upon the single role minehunter ordering programme;

(2) on the basis of the Government's current public expenditure programme as defined in Cm. 56, how many frigates will be in service, fully manned and fully operational, for each of the next five financial years; and what are the consequences of this commitment upon the frigate ordering programme.

Mr. Stanley: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Speed) on 27 February at columns *458-59*.

On the frigate ordering programme, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said on 9 December, at columns 168-69, we placed three orders for frigates last year. It remains our intention to maintain a force level of about 50 frigates and destroyers, but the number of frigates to be ordered in any one year will continue to depend upon the life of the frigates, the refit cycle and the resources available.

Decisions on the size and timing of the next orders for single role minehunters will be made following consideration of the tenders for up to four vessels which were invited earlier this year.

Procurement Contracts

Sir David Price asked the Secretary of State for Defence what importance is given by his Department to regional employment considerations in determining the results of open tender bids for procurement contracts.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The primary objective of defence procurement is to satisfy the essential requirements of the services and in a way that secures the best value for money for the taxpayer. Close links are maintained with the Department of Trade and Industry on the regional implications of equipment programmes.

"Keeping the Peace"

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many local education authorities have requested copies of the film "Keeping the Peace"; and how many have been distributed.

Mr. Stanley: As at 25 February 1987, 267 requests had been received from educational establishments in 94 local education authority areas. These requests came from 214 secondary schools, 40 colleges, nine teachers' centres, two polytechnics and two universities. A copy of the film is being made available to each of them free of charge.

It is not known how many educational establishments will have received the film through other channels, such as organisations interested in defence matters.

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for distributing the film "Keeping the Peace" to institutions of higher education and to other organisations.

Mr. Stanley: Video and film copies of "Keeping the Peace" are available on request free of charge to educational establishments and on free loan to other interested organisations and members of the public from the Central Office of Information or the Ministry of Defence.

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received from education authorities, from teachers' organisations and from parents and others, against the proposal to show his Department's film "Keeping the Peace" in schools; and what reply he has sent.

Mr. Stanley: As at 25 February 1987, no representations from education authorities or teachers' organisations have been received in the Department. The Department has received representations from 13 members of the public against the showing of the film "Keeping the Peace" in schools. An appropriate reply is being sent in each case, explaining that the film is designed to meet the ever increasing needs of interested groups, including schools, for information on defence.

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many copies of the film "Keeping the Peace" have been produced.

Mr. Stanley: Three thousand video cassettes and 15 16mm film prints have been produced to date.

Departmental Staff (Rates)

Mr. Home Robertson asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many of his Department's personnel in Scotland live in accommodation in respect of which payments in lieu of rates are made by his Department to local authorities.

Mr. Freeman: Contributions in lieu of rates are made in respect of property deemed to be in occupation of the Crown. Such payments are the responsibility of the rating of Government property department. Approximately 14,550 service and 500 Ministry of Defence civilian personnel are living in such property in Scotland.

RNAB Coulport (Floating Dock)

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he will invite tenders for the construction of a floating dock at the RNAB Coulport; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In matters of design and construction, the Property Services Agency of the Department of the Environment act on behalf of the Secretary of State for Defence. The floating jetty at RNAB Coulport is a unique and complex structure, and the design work and associated hydraulic model tests are well advanced. It is planned to invite tenders in the autumn of 1987 when the PSA has completed this work.

Mr. F. Holroyd

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish in the *Official Report* the dates on which letters from the hon. Member for Southend, East relating to the case of ex-Captain F. Holroyd of Flat 1, 314 Station road, Westcliff on Sea, Essex, were received by his Department, the dates on which meetings with Ministers on the case took place, and of any other representations or discussions which took place between the hon. Member and representatives of his Department on the case; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Letters relating to the case of Captain (Retd) F. Holroyd were received from my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) on the following dates:

6 February 1986
19 March 1986
30 March 1986
17 April 1986
21 May 1986
18 June 1986
25 June 1986
27 June 1986
23 July 1986
22 September 1986
12 November 1986
19 November 1986
3 December 1986
4 February 1987
24 February 1987

I had meetings with my hon. Friend on 17 June, 8 July and 28 October 1986, when he spoke to me in his capacity as a Member of Parliament seeking to represent Captain (Retd) Holroyd's views. I am not aware of any other representations or discussions between my hon. Friend and representatives of the Ministry of Defence.

The various allegations made by Captain (Retd) Holroyd and Mr. Colin Wallace over many years about the conduct of the security forces in Northern Ireland have been fully and carefully investigated since they left the Province in 1975. No evidence has been discovered as a result of these investigations to substantiate any of their allegations. The Government do not consider the public interest requires legal action to be taken to restrain the publication of such allegations.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Departmental Achievements

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the principal achievements of his Department since June 1983.

Sir Fergus Montgomery asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the achievements of Her Majesty's Government in the areas covered by his Department since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fowler: We have continued to develop services for patients in the Health Service. Spending on the National Health Service in England alone is up about 26 per cent. in real terms since 1978-79. There are almost one million more in-patient cases, about 3¼ million more out-patient attendances, and over ¼ million more day cases being dealt with each year. The Health Service is now treating more than twice as many people suffering from renal failure. It is performing more kidney and other transplants, more hip operations and more cataract operations.

Health authorities in England have made substantial progress in obtaining improved value for money in recent years. They have achieved cash-releasing cost improvements worth over £240 million in the last two financial years and plan further cash savings of some £150 million in 1986-87. These resources are devoted to patient care. A further £130 million is expected to be freed this year from sales of land which the NHS does not need.

Over 170 health building schemes, each worth over £1 million, have been started and completed since 1979. Over 400 more schemes, worth nearly £3 billion are currently being planned, designed, or built. Over 100 of them will be finished during the next three years.

At the end of last year we announced that we were establishing a special fund to deal with the transitional problems of resources allocation in those regions which get less than national average growth—principally the four Thames regions. Thirty million pounds over two years will help those regions to continue to improve the overall quality and balance of their services to different groups of patients and different areas within each region. A second special fund, with £50 million over two years, is being used to reduce excessive waiting lists and times. Health authorities have already shown their commitment to tackling this problem, and the fund will help them to make further progress, including reducing the time it takes to get to see a consulant in hospital as well as the time it takes to have an operation. The money will finance over 350 different projects throughout the country in the first year and will mean that health authorities will be able to treat an extra 100,000 patients from their in-patient waiting lists over the coming year.

The Government take very seriously the potential threat of an AIDS epidemic. In response we have undertaken the most comprehensive public education

campaign there has been in this country. We have agreed proposals for a specially financed programme of directed research put forward by the Medical Research Council and we have provided additional funds for patient care. We shall continue to give priority to all aspects of this issue, to keep in close touch with other Governments and to take whatever further public health measures are necessary.

Following the report of the committee of inquiry into an outbreak of food poisoning at Stanley Royd hospital in 1984 (Cmnd. 9716) we have reviewed the immunity of NHS hospitals under food legislation. We decided that further safeguards were needed to ensure satisfactory standards of food hygiene in the NHS and that it would be right to remove Crown immunity in this field. The opportunity afforded by the NHS (Amendment) Bill was taken to apply food legislation to health authority premises. In recognition of concern expressed in Parliament during the passage of the Bill we also agreed to extend its provisions to remove the Crown immunity of health authorities in respect of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974.

In the primary care field there are 3,000 more general practitioners and 2,400 more dentists. There are 6,800 more community nurses. General practitioners average list sizes have fallen from over 2,300 to 2,068.

Major reviews in both the primary care and community nursing fields began in 1986. The primary care review—the first since the NHS was established—is intended to raise standards of care still further and to ensure that the service is fully responsive to the public's needs.

In the social services field there have been increases in places in training centres and community homes for mentally handicapped people. There are more home help staff, and more social work staff. There are more places in day centres for elderly people, and many more places in residential and nursing homes. The sum of £16·3 million has been set aside under the care in the community initiative for pilot projects. In addition, £10·2 million has been available under the helping the community to care initiative to help volunteers, families and others to care for people who require support. In a separate initiative over £11 million has been made available to promote care in the community for children coming out of mental handicap hospitals, and £6 million for a series of mental illness development projects to improve the care given to mentally ill people in the community. Since 1983, health authorities have also been able to guarantee continuing annual payments to local authorities and voluntary organisations for the care of people moving into the community from long-stay hospital accommodation. This has given considerable impetus to joint planning and the implementation of the community care policy.

In the social security field, too, expenditure has never been at a higher level, both in cash and real terms. Expenditure in the current financial year is expected to be in the region of £44 billion—about one third of total Government spending. We have protected and increased the real value of nearly all the major social security benefits. Examples of real terms increases since 1979 include supplementary benefit rates (up by about 6 per cent.), prescribed amounts for family income supplement (by a minimum of 13 per cent.), retirement pensions (by several percentage points) and mobility allowance (by about 12 per cent.). The severe disablement allowance has been introduced (and the household duties test abolished) and invalid care allowance has been extended to married women.

There has also been a far-reaching review of the social security system. The Social Security Act 1986 will target help more effectively on those who need help most, make the system easier to understand, widen choice in pension provision and put pensions on a sound basis for the future, tackle the worst effects of the poverty and unemployment traps and create a soundly based system that the country can afford. Twice as many low income working families with children will get extra help under family credit and income support will direct help to groups such as disabled people, lone parents, families with children and pensioners.

We have significantly improved the position of people in occupational pension schemes, and have given everyone in work new pension options. The 1985 Social Security Act gives people the right to more information about their schemes and to a transfer value if they leave; it also protects the pension rights of early leavers. Last year's Act will give everyone in work the choice between a contracted-out personal pension and staying in his employer's pension scheme or fully in the state scheme.

NHS (Expenditure)

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will calculate the total annual cost and the average annual cost of full-time equivalent posts in the National Health Service and local government; and if he will break down the average cost for a full-time equivalent post into pay, national insurance, superannuation, and other costs such as office space, heating, lighting, and so on, for each of the years 1982-83, 1983-84, 1984-85 and 1985-86.

Mr. Newton: The available information is in the tables:

Table 1
NHS directly employed staff[1]

Year	Number of staff in post[2] [3]	Annual cost[4] £ million	Average annual cost per FTE Pay £	Supn. £	NI £	Total £
1982-83	[5]820,400	6,078	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	7,409
1983-84	[6]819,100	6,412	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	7,828
1984-85	[7]809,000	6,776	7,313	454	607	8,376
1985-86	[8]802,400	7,113	7,783	486	596	8,865

Abbreviations: Supn. = Superannuation, NI = National Insurance, FTE = Full time equivalent.

[1] Figures shown are for staff employed in the hospital and community health services in England and are exclusive of the family practitioner services, the Dental Estimates Board and the Prescription Pricing Authority.

[2] Figures expressed in full time equivalents and rounded to nearest 100.

[3] Includes locum and agency staff.

[4] Derived from health authorities' summarised accounts.

[5] At 30 September 1982.

[6] At 30 September 1983.

[7] At 30 September 1984.

[8] At 30 September 1985.

Note:

A breakdown of the various elements of salaries/wages is not available prior to 1984-85.

Table 2
Cost of full-time equivalent posts in local government[1]

Year	*Average of FTEs (over four quarters)*	*Annual cost £ million*[2]	*Average annual cost per FTE*[3] £
1982-83	1,882,600	16,735	8,900
1983-84	1,889,200	17,982	9,500
1984-85	1,886,800	19,075	10,100
1985-86	1,891,400	19,935	10,500

Notes:
[1] Figures shown are for England and include agency staff.
[2] Includes:
gross pay together with payments and allowances, compensation for loss of office, and redundancy payments;
employers share of national insurance contributions; contributions to superannuation funds, and beneficiaries under pension scheme e.g. police and firemen;
payments made to staff which are later reimbursed by central government, MSC etc.
but excludes:
payments for training expenses, removal expenses etc.;
transfer values on superannuation funds;
allowances paid to councillors.
[3] A breakdown of the various elements of salaries/wages is not available.

Mental Health (Nursing)

Mr. Irving asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish the results of his Department's Chief Nursing Officer's review of guidance in the work of community psychiatric nurses; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: The Department's chief nursing officer has not conducted a review of community psychiatric nursing but in December 1985 a meeting was held with representatives of professional organisations and statutory bodies to discuss the role of the registered mental nurse in the changing pattern of services. The report of this meeting was discussed with the standing nursing and midwifery advisory committee and a sub-group of the committee is examining the issues raised.

Mr. Irving asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what guidance has been given to regional health authorities to enable them to determine their future requirements for registered mental nurses and community psychiatric nurses and to make appropriate provision for their training;

(2) if he will list the occasions on which he has withheld approval from plans submitted to him by regional health authorities on the grounds that they contain inadequate provision for the recruitment and training of community psychiatric nurses and registered mental nurses; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: Determining future staffing requirements is a matter for health authorities to assess in the light of local circumstances. Regional health authority plans are, however, scrutinised to ensure adequacy of training levels and consistency with plans for service provision. Any inconsistencies are followed up through the planning and accountability review processes.

Following the last round of strategic plans, most regional health authorities were asked to undertake further work on nursing recruitment and training issues, including nurses required in the area of mental illness. This work is continuing.

Hospitals (Liverpool)

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he is satisfied with the policy of Olive Mount hospital, Liverpool, towards the discharge of its patients.

Mrs. Currie: I understand that, wherever possible, the views and wishes of patients and their relatives are taken into account when decisions are being taken to transfer patients out of Olive Mount hospital. No patient is transferred into a community setting until the health authority is satisfied that facilities and services required to meet his or her needs are available. This is in line with Government policy.

If the hon. Member is aware of particular difficulties concerning patients at Olive Mount hospital he may wish to contact the chairman of Liverpool health authority.

Health Education Authority

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he plans to announce the full membership of the Health Education Authority; with what organisations he is consulting over potential members; and whether it is open to individual hon. Members to make recommendations as to membership.

Mr. Newton: I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins) on 27 February at column *448*.

Benefits

Mr. David Atkinson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his Department's estimate of the number of people receiving invalidity benefit who are of retirement age but who do not receive a full state retirement pension; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Major: At 31 March 1985, the latest date for which figures are available, there were an estimated 72,000 men aged 65 to 69 years and 12,000 women aged 60 to 64 years receiving invalidity benefit. It is not possible to receive retirement pension in addition to invalidity benefit.

Mr. Watts asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether the Social Security Advisory Committee has completed its review of time limits for claiming benefits and reported; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Major: The committee's report has been received and together with the Government's response to its various recommendations is contained in a Command Paper (Cm. 100) published today. We are grateful to the committee for its report and to those interested parties who made representations. The recommendations achieve a rational package of measures which, with other changes in the rules governing claims to and payments of benefits, will introduce a considerable simplification in the administration of the benefits system. We propose to incorporate the revised time limits in a common set of claims and payments regulations to be laid later this year and to come into force in April 1988.

AIDS

Mr. Arnold asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has about the arrangements made within the North Western region during the last year for the appropriate treatment of AIDS cases in maternity wards.

Mr. Newton: This information is not held centrally. My hon. Friend may wish to make a direct approach to the chairman of the North-Western regional health authority on this matter.

Drugs

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the National Health Service expenditure on drugs in the latest period of 12 months for which figures are available.

Mr. Newton: The cost of drugs dispensed in the NHS in England in 1985-86 was £1,571 million.

Maternity Payments

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in Dewsbury claimed the maternity grant in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: Information is not available in the precise form requested, but in the 12 months ending on 31 December 1986, 986 claims for maternity grant were made at the Department's Dewsbury local office which covers the town, although the boundaries are not conterminous.

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in Halifax claimed the maternity grant in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: Information is not available in the precise form requested, but in the 12 months ending on 31 December 1986, 2,482 claims for maternity grant were made at the Department's Halifax local office which covers the town, although the boundaries are not conterminous.

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in Huddersfield claimed the maternity grant in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: Information is not available in the precise form requested, but in the 12 months ending on 31 December 1986, 2,651 claims for maternity grant were made at the Huddersfield local office of the Department which covers the town, although the boundaries are not conterminous.

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in Batley and Spenborough claimed the maternity grant in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: Information is not available in the precise form requested. The Batley and Spenborough constituency is covered by the Department's local office at Dewsbury, although its boundaries are not conterminous with the constituency. The number of claims for maternity grant received at the Dewsbury local office during the 1986 calendar year was 986.

Mr. McCrindle asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps have been taken to publicise the introduction of the statutory maternity pay scheme; what discussions he has had on the subject with the representatives of employers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lyell: An employers guide to statutory maternity pay was issued to all employers in November 1986 with national press advertising at the same time. In addition, details of the new arrangements have been publicised by poster and in DHSS leaflets [FB8 and NI17A] available in social security offices and antenatal clinics. Information about the rates of SMP was sent to all employers recently and a training brief was published by Her Majesty's Stationery Office in January 1987 which employers may use to train their staff if they wish. Further national and regional press advertising and a new poster are planned over the coming weeks.

A consultation paper was issued to employers organisations and others in December 1985. There have been numerous contacts between our officials and employer organisations over the past 12 months as the scheme has been developed. Ministers have met representatives from employer organisations, including the CBI and the Engineering Employers Federation from time to time to discuss the social security review proposals, including those for maternity.

Mr. Hoyle asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in Warrington, North and South and Chorley constituencies claimed the maternity grant in the last year for which figures are available; and if he will take steps to estimate how many women in Warrington, North and South and Chorley constituencies are expected to qualify for a maternity payment from the social fund after April 1987.

Mr. Major: Information on the numbers of claims to maternity grant is not available in the precise form requested. The Warrington North and South and Chorley constituencies are covered by the Department's local offices at Chester, Warrington, Widnes, Preston, South and Skelmersdale, although their boundaries are not conterminous with the constituencies. The numbers of claims to maternity grant received at these local offices during the 1986 calendar year are as follows:

	Number
Chester	1,547
Warrington	2,977
Widnes	1,923
Preston, South	2,959
Skelmersdale	1,335

It is not possible to predict how many women in the Warrington, North and South and Chorley constituencies will qualify for a maternity payment from the social fund after April 1987.

Mr. Hoyle asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in Warrington, North and South and Chorley constituencies received maternity allowance in the last year for which figures are available; and if he will take steps to estimate how many women in Warrington, North and South and Chorley constituencies are expected to receive statutory maternity pay or maternity allowance after April 1987.

Mr. Major: Information is not available in the form requested, but in the 12 months ending April 1986, the latest year for which figures are available, the following numbers of claims to maternity allowance were made at the Department's offices which cover Warrington, North and South and Chorley constituencies, although the boundaries are not conterminous.

	Number
Warrington North	
Warrington	2,057
Warrington South	
Chester	1,045
Widnes	1,126
Warrington	2,057
Chorley	
Preston South	1,859

I regret it is not possible to make reliable estimates of how many women in Warrington, North and South and Chorley will qualify for statutory maternity pay or maternity allowance from April 1987. However, it is estimated that in total some 230,000 women will qualify for statutory maternity pay and 84,000 for maternity allowance in 1987-88.

Attendance Allowance

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will introduce a third and higher rate attendance allowance to enable disabled people to pay for the care attendance they need to live outside an institution.

Mr. Major: In general, we do not intend to make significant changes in disability benefits in advance of the review we propose to undertake when we have the results of the current major survey by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys into the numbers, circumstances and needs of disabled people. We are, however, considering with the disability organisations the future arrangements within the income support scheme for payments to severely disabled people, some of whom might otherwise be obliged to live in an institution.

Rate Rebates

Mr. Lofthouse asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his estimate of the number of ratepayers currently receiving lower rate rebates as a result of the changes to the rate rebate taper since the publication of the Green paper on reform of social security in June 1985; and how many rate rebate recipients he estimates have lost entitlement to rate rebate as a result of the change in the taper since that time.

Mr. Lyell: Since the Green Paper "Reform of Social Security" was published in June 1985, the rates taper has been increased once. The number of rate rebate recipients who received less housing benefit at the point of change in November 1985, the only date for which information is readily available, is estimated at 1·9 million, of whom about 450,000 lost all entitlement to a rate rebate.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Lofthouse asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the present estimate of the number of housing benefit recipients for which a deduction is made in respect of one or more non-dependants and what are the numbers for each category of non-dependant deductions.

Mr. Lyell: The estimated number of housing benefit recipients in Great Britain for which a deduction was made in respect of one or more non-dependants in autumn 1985 was as follows:

	(000's)
Certificated cases	350
Standard cases	410
Total	760

The number of non-dependants in each category in certificated housing benefit households was as follows:

	(000's)
Higher rate deduction	200
Lower rate deduction	180
Total	380

This total is higher than the corresponding figure quoted above because there is on average more than one non-dependant per household.

Information on the number of non-dependants in each category in households receiving standard housing benefit is not available.

Notes:

1. The information on certificated cases was obtained from the statistical enquiries in May 1985 and December 1985. Information on standard cases was obtained from the annual inquiry in autumn 1985.
2. The higher and lower rates of the non-dependant deductions from 25 November 1985 were respectively £7·80 from rent and £2·60 from rates and £2·80 from rent and £1·10 from rates.

Patient Records (Computerisation)

Mr. Straw asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) which regional health authorities have computerised, or are in the process of computerising, their patient record systems;

(2) if he will state which companies have won contracts for the computerisation of regional health authority patient records systems; and which companies unsuccessfully submitted tenders, broken down for each regional health authority;

(3) if he will state, in respect of the computerisation of patient record systems by regional health authorities, the dates on which tenders were invited and the dates on which contracts were awarded, for each regional health authority;

(4) if he will state, in respect of the computerisation of regional health authorities patient record systems, the original tender price accepted by each regional health authority, and the amount by which the accepted tender price has been exceeded by authorities who have *(a)* completed their computerisation projects and *(b)* are in the process of computerisation.

Mr. Newton: Most hospital patient master indexes either are, or soon will be, computerised. The responsibility for this rests with health authorities, and no record of the details of individual procurements is kept centrally.

Male Unemployment (Side Effects)

Mr. Terry Lewis asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has any plans to commission new studies into possible links between male unemployment and *(a)* attempted suicides, *(b)* mental illness and *(c)* other illnesses.

Mrs. Currie: We have no plans to commission such studies in the financial year 1987-88. I understand that the

Medical Research Council, which receives grant-in-aid from the science vote of the Department of Education and Science and is the main Government body for biomedical research in the United Kingdom, is conducting research in this area.

Mr. Lewis asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what studies have been undertaken into possible links between male unemployment and the incidence of attempted suicides;

(2) how many attempted male suicides were recorded for each year from 1979 to 1986 inclusive; and how many of these involved unemployed males.

Mrs. Currie: I shall let the hon. Member have replies as soon as possible.

Pensioner Incomes

Mr. Raynsford asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish a table showing the annual change in the net disposable income of *(a)* all pensioners and *(b)* pensioners in receipt of supplementary pension (i) before taking account of housing costs and (ii) after taking housing costs into account over the period 1970 to 1986.

Mr. Lyell: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

University Research Staff (Pay)

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what provision he has made in his Department's research budget to allow for the pay settlement for university research staff which has just been agreed with the Association of University Teachers.

Mr. Newton: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Residential Homes

Mr. O'Brien asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he intends to issue any guidelines on levels of standards of care for small private homes catering for three or fewer mentally handicapped people.

Mrs. Currie: We are aware of concern that such homes fall outside the registration system for residential care homes and the related requirements governing standards of care. We are keeping a close eye on the situation and will bear it in mind when we take stock of the registration arrangements in association with our consideration of reports of studies involving residential care. These include a study by the Department's social services inspectorate on the implementation of the Registered Homes Act 1984, Sir Roy Griffith's overview of community care, and the review of residential care currently being chaired by Lady Wagner.

Mental Handicap Nurses

Mr. O'Brien asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the conditions of service for nurses who transfer with mentally handicapped people from the hospitals to community care for mentally handicapped people with social services departments; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Mr. O'Brien asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his policy towards mental handicap nursing, in the light of the report by regional nursing officers regarding the priority given to caring for mentally-handicapped people; what information he has as to the morale of nurses who care for long-stay patients; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: I am aware of unofficial reports of discussion at a private meeting of regional nursing officers but these have been criticised as inaccurate by the RNOs present. The support of RNOs for the high priority accorded by the Government to ensuring appropriate care for mentally handicapped people is very important. Uncertainties at a time of major change in services have been reflected in discussions Ministers and officials have held with the various nursing bodies. I am therefore glad to be able to pay tribute to the major contributions mental handicap nurses have made to the process of change; and to confirm the message in the Government's November 1985 response to the Social Services Committee report on community mental health services (Cmnd. 9674) and in the chief nursing officer's letter of 18 December 1985 (CNO(85)5) that mental handicap nurses will continue to have an important contribution to make to the support of mentally handicapped people in traditional settings, and in their own homes and in a range of residential and other settings in the community.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Nellist asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will provide updated information on hospital waiting lists for Coventry in the form of the answer given to the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East on 8 July 1986, *Official Report*, column *163*.

Mr. Newton: The figures in the reply given to the hon. Member on 8 July 1986 are the latest available centrally. For more recent information the hon. Member may wish to write to the chairman of the Coventry district health authority.

Women (Pensions)

Mr. Hicks asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will state, for each of the past five years, the number of married women who have exercised their right of appeal for back payment of their pension entitlement on reaching the age of 60 years in respect of contributions they made whilst in regular work before 1948.

Mr. Major: I regret that the information requested is not available. Statistics relate to retirement pension generally and are not broken down more fully.

Mr. Hicks asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will estimate the number of married women who are entitled to a pension in their own right through their insurance contributions whilst in regular work prior to 1948 but who on reaching the age of 60 years did not immediately claim this pension; and what would be the cost of meeting these back payments in full.

Mr. Major: I regret that the information requested is not available.

Severe Weather Payments

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what representations he has received on the use of the term householder in question two of his Department's press advertisements about extra help with fuel bills; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will instruct his officials to reconsider applications for help with fuel costs made on the basis of press advertisements issued by his Department, where the applicant answered no to question two.

Mr. Major: We have received a number of representations and inquiries on this point. The advertisement asks whether the claimant is a householder because this is one of the qualifying conditions for entitlement to an exceptionally cold weather payment.

Miss Janice Armstrong

Mr. Kennedy asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to be in a position to reply to the letter of 19 November 1986 regarding Miss Janice Armstrong, sent to him by the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye.

Mr. Lyell: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as the Department has completed its inquiries of Greenwich local authority and the unemployment benefit offices concerned with the claim.

Health Expenditure

Mr. Key asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list total Government expenditure in real terms and in cash terms on provision for the elderly in each of the last 10 years.

Mrs. Currie [*pursuant to her reply*, 2 February, 1987 c. 550.]: I regret that it is not possible to identify fully, and on a consistent basis, all expenditure on elderly people.

Social security expenditure in Great Britain on benefits payable only to elderly people, in cash and in real terms, for each year between 1976-77 and 1985-86 was as follows:

Great Britain (£ million)

	Cash	*Real terms at 1984-85 prices*[1]
1976-77	6,480	14,530
1977-78	7,660	15,090
1978-79	8,740	15,550
1979-80	10,130	15,420
1980-81	12,140	15,580
1981-82	14,330	16,750
1982-83	16,120	17,570
1983-84	17,670	18,430
1984-85	18,810	18,810
1985-86	20,470	19,270

[1] Adjusted in line with the GDP deflator at market prices.

These figures do not include expenditure on benefits paid to elderly people for reasons other than of age as these cannot be identified separately. For example, the figures do not include attendance allowances paid to elderly people because of disability.

It is estimated that some 43 per cent. of total revenue expenditure on health and personal social services is currently spent on people aged 65 and over, but I regret that similar estimates are not available for the whole period requested. However estimates of expenditure on hospital and community health services and on personal social services used mainly by elderly people are available from the Department's programme budget analysis, details of which are submitted annually to the Select Committee on Social Services and are published by the Committee in minutes of evidence associated with its reports on public expenditure on the social services, the latest being HC 387-II published in July 1986. Estimates for current and capital expenditure, in cash and in real terms, on these services are given below for each year between 1975-76 and 1984-85, the latest year for which these estimates are available.

England

Estimated net expenditure on hospital and community health services used mainly by elderly people

£ million

	Current		*Capital*	
	Cash	*Real terms at 1984-85 prices*[1]	*Cash*	*Real terms at 1984-85 prices*[1]
1975-76	350	888	33	83
1976-77	407	914	29	65
1977-78	462	909	23	45
1978-79	531	945	27	49
1979-80	640	975	25	37
1980-81	858	1,101	33	42
1981-82	948	1,108	41	47
1982-83	1,017	1,109	34	37
1983-84	1,073	1,120	38	40
1984-85	1,155	1,155	42	42

England

Estimated net expenditure (including Joint Finance) on personal social services used mainly by elderly people

£ million

	Current		*Capital*	
	Cash	*Real terms at 1984-85 prices*[1]	*Cash*	*Real terms at 1984-85 prices*[1]
1975-76	260	661	n/a	n/a
1976-77	300	673	30	68
1977-78	333	656	19	37
1978-79	383	680	25	44
1979-80	471	717	34	52
1980-81	570	732	45	58
1981-82	620	725	41	47
1982-83	678	739	40	43
1983-84	742	774	40	41
1984-85[2]	796	796	42	42

The above estimates do not cover the totality of health and personal social services expenditure on elderly people. They do not for example reflect the considerable use which elderly people make of the acute services, nor the expenditure on services for elderly mentally infirm people, nor do they include expenditure on family practitioner services, and on social work and administration relating to elderly people.

Further expenditure arising through the care in the community pilot projects and on other centrally funded initiatives on elderly people is given below.

England
£ million

	Care in the Community Pilot projects[1]		*Other Centrally funded initiatives*	
	Cash	*Real terms at 1984-85 prices*[1]	*Cash*	*Real terms at 1984-85 prices*[1]
1984-85	0·2	0·2	—	—
1985-86	0·8	0·7	0·3	0·3
1986-87[2]	1·4	1·2	0·8	0·7

[1] Adjusted in line with the GDP deflator at market prices.
[2] Including expenditure on the elderly mentally infirm.
[3] Provisional.
n/a = Not available.

In addition, grants are made to voluntary organisations mainly towards their general costs but I regret that details for the whole period are not available in the form requested.

Mr. Key asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list total Government expenditure in real terms and in cash terms on provision for the mentally handicapped in each of the last 10 years.

Mrs. Currie [*pursuant to her reply*, 2 February 1987, c. *550*]: I regret that total expenditure on provision for mentally handicapped people cannot be identified fully. Within the scope of the responsibilities of the Department the position is as follows. Estimates of expenditure on hospital and some community health services, and on local authority residential and day care services are available from the Department's programme budget analysis, details of which are submitted annually to the Select Committee on Social Services and are published by the Committee in minutes of evidence associated with its reports on Public Expenditure on the Social Services, the latest being HC 387-II published in July 1986. Figures on actual spending on centrally funded initiatives for mentally handicapped people are collected centrally. It is not possible however to identify the use mentally handicapped people make of the family practitioner services and of the other health and personal social services, nor to separate out social security payments made to mentally handicapped people.

Estimates of current and capital expenditure in England on hospital and community health services and local authority services for mentally handicapped people, in cash and in real terms, are given below for each year between 1975-76 and 1984-85, the latest year for which these estimates are available.

England

Hospital and Community Health Services
Net expenditure

£ million

	Current		*Capital*	
	Cash	*Real terms at 1984-85 prices*[1]	*Cash*	*Real terms at 1984-85 prices*[1]
1975-76	162	412	13	32
1976-77	181	407	13	30
1977-78	205	404	9	18
1978-79	229	407	9	16
1979-80	275	419	14	21
1980-81	355	455	19	25
1981-82	389	455	18	21
1982-83	419	456	25	27
1983-84	437	456	24	25
1984-85	462	462	32	32

England

Personal Social Services
Net expenditure (including Joint Finance)

£ million

	Current		*Capital*[2]	
	Cash	*Real terms at 1984-85 prices*[1]	*Cash*	*Real terms at 1984-85 prices*[1]
1975-76	41	103	Not available	
1976-77	51	115	12	27
1977-78	62	122	10	19
1978-79	73	130	11	20
1979-80	93	141	14	22
1980-81	119	153	17	22
1981-82	143	167	16	19
1982-83	166	181	13	14
1983-84	189	197	14	14
[3]1984-85	211	211	15	15

Further expenditure arising through care in the community pilot projects and through other centrally funded initiatives is listed below.

England
£ million

	Care in the community Pilot projects		*Other centrally funded initiatives*	
	Cash	*Real terms at 1984-85 prices*[1]	*Cash*	*Real terms at 1984-85 prices*[1]
1983-84	—	—	0·6	0·6
1984-85	0·6	0·6	2·5	2·5
1985-86	2·5	2·4	3·4	3·2
[3]1986-87	3·7	3·4	1·9	1·8

[1] Adjusted in line with the GDP deflator at market prices.
[2] Figures for 1976-77 to 1980-81 also include expenditure on mentally ill people.
[3] Provisional.

In addition grants are made to voluntary organisations mainly towards their general costs but I regret that details for the whole period are not available in the form requested.

Meningococcal Infections

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how much money has been spent by his Department on *(a)* research into and *(b)* publicity and health education regarding meningococcal infections in (i) the last year and (ii) the last five years for which figures are available.

Mrs. Currie [*pursuant to her reply*, 11 February 1987, c. *283-84*]: One specific research project (the Stonehouse meningococcal survey) has been funded to a total of £57,000. The Department has not initiated a central publicity or health education campaign, but district health authorities where the disease is prevalent have taken their own initiatives, while the public health laboratory service is working both on the development of a vaccine and on the nationwide surveillance of the different types of meningococci. It is not possible to provide figures for the cost of these activities.

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will take steps to encourage early diagnosis of meningococcal infections and an increase in public awareness of the disease and its symptoms.

Mrs. Currie [*pursuant to her reply*, 11 February 1987, c. *283-84*]: These infections tend to develop very suddenly

and therefore they rarely allow early diagnosis, but doctors are invariably anxious to have suspected cases of meningitis investigated and treated. This is borne out by the referral to hospital of many children who turn out not to have meningitis.

Outbreaks of meningococcal infection tend to be sporadic and relatively rare, and in areas where cases do occur, the medical officer for environmental health takes responsibility for necessary action, including alerting the public and doctors as necessary.

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will add all meningococcal infections, and in particular meningococcal septicaemia, to the list of notifiable diseases; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie [*pursuant to her reply*, 11 February 1987, c. *283-84*]: The list of notifiable diseases is kept under constant review. I have noted the views expressed recently by the medical profession on septicaemia, and the suggestion that it should be included is being considered.

Meningitis

Mr. Aspinwall asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many cases of meningitis recorded in England have resulted in death in each year since 1970; how many were in (i) County of Avon, (ii) County of Gloucester, (iii) Frenchay health authority, (iv) Bristol and Weston district health authority, (v) Bath and West Wiltshire health authority.

Mrs. Currie [*pursuant to her reply*, 16 February 1987, c. *512*]: Meningitis is caused by many different organisms. I assume my hon. Friend is interested in the number of deaths with an underlying cause of meningococcal meningitis, and these data are shown in the table. Because of boundary changes, some figures are not readily available prior to 1974.

Number of deaths with underlying cause meningococcal meningitis (ICD (8, 9) 036.0)[1] registered in England and Wales to usual residents of England, Counties of Avon and Gloucestershire, and District Health Authorities (DHA) of Frenchay, Bristol and Weston, and Bath 1970 to 1985

Year	Area of usual residence					
	England	County of Gloucestershire	County of Avon	Frenchay district health authority	Bristol and Weston district health authority	Bath district health authority
1970	50	—	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1971	31	—	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1972	38	1	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1973	63	1	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1974	72	—	—	—	—	—
1975	51	—	1	—	—	—
1976	49	1	1	—	—	—
1977	31	—	3	1	1	1
1978	35	1	—	—	—	—
1979	30	1	1	1	—	—
1980	25	—	—	—	—	—
1981	28	1	—	—	—	—
1982	20	—	1	—	—	—
1983	17	—	—	—	—	—
1984	25	—	—	—	—	—
1985	33	—	1	—	1	—

[1] International Classification of Diseases 8th and 9th revisions.
n/a = Not available.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 4 March 1987

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Overseas Students (Fees)

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his estimate of the net savings to the United Kingdom of the increases in university fees for overseas students since 1979.

Mr. Walden: The ending of the indiscriminate subsidy to overseas students from September 1980 was estimated to lead to savings in university funding of about £90 million annually at current prices. To be offset against this is targeted support for some categories of overseas students at a cost of about £14 million a year.

Sixth Form Colleges

Mr. Radice asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what has been the number of sixth form colleges in each year since 1973.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The numbers of sixth form colleges in England in each year since 1973 are as follows:

January each year	*Number of sixth form colleges*
1973	21
1974	38
1975	59
1976	67
1977	74
1978	81
1979	88
1980	96
1981	100
1982	101
1983	106
1984	106
1985	106
1986	108

Education Expenditure

Mr. Robert B. Jones asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will set out a table showing for May 1979 and the most recent date for which figures are available the expenditure per pupil in Hertfordshire in *(a)* cash terms and *(b)* constant price terms for (i) primary school pupils and (ii) secondary school pupils.

Mr. Dunn: The net institutional recurrent expenditure per pupil for Hertfordshire for the 1979-80 and 1985-86 financial years are given in the table below. Information is not available for individual months.

Net Institutional Recurrent Expenditure (£) Hertfordshire

	Primary Schools		*Secondary Schools*	
	Cash Terms	*Real Terms*[1]	*Cash Terms*	*Real Terms*[1]
1979-80	440	710	650	1,050
1985-86	780	780	1,180	1,180

Note:
[1] The cash figures for 1979-80 have been repriced to 1985-86 prices using the gross domestic product (market prices) deflator.

ENERGY

Nuclear Materials

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Energy how the figures for materials unaccounted for at establishments licensed to handle nuclear materials are calculated with regard to complete fuel pins.

Mr. Goodlad: The figures for material unaccounted for (MUF) are based on the nuclear material accountancy returns submitted to Euraton under regulation 3227/76. MUF figures for nuclear material are calculated by subtracting the book inventory from the physical inventory. In the case of fuel pins, the amount of nuclear material they contain is determined at the time of manufacture when the pins are sealed. Thereafter, identification and management procedures are such that there should be no MUF provided the integrity of the pins is maintained.

Industrial Costs

Mr. Hardy asked the Secretary of State for Energy what action he is taking in the Council of Energy Ministers to ensure that industrial energy prices within the Community reflect the same cover of full production costs as applies in the United Kingdom; and in which member states this level of pricing does not apply.

Mr. Peter Walker: The Council of Ministers has agreed energy pricing principles related to the long-term costs of production. It is for the Commission to apply these principles across member states and to report where they are not being observed.

Coal Industry (Subsidence Costs)

Mr. Mason asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list the subsidence costs calculated per tonne of coal produced in each colliery in the United Kingdom from February 1986 to the present date.

Mr. David Hunt: This is a matter for British Coal and I have asked the chairman to write to the hon. Member.

Offshore Safety

Mr. Irving asked the Secretary of State for Energy when was the most recent review of his Department's responsibilities for offshore safety; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: A new post of director of offshore safety has been established to strengthen the management and the co-ordination of the Department's responsibilities for offshore safety.

This follows a review completed in autumn 1986 which took account of the increased work load stemming from the industry's greater involvement in the United Kingdom sector of the North sea.

The director will head a unit to formulate and to carry out an effective offshore safety policy and strategy. In addition, there will be a strengthening of the Department's safety branches to meet the changing requirements of the industry.

WALES

Redundancies

Mr. John asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the employers in the Pontypridd parliamentary constituency or Pontypridd travel-to-work area who have notified his Department of redundancies since 1979; and if he will give the number of redundancies given in each such notification.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Firms notifying redundancies do so in confidence, and their names are therefore not disclosed. The number of notifications received and the number of redundancies recorded for each year since 1979 in the Pontypridd and Rhondda travel-to-work area are as follows:

Year	*Number of notifications received*	*Number of redundancies*
1979	32	1,331
1980	58	3,074
1981	42	2,422
1982	29	1,324
1983	34	1,471
1984	17	871
1985	23	1,069
[1]1986	8	301

[1] Provisional.

Source: MSC Wales.

Note: Some adjustments to travel-to-work areas boundaries were made in 1984.

PRIME MINISTER

Fishing Vessel (Accident)

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Prime Minister whether she has received representations about an incident in the Irish sea on Thursday 19 February; what information she has on damage caused to a British fishing boat; whether the incident took place in United Kingdom waters; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I have received no such representations. The incident occurred in the Irish sea outside United Kingdom waters. I understand that no damage was sustained to the fishing vessel's hull or machinery but her fishing gear was lost. On the incident itself, I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces gave to him on 24 February at column *222*.

Anglo-Soviet Arms Talks

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Prime Minister whether she will discuss with Mr. Gorbachev, during her forthcoming visit to Moscow, amending the outer space treaty to include a ban on all testing and orbiting weapons in space.

The Prime Minister: I expect to discuss arms control among a number of other subjects, but I have no plans to discuss detailed modifications to existing multilateral treaties.

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Prime Minister whether she will urge Mr. Gorbachev, on her forthcoming visit to Moscow, to accept the verification procedures submitted by the United Kingdom with regard to a chemical weapons treaty.

The Prime Minister: I expect to discuss a wide range of subjects with Mr. Gorbachev, including arms control, human rights, regional and bilateral issues. I hope that the latest United Kingdom verification proposals can provide the basis for substantial further progress in the Geneva chemical weapons negotiations.

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Prime Minister whether she will make it her policy to ask Mr. Gorbachev to halt the improvement in Soviet anti-ballistic missile defences in return for a freeze at 64 on the number of the United Kingdom's strategic nuclear weapon launchers.

The Prime Minister: Our position on the relationship of the British deterrent to the arms control process remains as set out by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in a statement to the United Nations general assembly in September 1983, and repeated in the House on a number of occasions. The action on the part of the Soviet Union suggested by the hon. Member would not meet the criteria that we have set out.

KMS Limited

Mr. Foulkes asked the Prime Minister on what occasions and for what purposes she has met Mr. David Walker of KMS Limited.

The Prime Minister: I have nothing further to add to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mr. Fields) on 3 March at column *726*.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Prime Minister whether any Government Department has at any time over the past five years had contracts with KMS Limited.

The Prime Minister: Details of contracts placed by other Government Departments are not recorded centrally. Records for my office are readily available only from April 1984. No contracts have been placed with, or payments made to, KMS Limited by or on behalf of my office during that period.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Vietnam

Mr. Hunter asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make appropriate representations to Vietnamese authorities requesting the release from prison of Father Joseph Nguyen Cong Doan, a Roman Catholic priest of the Jesuit Order.

Mr. Renton: I will write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Disarmament

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made

at the conference on disarmament towards the identification of issues relevant to the prevention of an arms race in outer space; and which areas remain to be examined.

Mr. Renton: The conference on disarmament's ad hoc committee on outer space held useful discussion at the last session of the conference on disarmament from 4 February 1986 to 29 August 1986. These discussions will continue at the present session under the renewed mandate.

Diplomats (Protection)

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those companies with which his Department has contracts to provide protection for United Kingdom diplomats abroad.

Mr. Eggar: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London has no contract with any company for the protection of staff abroad. Forty-four British missions abroad have contract arrangements with local security companies to protect their staff and premises. It is not our practice to provide details of security arrangements at individual posts.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Metropolitan Police (Public Opinion Surveys)

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department for how many years the Metropolitan police have been conducting public opinion surveys; how many surveys have been carried out for each year since such surveys have been undertaken; which companies have been employed to undertake the survey in each case; how many people have been interviewed; and what areas of the Metropolitan police district have been covered, in each case; what has been the purpose of the survey, in each case; what has been the cost to public funds, in each case; and if the results of these surveys will be deposited in the Library.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that National Opinion Polls Market Research Limited has been engaged to carry out a public opinion survey in the Metropolitan district (MPD) each year since 1983. The broad purpose of the survey is to assess what the London public expect of the Metropolitan police and the degree of satisfaction with the service it provides. Other information on the surveys is as follows:

	1983	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*
Number of people interviewed	4,204	4,309	4,309	2,932
Areas of Metropolitan police district covered—Divisions	8	8	9	all
Cost—£	36,500	39,000	44,420	15,200

I shall arrange for reports of each of the four surveys to be placed in the Library.

These annual surveys largely replace small-scale local surveys that have been carried out on occasions since the late 1960s. Details of these could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Dartmoor Prison (Visitors)

Sir Peter Mills asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he will take in response to the report of the local prison visitors on Dartmoor prison; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: My noble Friend is giving careful consideration to the 1986 report of the Dartmoor prison board of visitors and will be writing to the chairman of the board in due course.

Police (Numbers)

Mr. Wheeler asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the manpower position in the Metropolitan police and his plans for 1987-88.

Mr. Hurd: Between May 1979 and January 1987 the numbers of Metropolitan police officers and civil staff were increased by 4,750 and 1,400 respectively. The police establishment has been raised by 926 over the period.

In my announcement on 20 May last year, I said that I would be prepared to authorise increases of up to 300 in the police establishment and 150 in the civil staff ceiling for 1987-88 provided that I was satisfied about the use of the same level of increases agreed for 1986-87. Although the strength of the force has increased and is expected to reach nearly 27,000 by 31 March 1987, it will still be some 550 officers short of its establishment. The Commissioner and I are determined that this shortfall should be made good as soon as possible. To this end, the capacity of the force training school has been increased and it will be able to take up to 2,180 recruits in 1987-88, 380 more than this year.

Since my announcement of 20 May the Metropolitan police have made good progress in civilianisation. They were given a target of releasing 100 officers for operational duty in 1986-87. They now plan to release 108 officers and to use 40 civil staff to fill essential new posts which would otherwise have to be filled by officers taken off the streets.

In addition, through the force reorganisation, a target was set for 200 officers to be released for operational duties by April 1988. In the event, it is now hoped to release 218 officers by April 1988. The formation in January 1987 of territorial support groups to replace the special patrol group and district support units has allowed the redeployment to other operational duties of a further 200 officers.

In the light of this progress, and following a review, I have decided to authorise the increases already foreshadowed for 1987-88 and also to approve an additional increase of 100 in the civil staff ceiling making a total increase of 250. This will bring the police establishment to 27,815 and the civil staff ceiling to 13,882.

The additional increase in the civil staff ceiling, which brings forward part of the increase in the ceiling previously envisaged for 1988-89 and 1989-90, will enable the Metropolitan police, within existing financial provision, to press ahead faster with civilianisation as recommended by the Committee of Public Accounts in its report last session on the financial control and accountability of Metropolitan police.

Liverpool (Visit)

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his recent visit to Liverpool.

Mr. Hurd: During my visit to Liverpool on 27 February I addressed a meeting of the Liverpool University Conservative Association, met representatives of various Liverpool charities and visited the Ariel Trust, a voluntary project which teaches broadcasting skills to young people.

Road Fund Licences

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many summonses have been issued in England and Wales for not displaying a road fund licence on a motor vehicle in the last three years; how many people were fined as a result; how many received custodial sentences for non-payment of such fines; and what is the amount outstanding in respect of fines for non-display of a road fund licence disc.

Mr. Mellor: The available information is for proceedings, findings of guilt and fines at magistrates courts for the offences of a motor vehicle licence being obscured or not affixed, and resulting fines. This is published annually in "Offences relating to motor vehicles England and Wales", supplementary table 5 (page 12) of the issue for 1985, the latest year for which information is available. A copy is in the Library. The number of persons receiving custodial sentences for non-payment of fines and the amount of fines outstanding are not recorded centrally in respect of these offences.

Devon and Cornwall Constabulary

Mr. Mudd asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he is now prepared to increase the establishment figure of Devon and Cornwall constabulary.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: An increase of 17 police posts was approved in December 1986, meeting in full the authority's application for 1986-87. We are now considering a further application and hope to announce the outcome shortly.

Prison Population

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish in the *Official Report* how many serving prisoners in adult prisons are from Brent, the number from Brent now serving youth custody sentences, and the number from Brent on remand under 21 years; what increase these figures have shown, together with the national averages; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: The home address of persons in the prison population is not recorded centrally.

DEFENCE

Nuclear Warheads

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 5 February, *Official Report*, column 802, whether the reduction of 1,400 nuclear warheads was first agreed with the Warsaw pact or was decided unilaterally by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation; and what compensating reduction was obtained from the Warsaw pact.

Mr. Stanley: NATO's policy is to preserve the peace through the maintenance of forces at the lowest level capable of deterring the Warsaw Pact threat. The nuclear planning group's decision in October 1983 to reduce the stockpile of NATO's nuclear warheads in Europe by 1,400 was a reflection of this policy. At the same time, Ministers agreed that steps should be taken to ensure the survivability, responsiveness and effectiveness of remaining delivery systems and warheads. The Montebello decision was not agreed with the Warsaw Pact.

Park Vista Site, Greenwich

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will place in the Library a copy of the covenant between the Secretary of State for Defence and the London borough of Greenwich made in 1971 to restrict the building on, or damage to, the southern boundary wall of the Park Vista site, Greenwich.

Mr. Freeman: A copy of the conveyance of 1976 (not 1971) when the site concerned was sold to the London borough of Greenwich has been placed in the Library.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Gerald Howarth asked the Secretary of State for Defence how much of his Department's budget for 1987-88 has been allocated to energy efficiency investment in his Department's property; and how that figure compares with 1986-87.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: £12 million has been allocated for expenditure on energy efficiency measures in MOD property during 1987-88, as compared with £15 million for 1986-87. The difference is due to the fact that 1986-87 sees the end of extra funding made possible by savings elsewhere in the budget, which are not available in 1987-88.

The MOD's investment in energy efficiency is not restricted to the amounts directly allocated, however. New building projects—and wherever possible refurbishment also—incorporate the latest energy efficiency standards, but since these are an integral part of design and materials their cost is not identifiable.

Trident

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the implications for the credibility of the United Kingdom's future Trident nuclear deterrent of any Soviet decision not to remain within the terms of the anti-ballistic missile treaty.

Mr. Stanley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) on 9 December 1986 at column *139*.

Test Ban Treaty

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the implications of a comprehensive test ban treaty for the future development of British nuclear warheads.

Mr. Stanley: As my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, said on 20 January in reply to the hon. Member for Merionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Thomas) at column *524*, we believe it would be

premature to re-open negotiations on a comprehensive test ban treaty until progress in resolving outstanding issues particularly on verification becomes more apparent. This issue does not therefore arise.

Sir Frank Kitson

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence what action he intends to take against General Sir Frank Kitson under section 12 of Queen's regulations.

Mr. Freeman [*pursuant to his reply*, 20 February 1987, *Official Report*, c. *875*]: None. General Kitson has not breached Queen's regulations.

TRANSPORT

Vehicle Emissions

Mr. Bright asked the Secretary of State for Transport (1) whether he has any plans to require the use of three-way catalysts on cars over 2 litres and lean burn plus oxidation catalysts on cars between 1·4 and 2 litres;

(2) what decision has been taken on implementation of the provisions of the draft European Community directive on vehicle emissions;

(3) what the estimated average cost of fitting *(a)* three-way catalysts and *(b)* lean burn auto-catalysts to new production motor cars would be.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The estimated additional capital costs to the consumer of a car over 2 litres fitted with a three-way catalyst system is £500 to £800, and of a lean burn engined car from 1·4 to 2 litres fitted with an oxidation catalyst £125.

Implementation of the draft directive, the main provisions of which were agreed by most member states at Luxembourg in June 1985, depends first on it being adopted by the Council of Ministers. At present, the draft directive is subject to reservations by Denmark and Greece.

We are planning to implement the requirement for new cars to be capable of running on unleaded petrol from the earliest dates possible under the agreement. We are currently reviewing what other provisions of the agreement could be cost-effectively implemented, taking into account the environmental benefits, capital costs, maintenance and fuel consumption costs and the prospects for harmonisation of requirements in the European Community and elsewhere.

Railways (Cambridge-Royston Electrification)

Sir Anthony Grant asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has reached a decision concerning the electrification of the railway line between Cambridge and Royston following the representations made to the Minister of State by the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West on 17 February; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: I have today given approval to British Rail for the electrification of the line from Royston to Shepreth Junction at a cost of £2·5 million. This will allow passengers to travel directly from Kings Cross to Cambridge, which will be a significant improvement for commuters on this line. It brings the total BR investment that we have approved since October 1983 to £940 million.

Seat Belts (Coaches)

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for Transport if, in the light of the most recent motorway coach accident, he will seek to make compulsory the wearing of seat belts by all coach passengers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: In most cases coach passengers have a high-backed seat immediately in front of them which provides impact protection and keeps them within the limits of their seating space in the event of a frontal collision. It is passengers without a seat immediately in front of them that are most at risk. We will shortly be introducing a package of coach safety measures which will include a requirement that seat belts be fitted to those high risk seats in all new coaches registered from 1 October 1988. That should encourage their voluntary use. We have no present plans to make wearing a legal requirement.

Fishing Vessels (Accidents)

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list all United Kingdom registered fishing vessels lost at sea since 1979 where the cause of the loss was unknown, giving the exact location of the last reported position and in each case showing whether that location is within a designated submarine exercise area.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The information requested is set out in the attached table.

The following vessels have been lost in unexplained circumstances in the years between 1979 and 1986 and have been described as "missing" in the Departmental records

Year	*Missing vessel*	*Approximate location*	*In a designated submarine exercise area*
1979	FV TARRADALE II 22·3 m overall length	27 miles east of Pentland skerries	Yes
	FV SYLVIA MARITA 14·3 m overall length	Unknown, somewhere in the English Channel	Possibly
	FV CARINTHIA 17·8 m overall length	30 miles north west of Noup head	No
	FV OCEAN MONARCH 20 m overall length	94 miles east of Tafts Ness	No

Year	Missing vessel	Approximate location	In a designated submarine exercise area
1980	FV PAT MARIE 10 m overall length	1 mile south east of Benacre Ness	No
1981	FV CELERITY 19 m overall length	In Pentland firth	No
	FV REBORN 5 m overall length	Under the cliffs, east of Folkestone harbour	No
1982	NIL		
1983	FV ZANTO 17 m overall length	Off the west coast of Denmark	Not possible to say
	FV EXUBERANT 10 m overall length	Between Weymouth and Dartford possibly of Portland Bill	Yes
1984	FV SOUTH STACK 11 m overall length	Between Anglesey and the Isle of Man	Yes
1984	CORDOBA 48 m overall length	4 miles north of Montrose	No
1985	OCEAN HARVEST 15 m overall length	30 miles east of Fraserburgh	No
	PEARL 11 m overall length	Off Holyhead	Possibly
1985	LORNA ANN 10 m overall length	Off Berwick	No
1986	DAWN WATERS 25 m overall length	13 miles east of the Isle of Man	No
	JAKE II 11 m overall length	8 miles west of the Rhinns of Islay	Yes
	PESCADO 15 m overall length	15 miles east of Harwich	No

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Transport what recent representations he has received about *(a)* the loss of the fishing vessel Mhari L and *(b)* dangers to fishing vessels generally; what action he has taken as a result; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: My right hon. Friend has recently received letters from two hon. Members about the loss of the Mhari L; one of these letters referred to the dangers to fishing vessels generally. I will be replying as soon as possible.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list all cases reported to his Department or to the Coastguard, or about which his Department has information, where fishing vessels have been in any kind of incident involving *(a)* British, *(b)* United States or *(c)* other submarines; and what action he has taken as a result.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I shall answer this question shortly.

Road Accidents

Mr. Janner asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many fatal accidents, including how many fatalities, have occurred in the last 10 years for which figures are available on *(a)* trunk roads and *(b)* non-trunk roads.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The following information is available:

Fatal accidents on trunk and non-trunk roads: GB: 1980-1985

	Trunk roads and motorways	Non-trunk roads
1980	1,176	4,384
1981	1,094	4,261
1982	1,097	4,350
1983	1,019	4,008
1984	1,007	4,131
1985	944	3,824

Fatality data could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

SCOTLAND

Nurses

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide figures for numbers of nurses, broken down by category, completing training for every year from 1980 to 1990; and if he will publish comparable figures on the projected increase in demand for nursing staff from health boards' annual programmes.

Mr. John MacKay: Not all the information requested is available. The following table, supplied by the National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting for

tland, gives the numbers of learners by category npleting training and registering, by calendar year from 0 to 1982, and by fiscal year from 1983-84 to 1985-86.

Category	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*
First level nurse						
General	2,111	2,509	2,547	2,022	1,702	2,007
Mental illness	482	534	438	417	398	563
Mental handicap	102	123	121	115	103	155
Sick children	165	202	203	208	157	170
Total	2,860	3,368	3,309	2,762	2,360	2,895
Second level nurse	1,412	1,554	1,563	1,843	1,344	895
Overall total	4,272	4,922	4,872	4,605	3,704	3,790

It is not possible to predict with accuracy the figures of se completing training in future years or of health ards' projected demand for the period to 1990. Methods improving the estimating of nursing establishment ures and the appropriate intakes into training are being mined at present.

Colleges of Education (Governing Bodies)

Mr. Millan asked the Secretary of State for Scotland at proposals he has issued for the reconstitution of the verning bodies of colleges of education, to whom these oposals have been issued for the purposes of nsultation; what is the last date for making presentations; and what representations he has so far ceived.

Mr. Rifkind: A consultative paper on the future mposition of the governing bodies was issued by my epartment on 11 August 1986 to the colleges of ucation, the Joint Committee of Colleges of Education Scotland and the General Teaching Council for otland. Comments were invited by 17 October on the sis that it was open to the governing bodies or individual embers thereof to consult existing or potential pointing bodies. A total of 53 representations were ceived, of which five were from hon. Members. bsequently, further consultations have taken place on gulations, which will be laid before Parliament, next eek, giving effect inter alia to various changes in mposition.

Private Sector Rents

Mr. Canavan: asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will improve the system of arbitration through rent officers as respects levels of rent in the private sector.

Mr. Ancram: My right hon. and learned Friend has no plans at present to alter the existing arrangements.

Radioactivity (Fish)

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many lakes in Scotland are being monitored for radioactivity in fish; how often readings are taken; and if he plans to continue monitoring throughout 1987.

Mr. Ancram: To date, 16 lochs (as well as 19 rivers and streams) have been monitored at various times for radioactivity in fish. Monitoring will continue in 1987 as necessary.

Crafts in Scotland

Mr. Buchan asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what consideration he has given to the organisation of the crafts in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: I have received proposals from the Scottish Development Agency, HIDB and the Scottish Arts Council for a redistribution of responsibilities for the services to craftsmen in Scotland. These proposals are currently under consideration and a decision will be announced in due course.

Workers Educational Association

Mr. Buchan asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what consideration he has given to the level of funding from his Department to the Workers Educational Association in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* Strathclyde; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacKay: Central funding to the WEA in Scotland has risen in real terms by more than 37 per cent. since 1979. Additionally, a supplementary payment exceeding £24,500 was made last year to clear accumulated deficits on the understanding that for the future the association would plan to match expenditure against income. I shall take into account whether or not the association has achieved this objective when considering the applications for grant aid for 1987-88 from the three Scottish districts including the West of Scotland district. The association will be informed of the outcome in April.

Scottish Transport Group

Mr. Corrie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he has set corporate objectives for the Scottish Transport Group.

Mr. Ancram: I have written today to the Scottish Transport Group setting objectives for the group's bus and shipping operations. The objectives are as follows:

OBJECTIVES FOR THE SCOTTISH TRANSPORT GROUP

The Scottish Transport Group's function is to operate road passenger and ferry transport services in and to and from Scotland.

SCOTTISH BUS GROUP

Preamble

The Group's strategic objectives in the provision of bus services are as set out below. In pursuing these objectives the Group's policy (as set out in its document of September 1986 entitled "The Transport Act 1985 and Competition Law Guidelines for Scottish Bus Group Companies") is that financial dealings between the Scottish Bus Group and subsidiary companies will be at arm's length and undertakings have been given on the elimination of cross-subsidy between companies.

In addition the Scottish Transport Group recognises the special obligations arising from its present strength in the bus market in some areas of Scotland. It has therefore given the Secretary of State a number of important assurances concerning the management of its business following deregulation. First, the Scottish Bus Group's financial target — to seek an average annual return of 4 per cent. on average net fixed assets at current cost adjusted to take account of capital grant on an historical cost basis over the period to 1990 — is to be applied to each operating company. Arrangements have been established to allow regular monitoring by the Scottish Development Department. Second, any transfers of assets or loans, including short-term loans between subsidiary companies or between the holding company and a subsidiary, are to be conducted at arm's length. Third, arrangements have been agreed in principle with the Department to ensure that the cash reserves held by the Group will be available to subsidiary companies only on commercial terms.

Objectives

The Group's strategic objectives in the provision of bus services should be as follows:

1. To manage its bus operations as it would do in the interests of private shareholders seeking in particular to retain customer goodwill and to provide efficient profitable services.

2. Subject to objective 1, to provide services in rural areas both through the development of commercial opportunities and in participation in the tendering process, consistent with the framework for achievement of operational objectives set out below.

3. To explore and develop potential new markets and new methods of service provision.

Framework for achievement of objectives

In seeking to achieve the above objectives the Group's plans and actions should be consistent with the following operational policies:-

1. The achievement (year on year) of an adequate return on capital employed in accordance with the financial target set by the Secretary of State.
2. The establishment of a challenging system of cost control including targets for year on year reductions in unit costs.
3. The establishment of arrangements for the regular review of standards of service.
4. The achievement of performance aims agreed with Government.
5. The containment of external financing requirements within the limits set by Government.
6. The proper appraisal of new investments.
7. The provision of regular information to Government in a form suitable for monitoring performance in relation to target and financial limits.

CALEDONIAN MACBRAYNE

Objectives

In relation to its ferry services the Group should pursue the following strategic objectives:

1. To provide services as approved by the Secretary of State in terms of his Undertaking with Caledonian MacBrayne and to make appropriate financial and investment provision for the continuity of these services.
2. To provide economically and efficiently a level and pattern of service which strikes an appropriate balance between costs and revenue and takes due account of local requirements.
3. To exploit opportunities for the development of services for the benefit of both Caledonian MacBrayne and the communities served, having particular regard to the Government's commitment to the economic development of these communities.
4. To seek to develop commerical opportunities outwith the approved (subsidised) services where these opportunities can be met within existing capacity and agreed capital investment programmes.

Framework for achievement of objectives

In seeking to achieve these objectives Caledonian MacBrayne's plans and actions should be governed by the following operational policies:-

1. The need to contain deficit subsidy.
2. The achievement of the financial target set by Government.
3. The achievement of performance aims agreed with Government.
4. The requirement to make proper appraisal of investments.
5. The establishment of a challenging system of cost control including targets for year on year reductions in unit costs.
6. The need to take account of the social and economic needs of the communities served when making decisions on service provision.
7. The provision of regular information to Government in a form suitable for monitoring performance on targets and financial results.

THE ARTS

Local Authority Expenditure

Mr. Clelland asked the Minister for the Arts what is his latest estimate of local authority spending on the arts.

Mr. Luce: The 1986-87 estimated outturns of local authority expenditure on museums, galleries and libraries, within my programme, are £434 million for current expenditure and £49 million for capital expenditure.

Budget estimates of individual authorities for current expenditure on wider arts activities are published annually by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy in "Leisure and Recreation Statistics Estimates", copies of which are in the Library.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Public Service Employees

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give figures for the years 1982-83, 1983-84, 1984-85 and 1985-86 of *(a)* the cost of the Civil Service and *(b)* the average cost for each civil servant; and if he will break down the average cost for each civil servant into pay, national insurance, superannuation, and other costs, such as office space, heating, lighting, car allowance, travel allowance.

Mr. MacGregor: Civil Service running costs were rigorously scrutinised during the 1986 survey and agreed plans were reported in the 1987 Public Expenditure White Paper (Cmnd. 56). Although there were significant reductions in manpower numbers during the period 1982-83 to 1985-86, not all the related costs (such as accommodation) can be expected to reduce at the same rate. Cost per head figures should be viewed in that light. The following running costs per head figures are based on the financial and manpower figures published in Cmnd. 56.

	1982-83 £ million	*1983-84 £ million*	*1984-85 £ million*	*1985-86 £ million*
Departmental running costs[1]	9,094	10,499	11,155	11,703
Staff totals (average staff in post):				
Civil Service (excluding trading funds)[2]	630,600	611,100	596,000	590,400
Armed forces[3]	58,000	58,000	58,000	58,000
Northern Ireland Civil Service	26,200	25,500	25,000	25,000
Running costs per head	£ 12,722	£ [4]15,115	£ 16,429	£ 17,379

[1] Departmental running costs comprise pay costs, personnel overheads, accommodation costs, office services. They do not include notional accruing pensions liability, pensions in payment or capital expenditure.
[2] Trading funds are subject to separate financial control and are not included in running costs.
[3] The pay of armed forces personnel engaged in headquarters and support activities is included in running costs.
[4] The large increase between 1982-83 and 1983-84 is due mainly to the introduction of repayment for accommodation services.

Because of changes in the coverage of running costs the breakdown of these costs to the level of detail requested by my hon. Friend is only available on a consistent basis for 1984-85 and 1985-86. In considering a breakdown of total running costs account needs to be taken not only of the full-time staff shown above but also of usage of overtime and casual staff, ie man years of input. The figures shown in the table are based on the latest breakdown of the outturns on running costs for the two years:

	1984-85 £	*1985-86 £*
Running costs per man year	14,960	15,641
Costs per man year of main components:		
Pay costs	8,742	9,216
Personnel overheads	1,244	1,306
Accommodation costs	2,684	2,833
Office services	965	1,088
Other services	1,324	1,195

Civil Service Pay

Mr. Favell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with Civil Service unions about the scope for taking account of lower wage rates in the north in determining Civil Service pay.

Mr. Brooke: I am considering proposals for dealing with the difficult circumstances of recruitment and retention where they exist in London and the south east and other particular areas, and shall be discussing these with the Civil Service unions in due course.

Wales (Public Expenditure)

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will specify the public expenditure under various categories in Wales that is incurred by Departments other than his own in the sphere of *(a)* agriculture, fisheries food and forestry, *(b)* trade, industry and employment, *(c)* arts and libraries, *(d)* roads and transport, *(e)* housing, *(f)* environmental services other than those specified above, *(g)* law, order and protective services, *(h)* education and science, *(i)* health and personal social services, *(j)* social security, *(k)* other public services not specified above and *(l)* common services as set out in the Treasury territorial analysis exercise, specifying the amount spent in the 1985-86 financial year and the responsibilities in relation to which this expenditure is incurred in each category.

Mr. MacGregor: I refer the hon. Member to table 6 of the answer that I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon) on 16 December 1986 (columns *488-98)*. The table shows identifiable expenditure for Wales by function under the headings of Welsh Office (labelled "Programme 16" in table 6) and other departments (labelled "Wales Other" in table 6).

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Imperial Tobacco (Takeover)

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will institute an inquiry as to whether any inducements were offered directly or indirectly to buyers of shares in Hanson Trust to boost the price of the shares in the course of the takeover of Imperial Tobacco.

Mr. Howard: I am not aware of any allegations that such inducements were offered.

Diamond Report

Mr. Squire asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the representations made to his Department on the Diamond report on the law relating to security over moveables.

Mr. Howard: I assume my hon. Friend is referring to the consultative paper issued by my Department last July as part of Professor Diamond's review. The paper made no proposals but rather sought views on the legal and commercial need for reform and the form any changes might take. A wide range of views were expressed on the broad issues raised in chapters 4 and 5 of the paper but there was general agreement that the Companies Act provisions on registration of company charges are unsatisfactory and should be improved. [Some 70 references were received.]

If my hon. Friend wishes me to do so, I will let him have a list of respondents.

Mr. Squire asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has now reached any conclusions on the Diamond report on the law relating to security over moveables and its effect on leasing and hire purchase; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: Professor Diamond was originally asked to report by 31 December 1986 but is not now expected to do so before May. The delay reflects the considerable degree of interest shown in the review and the weight of the responses to the consultative paper issued by my Department last July.

European Regional Development Fund

Mr. Dormand asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will state the types of project eligible for grant from the European regional development fund.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The eligibility of projects for aid from the European regional development fund depends on criteria set out in EC regulation 1787-84. The types of eligible project are

(a) infrastructure investment projects where the cost is borne wholly or partly by a public authority, or by an analogous body, except that certain types of infrastructure listed in the annex to the regulation are not eligible;

(b) industry, craft or service sector investment projects which help create or maintain jobs; service sector projects must concern tourism of have a choice of location;

(c) measures to help internally generated development of regions — mostly by assisting small businesses and tourism in specified ways including subsidising consultancy and common services for such firms.

Investment projects as at (a) and (b) above must cost at least 50,000 ecu. All projects must be situated in an area eligible for national regional aid except that up to 4 per cent. of the fund may be used for infrastructure projects which are situated outside such areas but are an essential complement to their infrastructure. ERDF aid to a project is expressed as a percentage of the expenditure by the relevant public authority or analogous body.

The fund may also assist programmes of measures as distinct from individual projects, and studies relating to its operations.

Steel Industry

Mr. Hardy asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many people were employed in the steel industry in general and in the special steel industry in particular in the years 1975, 1980 and in each year since 1983.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Employment figures on the broad definition of the steel industry, which includes SIC groups 221 (iron and steel industry), 222 (steel tubes) and 223 (drawing, cold rolling and cold forming of steel), are available up to 1985 from the annual census of production (ACOP) and are as follows:

Employment

	Thousands
[1]1975	310
1980	217
1983	127
1984	115
1985	114

[1] estimate.

The Department of Employment's estimates of employees in employment indicates that employment in the industry fell between 5 and 10 per cent. between 1985 and 1986. However, these estimates are subject to a considerable potential estimating error due to the relatively small numbers of employees in the industry.

No estimates are available for employment in the production of special steels. Whilst special steels, including stainless and heat-resisting steels, accounted for around 2 per cent. of total crude steel production in 1986, they will have accounted for a higher proportion of employment as their production is more labour intensive.

Regional Economic Policy

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he commissioned the report into the effects of Government regional economic policy by D. Moore, J. Rhodes and P. Tyler; and at what cost.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The report was commissioned in 1981 at a cost of £43,340.

Industry (Public Funds)

Sir Alex Fletcher asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much support from public funds of all kinds has been made available to the shipbuilding industry since fiscal year 1978-79.

Mr. Butcher [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 March 1987, c.*517*]: Direct and indirect support for shipbuilding in the United Kingdom between 1 April 1978 and 31 December 1986 has exceeded £2,300 million.

Sir Alex Fletcher asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much support from public funds of all kinds has been made available to the steel industry since the fiscal year 1978-79.

Mr. Butcher [*pursuant to his reply*, 2 March 1987, c. *517*]: An estimated total of £5,585 million has been made available to the United Kingdom steel industry from public funds since the beginning of the fiscal year 1979-80.

EMPLOYMENT

Labour Statistics

Mr. Pike asked the Paymaster General how many people were employed in full-time manufacturing jobs in *(a)* the North West region, *(b)* Lancashire, *(c)* Burnley travel-to-work area and *(d)* Pendle travel-to-work area in May 1979 and at the latest available date; and if he will give the percentage change.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Between employment censuses, which we held in 1978, 1981 and 1984, employment statistics are based on small-scale sample surveys which cannot produce reliable results for areas smaller than the standard economic regions. At the regional level, figures are not available for those full time in manufacturing industries. The estimated number of people working both full and part time in manufacturing industries in the North West region in June 1979 was 971,000. In September 1986 it was 638,000, a decrease over the period of just over 34 per cent. However, some of the decrease in the figures will be the reclassification of jobs such as industrial cleaning, catering, computer services and road haulage previously done by manufacturers' own employees and now done by subcontractors outside the manufacturing sector. This developing feature of our economy has the effect of exaggerating the extent of the decline of manufacturing employment.

Table 1
Employees employed full-time in manufacturing industries (as defined according to SIC 1968)
(thousands)

	June 1978	*September 1981*	*Percentage change*
North West region	920·0	750·2	−18·5
Lancashire	196·4	170·4	−13·2
Burnley travel-to-work area[1]	20·8	16·5	−20·4
Pendle travel-to-work area[2]	19·3	16·1	−16·4

[1] Defined as the area covered by the Burnley and Padiham jobcentre areas.
[2] Defined as the area covered by the Colne, Nelson and Barnoldswick jobcentre areas.

Table 2
Employees employed full-time in manufacturing industries (as defined according to SIC 1980)
(thousands)

	September 1981	*September 1984*	*Percentage change*
North West region	742·9	621·3	−16·4
Lancashire	167·4	not yet available	
Burnley travel-to-work area	17·0	not yet available	
Pendle travel-to-work area	16·5	not yet available	

Ms. Clare Short asked the Paymaster General what is his best estimate of the number of people with two or more jobs in 1979, 1983 and at the latest available date.

Mr. Lee: The regularly published employed labour force series does not identify persons with two or more jobs.

The labour force survey provides information on a different basis but identifies persons with a second job. The available information for the years requested is given in the table:

Estimates of persons in employment[1] with a second job, either self-employed or as an employee, in Great Britain

Year	*Thousands*
1979	380
1983	550
1985	778

[1] Estimates relate to the spring of each year. Figures for 1983 and 1985 include those on Government schemes, whereas the figure for 1979 includes those on schemes only if reported as in employment.

Ms. Clare Short asked the Paymaster General what is his best estimate of the number of people engaged on Government special measures with contracts of employment in 1983 and at the latest available date.

Mr. Lee: The employment measures run by my Department and the Manpower Services Commission on which participants have contracts of employment are listed in the table, together with the number participating at January[1] 1983 and at the latest available date.

	January 1983	*January 1987*
CEP/community programme	34,199	248,255
community industry	8,044	7,768
Young-new workers schemes	110,000	33,938
Job splitting scheme	88[1]	239
Voluntary projects programme[2]	n/a	1,629[2]
	152,331	291,829

[1] The figure for the job splitting scheme is for February as the scheme was launched in January 1983.
[2] These are staff employed by sponsors to run projects.
n/a = not available.

Ms. Clare Short asked the Paymaster General if he will provide full details of the basis on which the numbers of people in self-employment is estimated and any change that has been made since 1979 in the way in which this figure is estimated.

Mr. Lee: Estimates of self-employment are obtained from the census of population, updated using data from the labour force survey (LFS) and the census of agriculture. Full descriptions of the methods used have been published in a series of articles in *Employment Gazette*, in particular the editions for February 1983, June 1983, March 1985 and May 1986.

In 1979 self-employment was assumed unchanged since 1975.

The first change in methodology since 1979 was the use of LFS results to produce new estimates for 1975 to 1979. These were published in the January 1982 *Employment Gazette*. The LFS data were used in place of discontinued information from the national insurance card count.

In June 1983 the conventional assumption that the level of self-employment had remained constant since the date of the latest LFS data was reviewed. As there were reasons for expecting some continuation of the upward movement in self-employment, a supplementary series which assumed a continuation of the rate of growth observed between the latest two surveys, was introduced.

In July 1984, when data from the 1983 LFS were incorporated in the estimates, the version of the series which assumed no change since the date of the latest LFS was discontinued.

When the estimates were updated to take account of results from the 1984 LFS and revised data from the 1983 LFS the figures for self-employment showed exceptional growth between 1983 and 1984 and the Department's statisticians considered it inappropriate to assume that this rate had continued. It was instead assumed that the average rate of growth between 1981 and 1984 continued thereafter. When 1985 LFS data were incorporated it was assumed, pending the results of the 1986 LFS, that self-employment continued to grow after mid-1985 at the average rate observed between 1981 and 1985.

Ms. Clare Short asked the Paymaster General what is the best available estimate of male full-time employment and male part-time employment in each year since 1979.

Mr. Lee: For the period March 1979 to March 1986, the most recent estimates for male employees in employment are to be found on page 4 of historical supplement No. 1 to the February 1987 *Employment Gazette*. A copy is in the library.

Estimates for June and September (the latest date for which figures are available) are as follows:

Male employees in employment in Great Britain

	Full time	*Part time*
June 1986	10,759,000	852,000
September 1986	10,837,000	850,000

Except for September 1981 (when a census of employment was conducted) no figures are available for part-time males from March 1979 to June 1984.

Estimates of the numbers of self-employed people do not separately identify those who are employed full time.

Training

Mr. Ashdown asked the Paymaster General what discussions have been initiated by the Manpower Services Commission regarding provision of adult training courses in 1987-88 and beyond; what account has been taken of the comparative value for money offered by colleges of further education in providing such courses; when he expects decisions to be made on the commissioning of such provision for 1987-88; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: The Manpower Services Commission will shortly be issuing planning guidance to its area offices in the vocational education and training group on the commissioning of adult training courses in the financial year 1987-88. The planning guidance will encourage area offices to seek the best value for money when commissioning courses, both from colleges of further education and from other training providers. It is expected that the plans developed by area offices will be approved by early April.

Family Expenditure

Mr. Lester asked the Paymaster General if he will provide a breakdown of family expenditure on items such as food, housing costs and so on distinguishing between manual and non-manual households.

Mr. Lee: The information available from the family expenditure survey 1985 is as follows:

Average weekly household expenditure (£)

	Manual households £	*Non-manual households* £
Housing:		
(gross)	27·75	37·79
(net)	26·41	37·40
Fuel, light and power	10·11	11·19
Food	38·28	40·88
Alcoholic drink	10·72	10·16
Tobacco	6·47	3·62
Clothing and footwear	14·03	17·52
Durable household goods	13·47	17·52
Other goods	13·84	19·11
Transport and vehicles	28·15	38·09
Services	18·09	31·03
Miscellaneous	0·72	1·27
All expenditure groups	181·29	226·79
Number of households in the 1985 survey	2,246	2,802

Notes:
(1) Manual households are here defined as those households in which the head of household is an employee or self-employed in a manual occupation.
(2) Non-manual households are here defined as those households in which the head of household is an employee or self-employed in a non-manual occupation, or a member of HM forces.
(3) Households in which the head of household was retired or unoccupied (2,764 in the 1985 survey) are excluded from this table. Unoccupied heads of household include school leavers who have never worked and those unemployed for more than 12 months.

Tourism

Miss Fookes asked the Paymaster General what level of grant-in-aid he expects to make available to the British Tourist Authority and the English Tourist Board in future years.

Mr. Trippier: The grants in aid to the British Tourist Authority and English Tourist Board (ETB) for 1987-88 will be £21·4 million and £11·3 million respectively. In addition, £12 million will be made available to the ETB for assistance to tourism projects under section 4 of the Development of Tourism Act 1969.

Small Businesses

Mr. Gordon Wilson asked the Paymaster General if he will list the legislative measures introduced by the Government designed to assist directly the small business community; if he will show against each the amount of central Government funding in all forms of advice and assistance; and if he is able to show the estimated increase in small business formation associated with each measure.

Mr. Trippier [*pursuant to his reply*, 27 February 1987, column *431*]: A list of all Government measures since 1979 to assist directly the small firms sector was set out in my reply on 9 February to the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne) at columns *56-60*. The principal measures operated by my Department and the Manpower Services Commission to assist small businesses are:

Enterprise allowance scheme (EAS). The EAS was introduced in 1981 and more than 200,000 people have taken advantage of it. Total expenditure on the scheme to 31 December 1986 is £310·9 million and the estimated cost in 1986-87 is £146·6 million.

Training for enterprise. A wide range of business training is made available through the Manpower Services Commission's training for enterprise programme. In 1986-87 the programme will cost £18·8 million and more than 46,000 people will take advantage of it.

Loan guarantee scheme. The LGS was introduced in 1981 and has covered 17,440 loans totalling £571·6 million. The net cost of the scheme to 31 January 1987 has been £107·9 million.

Small firms service. In England, there are 10 centres, which in 1985-86 dealt with 256,532 inquiries and provided 35,242 counselling sessions. The cost of the small firms service in

England in 1985-86 will be £5·1 million. In Scotland and Wales, the small firms service is provided by the Scottish and Welsh Development Agencies.

Local enterprise agency grants scheme (LEAGS). The scheme which assists local enterprise agencies in England was introduced in 1986 and is expected to provide assistance to some 180 enterprise agencies by the end of this financial year. The cost of LEAGS in 1986-87 will be £2·5 million.

Co-operative Development Agency. The remit of the CDA was widened and authority for funding until 1989-90 was provided by the Co-operative Development Agency and Industrial Development Act 1984. There are now more than 1,400 industrial co-operatives.

The legislative authority for the enterprise allowance scheme and the training for enterprise programme is the Employment and Training Act 1973. That for the loan guarantee scheme, the small firms service and the local enterprise agency grants scheme is the Industrial Development Act 1982.

Restart

Mr. George Howarth asked the Paymaster General how many people in Merseyside have been interviewed under the restart programme; and of those, how many have since *(a)* obtained jobs, *(b)* joined the community programme, *(c)* joined job clubs, *(d)* taken part in the enterprise allowance scheme, *(e)* undertaken restart courses, *(f)* undergone training, *(g)* taken part in voluntary projects, and *(h)* remained unemployed: and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to his reply*, 25 February 1987, c. *313-14*]: From 12 May 1986 to 8 January 1987, 52,203 people were interviewed on Merseyside under the restart scheme. We have no means of knowing precisely how many have since found jobs or other opportunities which might lead to employment. However, 75 per cent. of participants agreed to pursue the offer made to them at their restart interview.

Mr. Sheerman asked the Paymaster General if he will publish in the *Official Report* the list of restart menu options that will be offered to unemployed 18 to 25-year-olds when the job training scheme is extended outside the current 10 pilot areas.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to his reply*, 26 February 1987 at c. *339*]: When the new job training scheme is extended outside the current 10 pilot areas the menu options that will be available to unemployed people aged 18 to 25 will include (subject to individual eligibility)

—a submission to a job;
—a submission to a place on a job club;
—a referral for information on the enterprise allowance scheme;
—a submission to the new job training scheme;
—a submission for training under the commission's other training programmes for adults;
—a submission for a job on the community programme;
—a place on a restart course;
—locally available voluntary opportunities
—referrals to specialist help, for example a disablement resettlement officer.

Offers from the menu will be made in the light of which option will best help the individual's return to employment.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Council of Ministers

Mr. Maclennan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the outcome of the meeting of the Council of Agriculture Ministers on 2 and 3 March.

Mr. Gummer: The Council continued its discussions on the implementation of the December agreements on milk and socio-structures.

Decisions were taken on the arrangements for modifying the intervention system in the milk sector. Intervention buying of butter may be suspended once offers into intervention in the Community from 1 March exceed 180,000 tonnes. The Commission will use alternative methods for supporting the market. Intervention will be reintroduced if the market falls to the level of 92 per cent. of the intervention price. If physical stocks at any time exceed 250,000 tonnes, excluding quantities offered before 1 March 1987, the "floor price" of 92 per cent. will be reduced to 90 per cent. The Commission undertook that the current delays in payment of the traders offering into intervention will be shortened to 90 days when intervention is reintroduced under these procedures. For skimmed milk powder, where the council had already agreed that intervention would be suspended between September and March, it was further decided that intervention could be suspended during the rest of the year in which offers into intervention exceed 100,000 tonnes.

These intervention arrangements will result in a more flexible system. They strike the right balance between the clear need to make intervention less of a market in its own right and the need to maintain market stability.

The Council also agreed to adopt the socio-structures package excluding the early retirement provisions on which a decision was deferred. We resisted suggestions for splitting the package in any other way. This outcome means that the measures to which we attach importance, particularly extensification and the environmentally sensitive area arrangements, are adopted. The Commission gave its opinion that the measures agreed will cost the Community budget no more than 350 mecu over three years. Before the end of this period, the Commission will report to the Council which will decide on whether the measures are to be extended.

The outcome of this week's Council means that all the important decisions necessary to implement the agreements reached at last December's Council have now been taken. It is therefore a notable confirmation of the major success of the British presidency.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Benefits

Sir Peter Hordern asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish a table showing the proportion of average earnings taken up by housing benefit, as rent and rate rebates, in 1970, 1980 and the latest available date.

Mr. Lyell: I understand that my hon. Friend's intention is to compare the growth in expenditure on rent and rate rebates over time with movements in average earnings. National rebate schemes did not come into effect until the

early 1970s. The figures in table I show expenditure on the rent rebate and allowances and rate rebate schemes administered by the Department of the Environment but not the more substantial sums, which are difficult to isolate, which were at the time included in weekly supplementary benefit towards rent and rates.

The housing benefit scheme, which was fully implemented in April 1983, brought together the assistance with rent and rates previously provided through supplementary benefits and through the rent rebate and allowances and rate rebate schemes. Table II shows expenditure in the first full year of the housing benefit scheme and the latest estimates for the current year. To compare expenditure incurred under the different schemes would, however, be misleading as the apparent large growth in expenditure in 1983-84 arose primarily from the reclassification of what was formerly supplementary benefit expenditure.

Expenditure on rent and rate rebate and allowance schemes compared with average earnings

Table I	*Expenditure £ million*	*Percentage change over initial year*	*Average[1] earnings in April of each year*	*Percentage movement in average earnings over initial year*
			£	
1976-77	336	—	71	—
1980-81	632	88	122	73

Expenditure on housing benefit compared with average earnings

Table II				
1983-84	3,735	—	165	—
1986-87[2]	5,099	37	210	27

Notes:
[1] Average earnings of all male workers.
[2] Estimated outturn.

Mental Health (Community Services)

Mr. Irving asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what specific measures he proposes to take to remedy the shortfall in community services for the mentally ill identified by the Audit Commission report, December 1986.

Mrs. Currie: As I indicated in my reply to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) on 20 January at column *537*, the Government do not think that the substantial progress already made in carrying forward the policy of community care is properly reflected in the Audit Commission report; in particular, in the mental illness field, its account of existing community facilities is misleading.

The challenge of providing a good comprehensive community-orientated modern service for mentally ill people has been patchily met by health and local authorities; and successive Governments have recognised that it will take a good deal of effort over a long period to produce the kind of service we want. But a great deal has been achieved; the Health Advisory Service, and Good Practices in Mental Health, with sponsorship from the Department have helped to catalogue and spread good practice. Since 1979 gross expenditure on hospital and community health services for mentally ill people had grown by 18 per cent. in real terms by 1985 and gross expenditure on personal social services for this group by 47 per cent. (also in real terms) in the same period. A lot remains to be done; and funding for and pressure on authorities are designed to secure appropriate priority for services for mentally ill people.

We shall also await with interest the report of Sir Roy Griffiths' overview of community care policy announced by my right hon. Friend in his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward) on 16 December at columns *461-62*.

Handicapped Children (Medical Services)

Mr. Wrigglesworth asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will introduce legislation obliging education authorities to pay for medical services such as speech therapy and physiotherapy for children who are handicapped or have special needs.

Mrs. Currie: The Government have no plans to introduce such legislation. At the time of local government and National Health Service reorganisation in 1974 the principle was firmly established that medical services would generally be provided by health authorities. This principle was reaffirmed in the Education Act 1981.

Social Security Act 1986

Mr. Eastham asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what net savings will result in the financial years 1986-87 and 1987-88 from the implementation of the Social Security Act 1986.

Mr. Major: The effect of implementing the Social Security Act 1986 will be to increase benefit expenditure slightly in 1986-87 and to save some £75 million in benefit expenditure in 1987-88.

West London Hospital

Mr. Raymond asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the continuing threat of closure facing the West London hospital.

Mrs. Currie: I understand that, following consideration of the response to consultation on the closure of the West London hospital, work is continuing on the feasibility of relocating the hospital's maternity unit at either Charing Cross or St. Stephen's and a report will be made to a future meeting of the Riverside health authority.

Retirement Pension

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he next intends to make an announcement about state retirement pension levels.

Mr. Major: The next review of benefit levels will take place in the autumn of this year and a statement will be made shortly afterwards.

Mr. Patrick Thompson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish a table showing the yearly percentage increase for the pensioners price index and for the retirement pension for each year since 1983.

Mr. Major: The information requested is shown for the uprating month in each year in the table.

Percentage increase since previous uprating date

	Pensioners Price Index: One Person household[1]	Pensioners Price Index: Two Persons household[1]	Retirement Pension: Single person	Retirement Pension: Couple
November 1983	4·6	4·8	3·7	3·7
November 1984	4·4	4·5	5·1	5·1
November 1985	4·8	4·7	7·0	7·0
July 1986[2]	2·2	2·2	1·0	1·1

[1] The Pensioners Price Index measures the effect of inflation on low-income pensioner households. It covers about 40 per cent. of all pensioner households and is published quarterly. Figures used to calculate increases are for the quarter in which the uprating month fell in each year.
[2] Increase since November 1985.

Artificial Limb Fitting

Mr. Hannam asked the Secretary of State for Social Security what studies his Department has made of the new process of computerised artifical limb fitting developed by University College, London; and if he plans to develop it for use in the artificial limb and appliance centres.

Mr. Major: The work on the computerised artificial limb fitting, carried out by the University College London, has been wholly funded by the Department. The research phase is nearing its end.

Limb fitting companies have been invited to participate in trials of the new limb fitting system and a pilot scheme is now under way.

Our officials and the college are seeking a commercial involvement for the manufacture of the system and its supply to the artificial limb and appliance service.

National Disability Income

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his policy towards a national disability income, and whether he has any proposals to introduce changes in social security provision affecting disabled people.

Mr. Major: The Government are aware of the case made for a national disability income and share the underlying aim of progress towards a more coherent system of benefits for long-term sick and disabled people as resources permit. However, it would be inappropriate to make significant changes to existing benefit provision in advance of results of the survey of disabled people currently being carried out by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys. The results of the survey are expected to be published in 1988 and will provide the evidence for a comprehensive review of benefits for long-term sick and disabled people.

Injuries (Animal Attacks)

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services, pursuant to the reply by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) on 26 November, *Official Report*, column 295, whether he will give a breakdown of the figures provided in Tables (1) and (2) by the type of animal which inflicted the injuries on the people concerned; if he will also give the figures as to the total injuries caused to people by each category of animal; and what advice his Department gives on attacks by animals.

Mrs. Currie: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will update the information contained in his reply for 26 November, *Official Report*, column 295, to the latest date for which figures are available.

Mrs. Currie: Updated information on hospital statistics for Scotland is shown in the table. I regret that data on injuries for England and Northern Ireland for 1985, and figures on the number of deaths registered as being caused by animals for the constituent parts of the United Kingdom for 1986, are not yet available.

Estimate of number of hospital admissions following injury caused by animals (ICD(9) E905 excluding E905.7, E906) Scotland 1985

Area	Estimated number
Scotland	310

Medical Equipment

Mr. Patrick Thompson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received concerning the situation whereby medical equipment may be donated by a registered charity to a health authority without paying value-added tax on the purchase but that this relief is not available when the equipment is donated to a doctor's surgery; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: We have received one letter on this issue which has been passed to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Energy Saving

Mr. Patrick Thompson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what plans he has to ensure local health authority tenants are fully aware of the single payments for draughtproofing currently provided by his Department.

Mr. Major: Single payments for draughtproofing materials are available only to people entitled to supplementary benefit. Most health authority tenants are employed by the authority and are not therefore eligible for such payments.

Mr. Patrick Thompson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what arrangements he has made to ensure his Freephone DHSS service can promote the work of local neighbourhood energy action projects by way of local referrals;

(2) what plans he has to ensure that those claiming severe weather payments can also claim single payments for draughtproofing where the work can be done by local neighbourhood energy action groups.

Mr. Major: I shall let my hon. Friend have replies as soon as possible.

Mr. Patrick Thompson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what arrangements he has made to promote the Energy Efficiency Office's Monergy Save Freepost and Monergy Linkline service to claimants of supplementary and other benefits.

Mr. Major: The Monergy hotline and freepost services are available to everyone, not just those in receipt of supplementary benefit and other benefits. Both services have been widely advertised in national and local newspapers and special promotional activities, and the hotline has also been advertised on national television.

Mr. Patrick Thompson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what plans he has to introduce a specific scheme to replace single payments for draughtproofing.

Mr. Major: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) on 13 January 1987 at column *170*.

Christie Hospital, Manchester

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has received any representations about the effect on patient comfort and care of budget changes for Christie hospital in south Manchester; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: My hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Silvester) has brought to my attention the important work being done at Christie hospital and what could be achieved with increased financial resources. The regional health authority has recently announced a package of additional funding of more than £¼ million for Christie, which will provide 20 additional nurses and fund other service developments. In addition, Christie hospital will get a substantial share of the £104,000 allocated to south Manchester health authority next year in recognition of its regional specialty workload.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if, pursuant to his answer of 25 February, *Official Report*, column *317*, he will list in the *Official Report* those health authorities which have decided, or are considering whether, to use allocations from the waiting list funds for projects involving the private sector indicating *(a)* the specialties involved, *(b)* the cost and *(c)* the private sector participants; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Premature Births

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will give a breakdown by regional health authority of the number of premature deliveries by gestational age of the babies concerned; and if he will indicate in each group the percentage survival rate of such babies in each health authority in the latest year for which figures are available;

(2) if he will give a breakdown by estimated gestational age of the numbers of premature live births in England and Wales in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and if he will state how many of the babies in each case in each of those years survived.

Mrs. Currie: I shall let the hon. Member have replies as soon as possible.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will state the earliest gestational age at delivery of a premature baby which showed signs of life after birth in England and Wales in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mrs. Currie: I regret that the information requested is not available from the registration of live births, as period of gestation is not collected under this system.

Raptors

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will publish a table giving the figures of injuries to humans inflicted by raptors for each of the years 1979 to date for Scotland, England and Wales, which were reported to health agencies; how many of these injuries were serious; how many of them were to children; and what guidance his Department issues or has issued on this subject.

Mrs. Currie: I regret that information is not available centrally in the form requested.

Vaccination

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether deaths occurring in the first year of life have been identified as being attributed to vaccination since 1971; and how soon after the vaccinations the deaths occurred.

Mrs. Currie: Three deaths to persons aged under one year were registered in England and Wales between 1971 and 1978 where the underlying cause of death was assigned to "Complications and misadventures in prophylaxis with bacterial and other vaccines" (International Classification of Diseases (ICD) 8th revision E933, E934)—one in 1972, one in 1974 and one in 1976. Between 1979 and 1985, there have been no deaths to persons aged under one year registered in England and Wales where the underlying cause of death was assigned to "Bacterial and other vaccines causing adverse effects in therapeutic use" (ICD 9th revision E948, E949). From the registration of these deaths, it is not possible to state the interval between vaccination and death.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the research studies into cot death that are known to his Department; and if any such study recorded whether or not the child had been vaccinated.

Mrs. Currie: The main body for Government-funded biomedical research in the United Kingdom is the Medical Research Council which receives its grant in aid from the Department of Education and Science. The council is currently supporting a number of studies that may have relevance to cot deaths and respiratory distress conditions. In addition the Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths, a charitable organisation, is currently supporting a number of studies related to cot deaths. We do not have information centrally to indicate whether the children involved had been vaccinated.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many reports of sudden unexpected death occurring in infants under the age of one year have been made to the Committee on Safety of Medicines; how many were reported as associated with medication other than a vaccine; and how many were associated with pertussis related vaccine.

Mrs. Currie: Since 1964, the Committee on Safety of Medicines has received 75 reports from doctors, dentists or coronors of deaths in children under one year old where the death may have resulted from an adverse reaction to a drug. The number of these which were sudden and unexpected could be determined only at disproportionate cost. Forty of the reports named a drug other than a vaccine as suspect and 27 reports named a product containing pertussis vaccine as suspect. A report does not necessarily indicate a causal relationship between a product and a reported reaction.

Maternity Payments

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in Islington, North claimed the maternity grant in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: Information is not available in the precise form requested. The Islington, North constituency is covered by the Department's local offices at Finsbury Park, Highgate and Hoxton, although their boundaries are not conterminous with the constituency. The numbers of claims for maternity grant received at those local offices during the 1986 calendar year were as follows:

	Number
Finsbury Park	1,318
Highgate	1,656
Hoxton	321

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in Islington, North received maternity allowance in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: Information is not available in the form requested, but in the 12 months ending April 1986, the latest year for which figures are available, the following numbers of claims to maternity allowance were made at the Department's offices which cover Islington, North, although the boundaries are not conterminous:

	Number
Finsbury Park	1,209
Highgate	1,105
Hoxton	695

Towers Hospital, Leicester

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will make a statement on the escape by a patient from Arnold Lodge regional secure unit, Towers hospital, Leicester on Thursday 26 February;

(2) if he is satisfied with security arrangements at Arnold Lodge regional secure unit, Towers hospital, Leicester;

(3) how many patients are currently at Arnold Lodge regional secure unit, Towers hospital, Leicester; and what is the staff-patient ratio;

(4) how many patients have absconded from Arnold Lodge regional secure unit, Towers hospital, Leicester, since the opening of the regional secure unit;

(5) in the event of an escape from a regional secure unit, who exactly is notified; and, in the case of the specific escape from Arnold Lodge, Leicester, whether the police were informed.

Mrs. Currie: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Regional Secure Units

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his Department's policy on allowing patients on parole from regional secure units within the grounds of the unit.

Mrs. Currie: The degree of supervision which should be exercised within the grounds is a matter for the patient's responsible medical officer to decide, having regard to all the circumstances of the case.

Lung Cancer

Mr. Stevens asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when the recommendations of the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council on the prescription of lung cancer will be implemented.

Mr. Major: I am pleased to announce that regulations were laid today which will add this disease to the schedule of prescribed diseases from 1 April 1987. Benefit will be payable to those who suffer from lung cancer who work or who have worked underground in a tin mine, or who are or were exposed to bis(chloromethyl) ether produced during the manufacture of chloromethyl methyl ether, or who are or were exposed to zinc chromate, calcium chromate or strontium chromate in their pure forms, while at work.

Mentally Ill and Handicapped People

Mr. Soames asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the objectives, priorities and achievements of Her Majesty's Government's policy towards mentally ill and handicapped people since 1983.

Mrs. Currie [*pursuant to her reply*, 12 February 1987, c. *361*]: Services for mentally ill and mentally handicapped people, along with those for physically handicapped and elderly people, are high on our priority list. Within those broad priorities, we have given fresh impetus, direction and support to the development of comprehensive and integrated local service networks—providing people with accessible and acceptable help appropriate to their individual needs. For both mental illness and mental handicap services, we require a partnership between health and local authorities. For mental illness services, we require a service network which includes in-patient beds, a range of alternative accommodation (with appropriate support), and out-patient and day services. For mental handicap services, we require a network which includes a range of specialist residential care and home support, access to specialist resources and varied day services. Ready access to ordinary services and opportunities and planned and shared integration with local communities are vital.

Achievements since 1983, and earlier, have been the spread of good quality local services with marked improvements both for those living in more ordinary settings and those in hospital, and a marked shift of emphasis from the latter to the former. This has been achieved by increased resources, greater flexibility in their deployment and redeployment, clearer guidelines and wider spread of information about good practice, much more effective monitoring and accountability arrangements, targetted research, and specially funded initiatives to encourage new developments. Those in the front line of achievements have been local planners and other workers with vision and determination, in both the statutory and voluntary sectors; and service users who have themselves shown what they are capable of given the opportunity. Sir Roy Griffiths is presently conducting a review of care in the community provisions which should be completed by the end of 1987.

My right hon. Friend will be laying before Parliament later in the year the report required by section 11 of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986.

Attempted Suicide (Male Unemployed)

Mr. Terry Lewis asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many attempted male suicides were recorded for each year from 1979 to 1986 inclusive; and how many of these involved unemployed males.

Mr. Currie [*pursuant to her reply*, 3 March 1987]: Information is not available in the form requested. The number of male suicide deaths for England and Wales in each year from 1979 to 1985 is given in the table. Information for 1986 is not yet available.

Male suicide deaths for England and Wales 1979-85 (ICD Nos. E950—E959)

Year	*Number*
1979	2,564
1980	2,629
1981	2,761
1982	2,781
1983	2,812
1984	2,859
1985	2,949

Mr. Terry Lewis asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what studies have been undertaken into possible links between male unemployment and the incidence of attempted suicides.

Mrs. Currie [*pursuant to her reply*, 3 March 1987]: I understand that the Medical Research Council, which receives grant-in-aid from the science vote of the Department of Education and Science and is the main Government body for biomedical research in the United Kingdom, is funding research at its unit for epidemiological studies in psychiatry.

Nurses

Mr. O'Brien asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the conditions of service for nurses who transfer with mentally handicapped people from the hospitals to community care for mentally handicapped people with social services departments; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie [*pursuant to her reply*, 3 March 1987]: Transfer terms for NHS staff who moved to local authority employment as a result of the care in the community initiative are the subject of discussion between the Government Departments concerned.

Currently, nursing staff who transfer with mentally handicapped patients from hospitals to local authority community care may, depending on arrangements made locally, either move on secondment (retaining NHS conditions of service) or be recruited by the local authority on local government terms and conditions of service. We are actively exploring the feasibility of modifying these arrangements to facilitate such staff transfers.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Payroll Giving

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg asked the Lord Privy Seal what arrangements he will be making to enable hon. Members to participate, if they wish, in the charities payroll giving scheme under the Finance Act 1986 provisions.

Mr. Biffen: On 17 February 1987 the Services Committee resolved

"that the Fees Office should make arrangements to enable Members and Members' staff, who are paid through the Fees Office, to participate in a payroll giving scheme for charities, as provided for in sections 27 and 28 of the Finance Act 1986."

I understand that Mr. Speaker has endorsed this resolution and that the Fees Office is proceeding with the necessary detailed arrangements to implement the scheme. All Members will be notified once the formalities are complete.

ENVIRONMENT

Private Vacant Houses

9. **Mr. Terry Lewis** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what research is being undertaken by his Department into the reasons for the incidence of vacant privately owned houses.

Mr. Patten: The Department is commissioning a survey into vacant private dwellings as part of its housing research programme for 1987-88.

Rent Control

16. **Mr. Sackville** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has received a copy of the recent report of the Institute of Rent Officers on the future of rent control and the private rented sector.

Mr. Ridley: Yes.

Local Authority Expenditure

17. **Mr. Peter Bruinvels** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate the amount spent by local authorities in *(a)* twinning arrangements with Third world countries and *(b)* establishing nuclear-free zones; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Boyson: No central governmental records are kept on these matters. It is, however, clear that a number of local authorities are wasting ratepayers' and taxpayers' money on these and other activities that have little to do with their functions.

Competitive Tendering

18. **Mr. Meadowcroft** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to introduce legislation concerning competitive tendering by local authorities.

Dr. Boyson: We shall introduce legislation at the first available opportunity, either before or after the next general election.

Community Charge

19. **Mr. Stott** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish any responses received in his Department to the document "The Community Charge" published by his Department on 15 December 1986.

Dr. Boyson: No. The booklet is not primarily a consultation document; nor do I have the permission of respondents to publish their views.

26. **Miss Maynard** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations have been received to the document "The Community Charge" published by his Department on 15 December 1986.

Dr. Boyson: We have received more than a dozen representations in response to the document on the community charge.

41. **Mr. Wareing** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many representations had been received in his Department by 27 February in response to the document "The Community Charge" published by his Department on 15 December 1986.

Dr. Boyson: We have received more than a dozen representations in response to the document on the community charge.

49. **Mr. Jack Thompson** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish any responses received in his Department to the document "The Community Charge" published by his Department on 15 December 1986.

Dr. Boyson: No. The booklet is not primarily a consultation document; nor do I have the permission of respondents to publish their views.

56. **Mr. Clelland** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many organisations and individuals have responded to his Department's document "The Community Charge" published on 15 December 1986.

Mr. Boyson: We have received more than a dozen representations in response to the document on the community charge.

Leicester (Housing Programme)

20. **Mr. Janner** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how much money Leicester city council received for its housing programme in 1979 and 1986.

Mr. John Patten: The housing investment programme allocations made to Leicester city council for 1979-80 and 1986-87 were £20,524 million and £13·2 million respectively. In 1986-87, unlike 1979-80, the council has also been able to make use of capital receipts to increase its capital expenditure.

Local Authorities (Advertising)

21. **Mr. Spencer** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from local authorities concerning the draft publicity code on advertising by local authorities.

Dr. Boyson: I recently met representatives of the local authority associations to discuss a preliminary draft of the code. In addition, we have received a number of detailed comments from other organisations.

Houses in Multiple Occupation

22. **Mr. Pike** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he proposes to bring forward legislation in light of the publication by his Department of the physical and social survey of houses in multiple occupation in England and Wales.

Mr. John Patten: My right hon. Friend has no present plans to do so.

67. **Miss Boothroyd** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received following the publication by his Department of the physical and social survey of houses in multiple occupation in England and Wales.

Mr. John Patten: We have received a number of representations about the Housing (Houses in Multiple Occupation) Bill. Our response to the research was outlined in my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste) on 23 January at columns *776-77*.

Water Bill

23. **Mr. Corbyn** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of the average household annual water bill is due to interest and borrowing costs.

Mr. Ridley: In 1985-86 water authority interest charges amounted to 25 per cent. of revenue from water service consumers. It is not possible to attribute interest charges more precisely to any group of customers.

Homeless Households

24. **Mr. Raynsford** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the numbers of homeless households in bed-and-breakfast hotels; and if he will estimate the cost in 1987.

Mr. Ridley: On the number of households, I refer to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) on 20 February, at column *854*. Estimates of cost in 1986-87 or 1987-88 would involve too many assumptions to be reliable.

44. **Mr. George Howarth** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the latest figures for the number of homeless households reported by local authorities in England.

Mr. Tracey: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) on 20 February, at column *854*. Copies of the tables relating to the third quarter 1986 and earlier quarters are in the Library.

Rural Sewerage

25. **Mrs. Virginia Bottomley** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has to increase the grant for rural sewerage.

Mr. Waldegrave: I propose to revalue to current prices the grants for sewerage and water supply in rural areas. The Department is writing to water and local authorities with the details. I will send a copy of the letter to my hon. Friend and I am also placing one in the Library of the House.

Local Authority Housing Development

27. **Mr. Wainwright** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received on his plans to restrict the use of private finance for local authority housing developments.

Mr. John Patten: The Department has received several requests for the Secretary of State's consent to specific schemes and a number of local authorities and other bodies have submitted views on the proposals.

Bathing Beaches

28. **Mr. Ray Powell** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects Britain's bathing beaches to be able to comply fully with the European Economic Community water quality directive; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: More than half the United Kingdom bathing waters already comply with the directive's standards. Typically, major schemes to improve the quality of bathing waters take a number of years to complete and involve expenditure of millions of pounds. However, at the present rate of spending, we expect nearly all these waters to comply by the end of the century.

Private Sector Rents

29. **Mr. Sedgemore** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will be publishing any proposals for de-controlling private sector rents.

Mr. John Patten: We have no plans to amend the Rent Act in this Parliament.

Local Government Finance

30. **Mr. Cunliffe** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a White Paper on reform of local government finance before introducing any legislation to alter the rating system.

Dr. Boyson: Further statements of Government policy on this subject will be made as and when appropriate.

Local Authority Housing Waiting Lists

31. **Mr. Tony Lloyd** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his latest estimate of the numbers of people on local authority housing waiting lists.

Mr. Tracey: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery).

Northern Region (Dereliction)

32. **Mr. Dormand** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will increase the grant to local authorities in the northern region for the clearance of dereliction; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: I announced on 28 January that resources nationally for derelict land reclamation in 1987-88 will be about £81·14 million. Of this, £13·75 million or 18 per cent. has been allocated to the local authorities in the Department's northern region. This is £1 million more than their allocation at the beginning of 1986-87. I am unable to say whether further resources can be made available during the year.

Basildon (Tenants)

33. **Mr. Amess** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the latest total of New Towns Commission tenants in Basildon; and what is the figure for the corresponding period in each of the last four years.

Mr. John Patten: The number of tenancies given in the latest quarterly housing return from the Commission for the New Towns in respect of Basildon, and figures for the corresponding quarter in the four previous years are as follows:

	Number
December 1982	16,517
December 1983	15,886
December 1984	15,514
December 1985	15,103
December 1986	14,735

Sports Council

34. **Mr. Tony Banks** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had with the chairman of the Sports Council regarding his Department's grant to the Sports Council.

Mr. Tracey: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 17 December to the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry), at column *582*.

Land Use

35. **Mr. Livsey** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidelines his Department will be laying down for housebuilding in or near villages as a result of the proposed changes in agricultural land use.

Mr. Waldegrave: Planning policy on the character of new housing in the circumstances to which the hon. Member refers is set out in circular 15/84. Inter alia, it says,

"... sites for new housing should be well related in scale and location to existing development ... This applies to development within or adjoining larger towns and cities, and also to sites in smaller towns and villages where new housing, sympathetic in scale and character, can be permitted. Such development can help to sustain smaller communities in rural areas".

57. **Mr. Kirkwood** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received following his announcement of his intention to produce a consultation paper on alternative land use.

Mr. Waldegrave: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer that I gave earlier today to my hon. Friends the Members for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart), for Christchurch (Mr. Adley) and for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey).

64. **Mr. Sean Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what comments he has so far received on the draft circular "Development Involving Agricultural Land."

Mr. Waldegrave: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer that I gave earlier today to my hon. Friends the Members for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart), for Christchurch (Mr. Adley) and for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey).

Soil Erosion

36. **Mr. Rogers** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what resources he plans to devote to monitoring soil erosion in 1987-88.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Department is not planning to devote any resources specifically to monitoring soil erosion in 1987-88.

I understand the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will be devoting £27,000 to monitoring soil erosion in 1987-88. Officials in the Department and the Ministry are in touch on this work.

Secure Tenants (House Purchase)

37. **Mr. Thurnham** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many secure tenants have had their applications to buy their homes under the Housing Act 1980 refused during the last 12 months on the grounds of defective title; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: I am only aware of cases which have occurred in Bolton, where I understand 42 right-to-buy applications have so far been refused on this ground.

Rivers

38. **Mr. Allan Roberts** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the total estimated cost of cleaning up rivers in the United Kingdom so as to meet European Community standards.

Mr. Waldegrave: It is not possible to separate the costs of cleaning up rivers to meet the standards in EC directives relating to freshwater, that is, those concerned with the quality of water to support freshwater fish and with the discharge of dangerous substances, from general investment in pollution control. Most investment in cleaning up rivers is undertaken to meet national objectives such as the elimination of class 4 rivers.

Local Authorities (Contracts)

39. **Mr. Powley** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will take steps to outlaw political contract compliance conditions imposed on contractors by local authorities.

Dr. Boyson: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement that my right hon. Friend made on 18 February at column 916. While we have reluctantly had to postpone the legislation planned for this Session, it is our firm intention to introduce appropriate legislation at the first available opportunity.

48. **Mrs. Roe** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what up-to-date estimates he has of the scope for potential savings by local authorities from contracting out services.

Dr. Boyson: Precise estimates of the potential savings from contracting out are not possible as the cost-effectiveness of local authority service provision varies from service to service and council to council. However, authorities which contract out services, frequently report savings of 20 per cent. to 30 per cent. on previous costs.

Single People (Acccommodation)

40. **Mr. Chris Smith** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his latest estimate of the number of single people requiring cheap rented accommodation in *(a)* London and *(b)* the metropolitan county areas.

Mr. Tracey: The Department does not collect this information.

Estate Action

42. **Dr. Twinn** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment which local authorities are refusing to discuss the scope for improving their housing stock with Estate Action.

Mr. John Patten: Of the local authorities originally invited, in June 1985, to join in discussion with Estate Action (then known as the Urban Housing Renewal Unit) only two—Lambeth and Doncaster—have not taken up the offer.

Since then 63 local authorities have received approvals for £50 million additional resources in support of Estate Action schemes.

Anti-fouling Paint

43. **Mr. Campbell-Savours** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representations he has received regarding the copolymer content of tributyl tin anti-fouling paint; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received over 1,000 such representations in the past two years. The Government's latest measures to control the supply and use of such paints was set out in the answer given on 24 February to my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) at columns *202-3*.

51. **Mr. Ron Davies** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to introduce regulations to reduce the permitted level of organotin compounds in copolymer anti-fouling paints; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 24 February to my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) (*Official Report*, c. *202-3*).

Structure Plans

45. **Mr. Spearing** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement concerning his intentions in respect of structure plans for rural areas.

50. **Mr. Hancock** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the future of structure plans.

55. **Mr. Nicholas Baker** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to bring forward proposals to reform the present system of structure plans.

Mr. Waldegrave: In London and the metropolitan areas, unitary development plans, prepared by the London boroughs and the metropolitan districts, are to be introduced under the provisions of the Local Government Act 1985. Proposals for new arrangements elsewhere were made in the consultation paper, "The Future of Development Plans", published last September. Copies have been placed in the Library. Comments should be made by 14 March. Changes on the lines proposed would require primary legislation which I do not expect to be introduced during this Parliament.

Urban Development Corporations

46. **Mr. Gerald Bowden** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to be in a position to announce the setting up of the four new urban development corporations foreshadowed in October 1986.

Mr. John Patten: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave to the right hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Freeson) on 15 January, *Official Report*, at column *269*. I am pleased to say that the order designating the Trafford Park development corporation has now been approved by Parliament and the corporation came into operation on 10 February.

Housing Associations

47. **Mr. Squire** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to expand the role of housing associations in providing housing under general need.

Mr. Tracey: Under the increased programme for the housing corporation and new private finance initiatives announced by my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing, Urban and Affairs and Construction on 9 December, housing associations will be able to cater for more people in need of housing, particularly homeless families in bed and breakfast accommodation.

59. **Mr. Freeson** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many responses have been received in his Department to his announcement of 5 February about financial assistance to housing associations and further controls on local authority financial assistance to them and other bodies.

Mr. John Patten: The Department has received 13 written responses and a large number of telephone enquiries.

60. **Mr. Rooker** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many local housing authorities were affected by his announcement of 5 February concerning financial assistance to housing associations and other bodies.

Mr. John Patten: All local authorities were affected by my announcement, insofar as it proposed new powers for authorities to give financial assistance for private rented housing and required them to obtain the Secretary of State's consent before giving such assistance. It is impossible to say how many authorities were working up specific schemes that might now require consent, since there has been no obligation on local authorities to inform us of their intentions in this regard.

Creative Accounting

Mr. McLoughlin asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received on the use of creative accounting devices by local authorities.

Mr. Chope: We have received a number of representations relating to those creative accounting devices which will have the effect of imposing a massive burden on ratepayers in future years.

Rates

53. **Mr. Fallon** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many English non-metropolitan district councils levy higher rates than 253·7p in the pound.

Mr. Chope: There are 27 non-metropolitan district councils with average general rate poundages of more than 253·7p in 1986-87.

54. **Mr. Leigh** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met leaders of the authorities which are to be rate-capped in the next financial year to discuss their levels of spending and rates.

Mr. Chope: On 12 February, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State met local authority association representatives, some from rate-capped authorities, to discuss the Local Government Finance Bill, which includes provision for rate limitation in 1987-88.

Football Hooliganism

58. **Mr. Stevens** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met members of the Sports Council to discuss measures to combat football hooliganism.

Mr. Tracey: I discussed this with the chairman of the Sports Council on 18 February.

Empty Houses

61. **Mr. Litherland** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about any progress made in studying the scale of, and reasons for, vacant privately owned houses.

Mr. Tracey: I refer the hon. Member to my reply given earlier today to the hon. Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis).

Homelessness

62. **Mr. Cartwright** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to receive the results of his research project into the causes of homelessness.

Mr. Tracey: We expect to receive by the end of March 1988 the results of the homelessness study recently commissioned from the university of Birmingham's centre for urban and regional studies.

71. **Mr. Hardy** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a White Paper with proposals to reduce homelessness in England and Wales.

Mr. Tracey: My right hon. Friend has no plans to do so. On action against homelessness, I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 16 January to the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) at column *331*.

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his reply of Friday 16 January, *Official Report*, column *331*, what is his estimate of the comparative public sector costs of housing homeless families in non-metropolitan areas by *(a)* providing them with newly built council dwellings, *(b)* providing them with dwellings acquired from the private sector and improved for letting and *(c)* providing them with bed and breakfast accommodation.

Mr. Tracey: The comparable figures for non-metropolitan areas in England are around £3,700 and £3,600 in the first year, and an average of some £15 per household day, respectively.

Private Rented Accommodation

63. **Mr. Yeo** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what population of households live in privately rented accommodation.

Mr. Tracey: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) on 23 February at columns *96-98*.

Nitrates

65. **Mr. Teddy Taylor** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress he has made in measures to reduce the nitrate content of public water supplies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: Discussions are continuing both within Government and with the water industry and interested outside organisations on the various options for limiting nitrate concentrations in water supplies. On Monday I discussed the contribution which farmers could make with representatives of the National Farmers Union. The water authorities most concerned are reviewing their nitrate strategies in close consultation with Government, identifying areas at risk more closely, and investigating the extent to which protection policies are practical in those areas.

UK 2000

66. **Dr. Godman** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met the Chairman of UK 2000 to discuss the progress of the scheme.

Mr. Waldegrave: I met Richard Branson, the Chairman of UK 2000, on 29 October 1986; my officials have met Mr. Branson about twice a month since then to monitor progress.

Gleneagles Agreement

68. **Mr. Ernie Ross** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent action he has taken in support of the Gleneagles agreement on sport and apartheid.

Mr. Tracey: All governing bodies of sport have been advised of the Government's commitment to the Gleneagles agreement. They are aware that Her Majesty's Government discourages sporting contact with South Africa, and that Government and Sports Council Policy, most recently reaffirmed in January, ensures that no public funds are made available to support such contacts. I only rarely need to approach individual bodies to repeat or clarify that advice.

Sizewell

69. **Mr. Madden** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received concerning the environmental implications of the proposal to build a pressurised water reactor station at Sizewell.

Mr. Waldegrave: I have received a number of letters commenting on the proposal to build a pressurised water reactor at Sizewell. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy is currently considering Sir Frank Layfield's report before reaching his decision on the CEGB's application.

Bed-and-Breakfast Accommodation

70. **Mr. Tom Cox** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what action his Department is to take to improve the conditions under which families live in bed-and-breakfast hotel accommodation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tracey: The action that we are taking to assist and advise local authorities on the use of their powers to improve conditions in houses in multiple occupation was described in the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste) on 23 January at columns *776-77*. Our current research on homelessness is examining the use of temporary accommodation.

Housing Prices

72. **Mr. Torney** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will consider introducing legislation to control housing and flat prices in large cities, particularly London.

Mr. Tracey: No.

Sellafield

73. **Mr. Cohen** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what levels of radiation in the environment have been recorded as a result of the accidents at the Sellafield reprocessing plant during January; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: No increases in the levels of radiation in the environment were detected following the incidents at Sellafield in January 1987.

Mr. Frank Cook asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if the Government propose to take any action with regard to safety standards at Sellafield in the light of the most recent call by the Irish Government for the closure of the plant; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: I have been asked to reply:

Safety standards at Sellafield are kept under continuous review by Her Majesty's Nuclear Installations Inspectorate.

Housing

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many homes were completed for local councils and housing associations in the year 1986; and how this compares with the number in 1978;

(2) what is the latest available figure for the number of homes started by housing associations and local councils in the year 1986; and how this figure compares with the number of starts in the year 1978.

Mr. Tracey: The numbers of housebuilding starts and completions for local authorities and housing associations in 1978 appear in table 6.1*(a)* of "Housing and Construction Statistics 1975-1985" and the provisional estimates for 1986 are in table 3 of this Department's press notice No. 60 issued on 5 February 1987. Copies are available in the Library.

Water Courses (South Yorkshire)

Mr. Hardy asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has as to what improvement has taken place in the quality of South Yorkshire water courses between 1980 and 1986; and what further improvement he expects by 1990.

Mr. Waldegrave: In South Yorkshire between 1980 and 1986, some 65 km of canal and river length were reported as being upgraded—nearly half of this having previously been class 4 (bad quality). By 1990, a further 98 km are expected to meet the long-term objective of class 2 (fair) and be capable of supporting reasonably good coarse fisheries. These improvements are the result of investment in improved sewage treatment by Yorkshire water authority and of reductions in industrial effluent.

Local Authorities (Fees and Charges)

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when the Government will complete their review of local authority fees and charges announced in "Paying for Local Government" (Cmnd. 9714); and what proposals that review is considering in relation to local authorities' powers to charge for services such as compulsory education.

Mr. Ridley: I have not yet completed consideration of the results of the review; but I hope to have done so fairly soon.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 5 March 1987

THE ARTS

Museums (Admission Charges)

Mr. Nellist asked the Minister for the Arts what representations he has received about the effect on attendances of the introduction of admission charges to museums.

Mr. Luce: In the 12 months to the end of February I received six letters expressing concern about the effect on attendances of charges for admission to the national museums and galleries that I sponsor.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL FOR SCOTLAND

Child Sexual Abuse

Dr. Godman asked the Solicitor-General for Scotland when he last reviewed the policy on prosecution of child sexual abuse cases.

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: Prosecutions in respect of offences involving the sexual abuse of children are afforded a high priority in Scotland and every effort is made to ensure that proceedings are instituted expeditiously and handled in such a way as to minimise the inevitable traumatic effects upon the children involved. In addition, procurators fiscal are instructed to maintain contact with other agencies concerned with the safety and welfare of the children and, in particular, with the reporter to the children's panel, with whom the fiscal has a close working relationship.

WALES

Brecon Beacons (Herbicide)

Dr. David Clark asked the Secretary of State for Wales what action he proposes to take to prevent the spraying of herbicide on part of the Black Mountains site of special scientific interest in the Brecon Beacons national park; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The Nature Conservancy Council has already written to the landowner concerned to remind him of his statutory duty to inform it of any notifiable operation he intends to carry out on the Mynydd Du (Black Mountain) site of special scientific interest. I am advised by the Nature Conservancy Council that it does not consider that there is any immediate prospect that the statutory provisions will not be complied with.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Entertainers and Sportsmen (Taxation)

Mr. Squire asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has received any representations on the new rules for the collection of tax from visiting entertainers and sportsmen; and when he intends to introduce the regulations.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Sixty-one representations have been received. Regulations will be laid before the House as soon as possible in time for them to come into effect on 6 April 1987.

Mr. Squire asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the governing bodies of sport which he has consulted over the draft regulations on the collection of tax from visiting entertainers and sportsmen; and if he intends to meet a delegation from the Institute of Sports Sponsorship to discuss the effects of the proposals.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Representations on the draft regulations have been received from the following sports bodies:

All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club, Wimbledon
British Equestrian Federation
British Equestrian Promotions Ltd.
Central Council of Physical Recreation
Institute of Sports Sponsorship

I am considering these in detail, and the views expressed will be fully taken into account.

Consumer Expenditure

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the total consumer expenditure on *(a)* alcohol, *(b)* tobacco, *(c)* gambling and *(d)* video hire for each year since 1970 showing these in actual prices and in constant prices taking 1970 as 100; and if he will also show each figure as a percentage of total consumer expenditure.

Mr. MacGregor: The latest estimates of consumers' expenditure on alcohol (including beer), tobacco and gambling (including bingo admissions) are as follows. Constant price estimates are based on 1980 prices and rescaled to 1970=100. Separate estimates for video hire are not available.

Consumers' expenditure on alcohol, tobacco and gambling

Year	Alcohol			Tobacco			Gambling		
	Current prices		Constant prices 1970=100	Current prices		Constant prices 1970=100	Current prices		Constant prices 1970=100
	£ million	Per cent. of consumers' expenditure		£ million	Per cent. of consumers expenditure		£ million	Per cent. of consumers' expenditure	
1970	2,300	7·2	100·0	1,720	5·4	100·0	399	1·2	100·0
1971	2,593	7·2	106·7	1,691	4·7	96·5	481	1·3	112·0
1972	2,910	7·2	114·8	1,808	4·5	101·7	531	1·3	115·8
1973	3,423	7·4	130·2	1,938	4·2	107·6	582	1·3	120·3
1974	3,915	7·4	133·4	2,229	4·2	106·3	672	1·3	113·0
1975	4,848	7·4	132·2	2,735	4·2	101·2	769	1·2	102·6

Year	Alcohol			Tobacco			Gambling		
	Current prices		Constant prices 1970 = 100	Current prices		Constant prices 1970 = 100	Current prices		Constant prices 1970 = 100
	£ million	Per cent. of consumers' expenditure		£ million	Per cent. of consumers' expenditure		£ million	Per cent. of consumers' expenditure	
1976	5,714	7·5	133·6	3,092	4·1	97·7	871	1·1	99·7
1977	6,545	7·6	134·1	3,629	4·2	93·3	984	1·1	99·5
1978	7,283	7·3	140·4	3,885	3·9	101·0	1,127	1·1	101·1
1979	8,065	7·3	146·8	4,234	3·8	100·5	1,278	1·1	99·7
1980	9,955	7·3	140·7	4,821	3·5	97·7	1,506	1·1	99·5
1981	11,152	7·3	135·9	5,515	3·6	90·6	1,626	1·1	94·8
1982	12,000	7·2	132·5	5,881	3·5	83·7	1,777	1·1	93·7
1983	13,370	7·3	137·6	6,209	3·4	82·7	1,842	1·0	92·1
1984	14,430	7·4	141·1	6,622	3·4	79·9	1,971	1·0	93·4
1985	15,783	7·4	144·5	7,006	3·3	77·8	2,110	1·0	93·1

Source: CSO.

Public Expenditure

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing, at 1980-81 prices, and using the gross domestic product market price deflator, public expenditure on education and science, housing, law and order and protective services in 1978-79 and in 1985-86, showing the percentage differences in each case.

Mr. MacGregor: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he now expects the European Court of Justice to make its decision on the case presented by the Commission that the United Kingdom should cease to zero rate new house building, gas, electricity, news services and protective clothing for value added tax purposes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: I understand that the oral hearing of the infraction case in which the Commission has challenged certain of the United Kingdom's zero ratings will take place on 15 September 1987. A final judgment is generally given three to four months after the conclusion of an oral hearing.

EC Commission (Overdraft Facilities)

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer on how many occasions prior to February 1987 the European Economic Community Commission has demanded to overdraw on the account of member states under article 12(2) of Regulation 2891/77; if he will make a statement on the operation of the sub-article; and whether there is any restriction on the amount of such overdraft facilities which can be demanded from the accounts of member states.

Mr. Brooke: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Crown Prosecution Service (Fees)

Mr. Alex Carlile asked the Attorney-General what is the average delay in the payment of Crown court fees to junior counsel briefed by the Crown prosecution service; and if he will make a statement.

The Solicitor-General: Figures are at present not available. However, the target of the Crown prosecution service is to make payment of Crown court fees to junior counsel briefed by the Crown prosecution service within 10 days of the receipt of an agreed invoice; that target is already being achieved in the majority of the areas of the CPS. Ultimately it is expected that payment will be achieved within five days.

Judges and Registrars

Mr. Campbell-Savours asked the Attorney-General how many registrars in the county court have been promoted to high court judge service since 1979; and how many were promoted directly from registrar.

The Solicitor-General: County court registrars are not eligible for appointment as High Court judges and none has been appointed. One registrar of the principal registry of the family division of the High Court has been appointed a High Court judge.

Mr. Campbell-Savours asked the Attorney-General how many registrars there are in England and Wales.

The Solicitor-General: There are 199 county court registrars, 13 registrars of the principal registry of the family division of the High Court and four bankruptcy registrars of the High Court in England and Wales.

Mr. Campbell-Savours asked the Attorney-General if he will make a statement as to the Lord Chancellor's practice in recommending the appointment of registrars and High Court judges.

The Solicitor-General: County court and district registrars are appointed by the Lord Chancellor. High Court judges are appointed by the Queen on the recommendation of the Lord Chancellor.

The Lord Chancellor's practice is outlined in a pamphlet entitled "Judicial Appointments" obtainable from the Lord Chancellor's Department, and which has been placed in the Library of the House of Commons. The

Lord Chancellor's overriding consideration is the public interest in maintaining the quality of the bench and confidence in its competence and independence. His practice is to appoint to every judicial post the candidate who appears to him to be best qualified to perform its duties regardless of party, sex, religion or ethnic origin. Profession ability, experience, standing and integrity alone are the criteria, with the requirements that the candidate must be physically capable of carrying out the duties of the post, and not disqualified by any personal unsuitability.

Queen's Counsel

Mr. Campbell-Savours asked the Attorney-General (1) what is the total number of briefs given in prosecution cases to Queen's counsel in England and Wales, in each year since 1979 for each circuit;

(2) how many Queen's counsel were instructed in prosecution cases more than *(a)* two, *(b)* four or *(c)* six times per annum in each year since 1979.

The Solicitor-General: I will write to the hon. Member when the information he requests has been collated.

Mr. Campbell-Savours asked the Attorney-General whether he will publish a list of all those prosecution cases handled by his Department naming the Queen's counsel who were instructed in each year since 1979; and what were the results of each case.

The Solicitor-General: Responsibility for the prosecution of criminal cases in which the consent of the Law Officers must, by statute, be obtained lies with the prosecutor. Specific records are not kept of the leading counsel instructed in these cases, and figures could not be obtained without incurring disproportionate cost.

Mr. Campbell-Savours asked the Attorney-General what is his practice in the allocation of prosecution briefs to Queen's counsel.

The Solicitor-General: The nomination of counsel for the prosecution of criminal offences, both leading and junior, is now the responsibility of the Crown prosecution service. Leading counsel are briefed in cases of gravity and complexity, either according to a rota system or on the basis of special expertise in a particular area, such as fraud.

Mr. Campbell-Savours asked the Attorney-General with whom he consults in deciding which Queen's counsel are allocated work in the High Court.

The Solicitor-General: In cases where it falls to my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General to nominate counsel for civil cases in the High Court on behalf of other Government Departments, although the ultimate decision is his alone he takes into account views expressed by the Department seeking a nomination.

Mr. Campbell-Savours asked the Attorney-General if any Queen's counsel have been removed from the list of Queen's counsel available for criminal work for reasons of lack of success in achieving convictions in prosecution cases.

The Solicitor-General: No.

EMPLOYMENT

Skillcentres

Mr. Eastham asked the Paymaster General how many skillcentres have been closed down during the past three years; and where they were located.

Mr. Trippier: My right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State for Employment informed the House on 29 November 1984 about the skillcentre training agency's proposals for improving the efficiency and cost effectiveness of the skillcentre networks and told the House on 21 February 1985 that he was asking the Manpower Services Commission to implement the agency's proposals. In consequence, some 27 skillcentres or skillcentre annexes have been closed down. These were located at:

Bellshill Annexe (Glasgow), Bristol Annexe, Castle Bromwich Skillcentre, Denton Skillcentre (Manchester), Doncaster Skillcentre, Dumbarton Skillcentre, Edinburgh Annexe, Gloucester Annexe, Handsworth Young Persons Training Centre (Birmingham), Hillington Annexe (Glasgow), Hindley Annexe (Greater Manchester), Killingworth Skillcentre (Newcastle), Kirkby in Ashfield Skillcentre, Lambeth Young Persons Training Centre, Liverpool Skillcentre, Llanelli Skillcentre, Long Eaton Skillcentre, Medway Annexe, Middlesbrough Skillcentre, Plymouth Annexe, Queenslie Skillcentre (Glasgow), Redditch Skillcentre, Waddon Skillcentre (Sydenham), Waddon Annexe (Sydenham), West Gwent Skillcentre (Pontllanfraith), West Sussex Annexe (Lancing), Wolverhampton Annexe.

Restart

Dr. Hampson asked the Paymaster General how many unemployed people in the Yorkshire/Humberside region have been invited to restart interviews; of these, how many have found jobs, how many have been placed on the community programme or other schemes; and how many have stopped claiming benefit.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: In the period 12 May 1986—January 1987 a total of 97,270 people in Yorkshire and Humberside were invited to restart interviews. We have no means of knowing precisely how many have since found jobs or other opportunities which might lead to employment. However, 75 per cent. of participants agreed to pursue the offer made to them at their restart interview. 16,811 of those invited to interview had ceased to claim benefit as unemployed by 8 January. We do not know how many of these people left the count because of help received under the restart programme since people are constantly leaving unemployment for a variety of reasons.

Youth Training Scheme

Mr. Sheerman asked the Paymaster General, pursuant to his answer of 16 February, *Official Report*, columns 427-8, if he will publish in the *Official Report (a)* the number of entrants to YTS schemes in the financial services sector at March 1986 by the standard Department of Employment categories of ethnic origin, and by sex, and *(b)* the percentages of young people in work three months after leaving YTS schemes in the financial services sector between April 1985 and March 1986, by ethnic origin, and by sex.

Mr. Trippier: The information required on entrants by ethnic origin and sex is not currently available. The

information below shows the percentage of young people in work three months after leaving YTS schemes in the financial services sector between April 1985 and March 1986 by (i) ethnic origin and (ii) by sex.

(i) Of the 17,273 white young people 66 per cent. were in work three months after leaving YTS. Of the 452 young people of Black/African Caribbean descent 40 per cent. were in work three months after leaving YTS. Of the 457 young people of Indian subcontinent descent 37 per cent. were in work three months after leaving YTS. Of the 316 young people who were either from none of those groupings or preferred not to say, 65 per cent. were in work three months after leaving YTS.

(ii) Of the 6,409 males who left YTS schemes in the financial services sector, 62 per cent. were in work three months after leaving YTS. Of the 12,094 females, 66 per cent. were in work three months after leaving YTS.

Tobacco Manufacture (Job Losses)

Mr. Parry asked the Paymaster General if, pursuant to the reply given by the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Lee) on 21 January, *Official Report*, column 568, he will estimate the number of jobs lost indirectly associated with tobacco manufacture since 1979; and what is his estimate of the extent to which such losses are attributable to the import of cheap cigarettes.

Mr. Lee: Estimates of the number of employees indirectly supported by tobacco manufacture are not available.

Employment in the various industries which supply tobacco manufacturers has, in some cases, grown since 1979 and, in others, declined. This performance has partly depended on the ability of those industries to win orders from many markets, of which tobacco manufacture is only one.

Direct employment losses in tobacco manufacture since 1979 are the result of numerous factors, principally declining cigarette consumption but also rising productivity in the industry and increased import penetration. It is not possible separately to identify the employment impact of each of these factors.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Vietnamese Refugees

Mr. Leigh asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further measures are being undertaken or considered to reduce the numbers of Vietnamese refugees in Hong Kong; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: We are considering carefully what more can be done to help, in terms both of resettlement and of the search for other practicable solutions to the problem of Vietnamese refugees in Hong Kong. We shall announce our decision as soon as possible.

Hong Kong

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what consideration Her Majesty's Government propose to give, in future discussions with the Chinese Government regarding the legal framework governing the transitional period up to 1997, to the effect of the Colonial Laws Validity Act 1865 on the introduction of democratic institutions in Hong Kong; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: Our exchanges with the Chinese Government on Hong Kong are confidential. The legal framework for Hong Kong for the period up to 30 June 1997 must conform with the provisions of the Sino-British joint declaration, under which the British Government will retain full responsibility for the administration of the territory to that date. We are satisfied that the provisions of the Colonial Laws Validity Act will in no way affect the ability of the Government to fulfil all our obligations under the joint declaration.

Nicaragua

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government's policy towards the sale of arms by British manufacturers to the Contra forces in Central America.

Mr. Eggar: Our policy is in line with our consistent support for a political solution to the problems of the region based on the Contadora objectives and our frequently stated view that these problems cannot be resolved by armed force.

Project Zircon

Mr. Cash asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what detailed assurances have been given by Mr. Duncan Campbell in respect of the disclosure of sensitive information about project Zircon now that the injunction against Mr. Campbell has been discharged.

Mr. Renton: Mr. Duncan Campbell gave a binding undertaking to the High Court on 25 February that he would not, whether by himself, his servants or agents or otherwise, publish

(a) technical information or data, plans or diagrams, notes or sketches relating to the Zircon project;

(b) information on the intelligence, military, strategic or security arrangements or the purposes of the Zircon project;

(c) information about persons or organisations directly involved in the planning, implementation, design, direction, construction intended use or deployment of the Zircon project.

This undertaking does not prohibit

(a) bona fide reporting of or fair comment upon any public statements about the Zircon project made by Ministers or servants of the Crown or any other person authorised on behalf of the Crown to make such statements;

(b) comment on the publicity affecting the *New Statesman* article and associated BBC film about the Zircon project;

(c) political debate related to *(a)* or *(b)* above,

provided that no such report comment or debate may include or deploy material or information obtained as a consequence of any breach of confidence. In the light of this undertaking, the injunction granted to the Government against Mr. Campbell was no longer necessary.

ENVIRONMENT

Sellafield

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether, in the light of the three accidents at the Sellafield plant during the month of January, he plans any new initiatives to investigate the cumulative effect of Sellafield's discharges to the terrestrial environment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: None of the events at Sellafield during January resulted in a discharge of radioactivity to the environment. An extensive research programme is already in progress to examine the behaviour of radionuclides discharged to the terrestrial environment from Sellafield. Reports on this work are published regularly.

Mr. Frank Cook asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has about the three accidents at the Sellafield nuclear plant during the month of January; what evidence his Department has on plutonium levels in the Cumbrian environment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: I have been informed about two minor events at Sellafield during January 1987 and in the same month the results of an inquiry on the loss of part of a fuel pin were also announced. None of these events resulted in a discharge of radioactivity to the environment.

Levels of plutonium and other radionuclides in the vicinity of Sellafield are regularly monitored by BNFL and authorising Departments. The results of the aquatic monitoring programme undertaken by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in the vicinity of major United Kingdom nuclear installations are published annually in a series of reports entitled "Radioactivity in Surface and Coastal Waters of the British Isles". Data relating to atmospheric discharges in 1986 will be published in mid-1987. A copy of the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority's Report "Studies of environmental radioactivity in Cumbria. Part 7: A summary of progress to December 1984" was published in April 1985. Copies of these reports have been placed in the Library of the House.

Community Charge

Mr. Hoddle asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the effect of the proposed community charge on the rating of sports clubs and related buildings.

Mr. Chope: Sports clubs will not be directly affected by the introduction of the community charge. However, like other non domestic properties, under our other proposals for rating reform, they will pay rates at a uniform rate in the pound on up to date rateable values following the revaluation planned for 1990. Non profit making sports clubs will continue to be eligible for rate relief of up to 100 per cent. at the discretion of local authorities.

Heart Disease

Mr. Coombs asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the actions taken by his Department since the publication of the COMA report, designed to assist in the prevention of coronary heart disease.

Mr. Ridley: The Sports Council sponsored by his Department continues to encourage participation in sports and recreational activities to enhance health and fitness. Also, the voluntary agreement on the sponsorship and related advertising of sporting events has recently been renegotiated with the tobacco industry, as outlined in my hon. Friend the Minister of Sports reply of 19 January to his hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle).

Sports Stadiums

Mr. Stephen Ross asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has as to how many publicly owned indoor multi-purpose sports stadiums there are in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* West Germany and *(c)* France.

Mr. Ridley: The information is not available in this form.

The Sports Council collects information only on the number and type of facilities in England as part of its planning process.

Ozone Levels

Mr. Bright asked the Secretary of State for the Environment on how many occasions in each of the last five years ozone levels monitored in the open air have exceeded those permitted as a maximum in factories.

Mr. Waldegrave: The interim report of the United Kingdom photochemical oxidants review group, copies of which I have had placed in the Library of the House, analysed the United Kingdom ozone monitoring data available up to 1985. Only during the exceptional summer of 1976 could the occupational exposure limit for ozone be said to have been exceeded at some sites in the south-east. Data for 1986 have yet to be fully verified but it is unlikely that they will change that conclusion.

Green Belt

Mr. Robert B. Jones asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will list all planning appeals in the Hertfordshire, West constituency since May 1979 where he has upheld an appeal for planning application relating to land in the green belt.

Mr. Waldegrave: This information is not available. However, I will write to my hon. Friend if he will let me have details of the planning appeals he has in mind.

Council Housing

Mr. Peter Hardy asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many council homes have been provided in each year since 1983; how many he expects to be completed in the current year; and how these numbers compare with the record for 1979.

Mr. Tracey: The number of new dwelling completions for local authorities in 1979 and 1983 to 1985 appear in table 6.1*(a)* of "Housing and Construction Statistics 1975-1985" and a provisional estimate for 1986 appears in table 3 of this Department's press notice No. 60, issued on 5 February 1987: copies are available in the Library. It is not the practice to make forecasts of housebuilding.

Planning Appeals

Sir Julian Ridsdale asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he takes any steps in reaching a decision over a planning appeal to inform himself as to whether the recommendation comes to him as a result of a unanimous decision by the local planning authority.

Mr. Waldegrave: Planning appeals are decided having regard to the provisions of the development plan, so far as material to the proposal, and to any other material considerations. Representations by the parties and other interested persons are taken into account so far as they refer to considerations which are material. The unanimity or otherwise of the local planning authority's decision is not relevant to the weight to be attached to the local authority's representations.

Mobile Homes (Insulation Grants)

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take steps to enable mobile-home owners to qualify for insulation grants; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: I shall answer this question shortly.

Thamesmead

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will issue direction requiring the London residuary body to transfer Thamesmead to Thames Trust;

(2) when he expects the transfer of Thamesmead from the London residuary body to Thamesmead Trust.

Mr. Chope I shall answer these questions shortly.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will require a further consultation of Thamesmead tenants on the final terms of transfer of Thamesmead from the London residuary body to the trust.

Mr. Chope: No.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will allow Thamesmead Trust to sell properties with vacant possession.

Mr. Chope: Yes.

"Faith in the City"

Mr. Simon Hughes asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what further action he has taken in the light of the report, "Faith in the City", on matters which are the responsibility of his Department, subsequent to the action referred to in his reply to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey, 9 December 1986, *Official Report*, column 95.

Mr. John Patten: I shall answer this question shortly.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Rolls-Royce plc

Mr. Crowther asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assurances he has given Rolls-Royce plc about the future public funding of research and development following the proposed privatisation of the company.

Mr. Pattie: There will be no reduction in Rolls-Royce plc's eligibility for Government funding for research and development following privatisation. Rolls-Royce will have the same eligibility for Government funding as other companies in the private sector.

Shipbuilding

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will estimate the projected number of jobs in the shipbuilding industry from 1987 to 1990.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I shall reply to the hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

Chinese Cloth

Mr. Wainwright asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to ensure that cloth made in the People's Republic of China shall not enter the United Kingdom with the word "England" woven in its selvedge.

Mr. Howard: Section 16 of the Trade Descriptions Act 1968 prohibits the importation of any goods to which a false or misleading trade description has been applied outside the United Kingdom. This section is enforced by the Customs and Excise and I have drawn this matter to their attention.

Independent Intermediaries

Mr. Allan Stewart asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimates he has made of the consequences for employment of the proposals he is currently considering from the Securities and Investments Board in relation to the future of independent intermediaries.

Mr. Howard: My right hon. Friend is currently considering the rules and supporting material submitted by the Securities and Investments Board on 10 February. The position of independent intermediaries will be one of the matters to which he will have regard in deciding whether to recommend to Parliament the transfer to the board of powers under the Financial Services Act 1986.

Mr. Allan Stewart asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received concerning the proposals he is considering from the Securities and Investments Board in relation to the future of independent intermediaries.

Mr. Howard: I have received a large number of letters from hon. and right hon. Members and directly from those likely to be affected by the Board's proposals. The comments made will be fully considered in deciding whether to recommend to Parliament the transfer to the Board of powers under the Financial Services Act 1986.

Patent Agents

Mr. Brandon-Bravo asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has completed his consideration of the Director General of Fair Trading's report on the patent agents' profession; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: The report by the Director General of Fair Trading "Review of Restrictions on the Patent

Agents' Profession" was published in September 1986. It recommended that the Government end the exclusive right which patent agents, together with solicitors, have to represent inventors in dealing with the Patent Office, and remove restrictions on the use of the title "patent agent" and on the freedom of patent agents to enter into mixed practices. It also made a number of recommendations relating to the rules of the Chartered Institute of Patent Agents, which the Government have already endorsed and asked the director general to discuss with the Chartered Institute.

Having studied the recommendation for statutory change carefully, and considered representations from the Chartered Institute of Patent Agents and others, the Government have now decided to accept the recommendations concerning the right of representation and mixed practices. It is our intention to include these changes in the legislation implementing the proposals in the White Paper "Intellectual Property and Innovation" (Cmnd. 9712) which will be introduced when the Parliamentary timetable permits. They will, by making it possible for anyone to offer patent agency services, open the profession to greater competition; whilst patent agents will be free to enter into practice with members of other professions to offer a range of protection and exploitation services. We have decided, however, that use of the title "patent agent" should continue to be reserved to qualified patent agents, so as to avoid any risk of the public being misled or the international reputation of the profession being undermined by unrestricted use of the title. This, and the maintenance of a register of patent agents, means that the position of qualified patent agents will continue to be recognised and safeguarded. At the same time, we are, as the director general also recommended, reviewing the present system of register qualifications.

Northern Development Company

Mr. Trotter asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what financial support the Government are offering the Northern Development Company for the activities set out in the company's business plan as presented to him on 6 February.

Mr. Channon: I have offered the Northern Development Company a total of up to £1,118 million in 1987-88. Of this £908,000 is for the company's inward investment promotion work hitherto carried out by the North of England Development Council. This latter sum represents an increase in excess of the rate for inflation over the provision of 1986-87. The remaining £210,000 meets in full the company's request for support for its wider activities aimed at the regeneration of the region. My Department is providing up to £180,000 of this latter amount and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment is contributing £30,000.

Regional Development

Mr. Hind asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what financial support he is offering the regional development organisations in England in 1987-88 for inward investment promotion activities.

Mr. Channon: As I have stated separately today in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter) I have offered the Northern Development Company up to £908,000. I shall also make available up to £600,000 to support the approved inward investment promotion programme of the Yorkshire and Humberside development association and up to £320,000 to that of the Devon and Cornwall development bureau, on the understanding in both cases that they continue to co-ordinate such promotional work in their respective regions. In the case on INWARD Ltd, (the regional development organisation for the north-west), on condition that it is also able to carry out this co-ordination role, I am prepared to make available up to £380,000 in support of its approved inward investment promotion programme. I am also making available up to £320,000 to support the approved inward investment promotion programme of the West Midlands industrial development association, provided that it is able to raise the same level of support from contributors within its region.

TRANSPORT

Addingham Bypass

Mr. Waller asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to receive the inspector's report on the A65 Addingham bypass.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The inspector's report has now been received. We hope to announce a decision in the summer.

Driving Test Candidates (Impersonation)

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many prosecutions there were in the last five years for which figures are available for impersonation of driving test candidates; and how many resulted in convictions.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The figures are as follows:

	Prosecutions	*Convictions*
1981	6	6
1982	15	14
1983	20	18
1984	16	16
1985	15	15

M11 (Roadworks)

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he anticipates the works on the M11 at Redbridge roundabout will be completed.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The works involve building a viaduct to carry the new A406 South Woodford to Barking relief road. The present closures and diversions for A12 traffic at the roundabout will finish by the beginning of May. The relief road itself should be fully completed and open to traffic early next year.

M4 (Closures)

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop asked the Secretary of State for Transport for how long he expects the night-time closures of the M4 between junctions 2 and 3 to last.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The westbound carriageway is involved in this essential maintenance work. Its closure is restricted to the hours of 9.30 pm to 6.30 am to minimise inconvenience to travellers. We hope to have the road fully open again from 13 March.

Speed Governors

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for Transport how long he expects to be the period between the end of consultation about, and the implementation of, his Department's intention to compel coach operators to fit speed governors; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I shall make the necessary regulations as soon as we have completed consultation with the interested organisations.

Driver Testing

Mr. Fry asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will review the operation of driver testing; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moore: I am setting up an internal review of the scope for improvement in the way in which driver testing is carried out. Its purpose is to examine whether and how a better service to customers can be provided and greater efficiency achieved. The review will also consider the possibility of delegation to the private sector and of means to improve the pass rate of candidates. I have no intention of reducing the standard of the test. I expect that any changes the review may propose will maintain the contribution which the driving test makes to road safety, and the public confidence which the present arrangements enjoy.

DEFENCE

Defence Lectureships

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will list existing defence lectureships in British universities, polytechnics and colleges of higher education.

Mr. Freeman: The Ministry of Defence currently sponsors a total of five defence lectureships in British academic institutions. These are at the University of Aberdeen; the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth; King's College, London; and two posts at the University of Cambridge. A sixth defence lecturer will take up his post at the University of Birmingham on 1 October 1987. Two former defence lecturers, at the University of Lancaster and the University of Leeds, will continue to receive support funds from the Ministry of Defence until the end of the 1986-7 and 1987-88 academic years respectively.

Compex Exercise

Miss Fookes asked the Secretary of State for Defence if the results of the Compex exercise are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Following an initiative by my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) on the scope for competition, and a report by a joint Ministry of Defence/British Shipbuilders working party, COMPEX was set up in 1984 to compare in terms of time in hand, quality and cost the refits in Devonport Dockyard of a Leander class frigate and an Oberon class submarine with those of similar vessels undertaken by private ship repair yards.

The refits of the frigates, HMS Euryalus at Tyne Shiprepair Ltd (TSL) and HMS Arethusa at Devonport dockyard, were completed in 1985 and 1986 respectively. A detailed report has now been drawn up. Against an allocation of 41 weeks at the outset, HMS Arethusa's refit was completed in 38 weeks; that for HMS Euryalus took just over 49 weeks. However, the report emphasises that the work required on HMS Euryalus was about 20 per cent. greater than that on HMS Arethusa, and that other delays occurred outside the company's control, particularly on material supplied by the Ministry of Defence. The report concludes that the difference in time-in-hand was insignificant given these circumstances.

Both refits were completed satisfactorily to a high standard. The Commander-in-Chief Fleet reported that it would be difficult to distinguish between them, or between these and other similar frigate refits.

The comparison of costs was carried out by the Ministry of Defence's principal director of accountancy services, independently of the Directorate General of Ship Refitting and the Chief Executive of the Royal Dockyards. In conducting the comparison, PDAS made allowance for differences in specification, work content, condition of ships and yard facilities. He also took into account the work sub-contracted by TSL, services provided to TSL by MOD and the rectification of defective Ministry-supplied materiel. With these adjustments, PDAS assessed that the cost of the Devonport refit of HMS Arethusa was 10 per cent. higher than that of the TSL refit of HMS Euryalus.

In addition to these main aims, COMPEX has afforded an unprecedented opportunity to learn lessons about refits by contract in a number of important areas. These include more accurate planning and specification of refits, working practices and our methods of supervising work done and of materiel control. These valuable lessons apply in varying measures to the Royal Yards, both now and in the future under commercial management, as well as to provide ship repairers. The report contains a number of recommendations, which are now in hand or under consideration.

Although the submarine refits will not be complete until later this year, and until then no final conclusion can be reached, so far COMPEX has shown that, despite the inbuilt advantage of depth of experience in the Royal Dockyards, private ship repairers can compete on level terms. More importantly, it shows the opportunities for tightening our refit procedures across the board to achieve better value for money, and points the way ahead as to how we can responsibly develop the scope for competition, following the introduction of commercial management into the Royal Dockyards.

I have placed in the Library a copy of the report on the frigate refits.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Terrorism

Mr. Campbell-Savours asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what investigations are currently taking place into murders and kidnappings by paramilitary organisations in the 1970s.

Mr. Scott: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

ENERGY

Electricity (Export)

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for Energy what prospects he envisages for the export of electricity to France and other EEC countries from the national grid.

Mr. Goodlad: The present cross-Channel electricity link with France was designed for two-way exchanges. The predominant flows are likely to be from France to England; there have been some recent exports. The CEGB concluded agreements with Electricité de France which provide for imports of electricity until 26 March 1988. Arrangements beyond this will be subject to commercial negotiation between the two utilities. There are no plans at present for further links with any EEC countries.

Pressurised Water Reactors

Mr. Campbell-Savours asked the Secretary of State for Energy (1) whether he will place in the Library a copy of the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority's report of work carried out at the United States Oak Ridge National Laboratories into risk of damage to the core of pressurised water reactors;

(2) whether he will ask the British ambassador in Washington to secure from the Library of Congress under freedom of information legislation a copy of the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority's report of work carried out at the United States Oak Ridge National Laboratories into risk of damage to the core of pressurised water reactors for use by Government Departments in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Goodlad: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Domestic Fuel Prices

Mr. Colin Shepherd asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will set out in the *Official Report* a table showing in terms of 1985 prices the cost to a domestic consumer in 1974, 1979 and 1987 of a unit of electricity and a therm of gas, each computed on the basis of the standing charge for a quarter distributed across 1,000 units of electricity and 125 therms of gas and 25 kilogrammes of coal.

Mr. Peter Walker: The information is as follows. Changes in tariff levels and structures over the period mean that the figures for each fuel are not directly comparable.

	1985 prices		
	Coal[1] *pence per 25 kg*	*Gas*[2] *pence per therm*	*Electricity*[3] *pence per kWh*
1 January 1974	98	32·6	2·433
1 January 1979	214	34·8	5·430
1 January 1987	239	41·2	5·880

[1] Average prices for group 2 house coal.
[2] 1979 and 1987 relate to consumers on the domestic credit tariff in the General Zone. This did not exist in 1974; the 1 January 1974 price relates to the North Thames Region.
[3] Average for the standard domestic tariff in England and Wales.

PRIME MINISTER

BBC Scotland (Police Raid)

Q7. **Mr. Dalyell** asked the Prime Minister what contacts there have been between the Strathclyde police and press officers of Government departments *(a)* prior to, *(b)* during and *(c)* after the police raid on BBC Glasgow.

The Prime Minister: So far as my office is concerned, there have been no such contacts.

I understand that on 6 February, five days after the police operation, the Scottish Information Office informed Strathclyde police as a matter of routine of the content of two news releases issued on behalf of the Crown Office. On 13 February the Scottish Information Office informed the Police of a third news release.

There is no evidence that press officers from any Government Department other than the Scottish Office have been in contact with Strathclyde police at any stage about the action at the BBC.

EC (Alternative Funding)

Q79. **Mr. Teddy Taylor** (Southend East) asked the Prime Minister if she will seek to raise at the next meeting of the European Council the proposals made by Mr. Delors, President of the Commission, on 18 February regarding alternative sources of funding for the European Economic Community; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to him on 10 February 1987 at column *159*.

Scotland (Visit)

Q142. **Dr. Godman** asked the Prime Minister when she next plans to make an official visit to Scotland.

The Prime Minister: I make official visits to Scotland two or three times each year.

Moscow (Visit)

Q183. **Mr. Wigley** asked the Prime Minister if she will give the dates of her forthcoming visit to Moscow; and what matters she intends raising with Mr. Gorbachev.

The Prime Minister: At the invitation of the Soviet Government, I shall be visiting Moscow from 28 March to 1 April 1987. I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) on 4 March 1987, column *598*.

Official Receptions

Q190. **Mr. Pollock** asked the Prime Minister when she last hosted an offical reception at No. 10 Downing street.

The Prime Minister: I last gave an official reception at No. 10 Downing street on Monday 9 February.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Prime Minister, pursuant to her reply of 2 March, *Official Report*, column 463, what procedures will be adopted by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his capacity as a Director of the European Investment bank to identify and separate those funds

provided by Her Majesty's Government to the bank when he and other directors consider the loan application from the promoters of the Channel tunnel; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer is a member of the Board of Governors of the European Investment bank.

The bank borrows on the capital markets to finance its project loans. The funds paid by Governments are contributions to the bank's subscribed capital which supports the general operations of the bank and enables it to raise finance on the capital markets. It would not therefore be appropriate to link contributions to subscribed capital with particular projects.

Engagements

Mr. Simon Hughes asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 5 March.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 5 March.

Mr. Campbell-Savours asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 5 March.

Mr. Pike asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 5 March.

Mr. John Mark Taylor asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 5 March.

Mr. Greenway asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 5 March.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with Ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House I shall be having further meetings later today, including one with a delegation from the National Pensioners' Convention.

SCOTLAND

Arts (Expenditure)

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his latest estimate of local authority spending on the arts in Scotland.

Mr. John MacKay: Outturn in the current financial year is expected to be in the order of £60 million. The breakdown is as follows:

	£ million
Libraries—current	46·0
—capital	2·1
Museums and Galleries—current	10·0
—capital	1·2
Theatres and Entertainment—capital	0·7

The figures do not provide a comprehensive picture, since current expenditure on theatres and entertainment is subsumed under leisure and recreation and cannot be diaggregated.

EC (Surplus Butter)

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the distribution points in the parliamentary constituency of Greenock and Port Glasgow where European Economic Community surplus butter is made available for pensioners to collect; and if he will give the quantity of butter so far distributed in Greenock and Port Glasgow.

Mr. John MacKay: In Greenock and Port Glasgow the Salvation Army and Women's Royal Voluntary Service are co-ordinating arrangements for the distribution of free intervention butter to those persons whom the charities consider are eligible, including many pensioners.

I understand that there are 10 distribution points:

Port Glasgow Salvation Army Hall
Gibbshill Community Centre, Greenock
Greenock Salvation Army Citadel
Greenock East Salvation Army Hall
Medical Aid Home, Greenock
Mariners Home, Greenock
Mearns Centre, Greenock
Octavia Tenants' Association, Greenock
Fewster House, Greenock
Salvation Army Inverclyde Centre, Greenock

Approximately 10 tonnes of butter had been distributed up to 28 February.

Housing Statistics

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the latest available figure for the number of homes started by housing associations and local authorities in Scotland in the year 1986; and what were the comparable figures in 1978.

Mr. Ancram: Figures for 1986 are not yet available. Figures for earlier years, including 1978, are published in the table on page 9 of "Scottish Housing Statistics 1985" which is available in the House Library.

NHS (General Managers)

Mr. Pollock asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will announce plans for the introduction of a scheme of performance related pay for general managers in the National Health Service in Scotland.

Mr. John MacKay: The Scottish Home and Health Department issued today a circular describing the arrangements for performance-related pay for NHS general managers. The scheme provides for an annual performance review measured against objectives previously agreed with employing authorities. I have made arrangements for copies of the departmental circular promulgating the scheme to be placed in the Library.

Tilgate Forest, Crawley

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what arrangements have been made to date for the sale or provision for an option on sale of Forestry Commission land at Tilgate forest, near Crawley; what are the terms of such arrangements; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I have been asked to reply.

The Forestry Commission has entered into negotiations to grant an option to purchase some 35 hectares of its land at Tilgate forest. Any sale under this option would be dependent on planning permission being given for industrial and other purposes.

Dwellings

Mr. Maxton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will detail the existing provision of *(a)* sheltered housing, *(b)* amenity housing, *(c)* sheltered wheelchair housing, *(d)* wheelchair housing, *(e)* housing for the ambulant disabled and *(f)* other specially adapted housing; and if he will give the proportions provided by (i) public authorities, (ii) housing associations and (iii) the private sector, indicating the proportions which are rented housing and which are owner-occupied.

Mr. Ancram [*pursuant to his reply*, 23 February 1987, c. *57*]: The provision of special needs housing, as reported by authorities to the Scottish Development Department, is set out in the table. Other sources of statistical information suggest that the numbers provided by the private sector as thus reported are understated. The information collected by the Department does not identify rented and owner-occupied housing in the private sector.

Type of housing	*Provision (dwellings)*	*Proportion provided by* [1]*Public Authorities*	*Housing Associations*	*Private*
(a) Sheltered	21,501	62·3	34·9	2·9
(b) Amenity	8,529	96·2	3·8	0·0
(c) Sheltered wheelchair	878	87·6	12·4	0·0
(d) Other wheelchair	944	83·6	15·7	0·7
(e) Ambulant disabled	3,364	98·9	1·0	0·1
(f) Other adapted housing	8,846	99·3	0·1	0·6

[1] Local authorities, New Towns and SSHA.

Mr. Maxton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide the numbers of dwellings in Scotland which are privately rented, detailing the numbers which are *(a)* rented with business, *(b)* rented by virtue of employment, *(c)* other rented unfurnished and *(d)* other rented furnished for each of the years 1978 to 1986 inclusive, indicating the percentage of all households which are living in each of these sectors.

Mr. Ancram [*pursuant to his reply*, 23 February 1987, c. *57*]: Annual estimates splitting the numbers of privately rented dwellings into the required categories are not available.

Mr. Maxton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide details of the type of shortstay accommodation secured for homeless people and the percentage securing permanent accommodation for the years 1984-85 and 1985-86, and if he will provide this in a form similar to table 5 of SDD statistical bulletin HSIU Number 17.

Mr. Ancram [*pursuant to his reply*, 23 February 1987, c. *57*]: Details, in the form requested, are no longer available centrally. I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mr. Craigen) on 30 July 1984, at column *95*.

Mr. Maxton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide the average annual rent for registered rents for 1978 and for 1986.

Mr. Ancram [*pursuant to his reply*, 23 February 1987, c. *57*]: Information on registered rents for 1986 is not yet available. Figures for 1978 are published in the table on page 37 of "Scottish Housing Statistics 1985" which is available in the House Library.

Mr. Maxton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the average subsidy provided by housing support grant per local authority house for each of the years 1979-80 to 1987-88 inclusive.

Mr. Ancram [*pursuant to his reply*, 23 February 1987, c. *57*]: The information is given in the table:

Year	*Average subsidy per local authority house* £
1979-80	238·83
1980-81	255·30
1981-82	181·48
1982-83	118·33
1983-84	82·49
1984-85	77·93
1985-86	75·27
1986-87	52·75
1987-88	[1]55·74

[1] Estimate.

Mr. Maxton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide the number of new dwellings started in 1986 by *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* new towns, *(c)* the Scottish Special Housing Association, *(d)* housing associations, *(e)* Government Departments and *(f)* the private sector; and if he will break down this information by district within regional sub-totals.

Mr. Ancram [*pursuant to his reply*, 23 February 1987, c. *57*]: The information requested is not yet available.

Mr. Maxton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide details of the numbers of dwellings in Scotland which are *(a)* rented from a local authority, *(b)* rented from the Scottish Special Housing Association, and *(c)* rented from a new town development corporation for each of the years 1978 to 1986 inclusive.

Mr. Ancram [*pursuant to his reply*, 23 February 1987, c. *57*]: The information requested is set out in the table:

Total number of dwellings at 30 September

Year	*Local Authority*	*Special Scottish Housing Association*	*New Town*
1978	888,886	90,468	51,947
1979	893,541	92,558	53,162
1980	893,845	93,077	52,636

Year	Local Authority	Special Scottish Housing Association	New Town
1981	892,088	92,569	52,292
1982	884,248	92,241	51,664
1983	874,460	91,140	50,183
1984	862,479	87,750	48,439
1985	852,656	86,003	46,919
1986	842,968	84,294	45,690

Source: Annual rent return to the Scottish Development Department.

Mr. Maxton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will estimate the numbers of vacant houses in *(a)* the private rented sector and *(b)* the privately owned sector; and if he will break these figures down according to the reasons for vacancy.

Mr. Ancram [*pursuant to his reply*, 23 February 1987, c. *57*]: The most recent figures on vacancies in the private sector relate to 1981 and were published in Scottish Development Department statistical bulletin — HSIU No. 1 (September 1983) which is available from the House Library.

Mr. Maxton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide detailed breakdown of local authority housing revenue account income for each of the years 1979-80 to 1986-87 inclusive; and if he will estimate income for 1987-88.

Mr. Ancram [*pursuant to his reply*, 23 February 1987, c. *57*]: The information requested is set out in the table. Estimates for 1987-88 are not yet available.

Housing Revenue Account: Local Authority Income

£ million

Financial Year	Standard Rents	Housing Support Grant	Interest on Revenue Balance	Other Income	Rate Fund Contribution	Total Income
1979-80	227·5	199·5	n/a	16·3	74·0	517·3
1980-81	272·9	228·2	8·9	23·2	82·0	615·0
1981-82	356·1	161·9	10·3	14·3	106·8	649·4
1982-83	414·0	104·4	10·0	18·3	123·1	669·8
1983-84	447·4	71·8	8·6	15·9	122·6	666·4
1984-85	469·9	62·5	9·0	18·1	138·7	698·2
1985-86	511·2	66·0	11·5	22·8	97·3	708·8
[1]1986-87	570·5	51·0	13·8	21·1	69·5	725·9

n/a Not available.
[1] Estimates: CIPFA Rating Review.

Mr. Maxton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide a detailed breakdown of local authority housing revenue account expenditure for each of the years 1979-80 to 1986-87; and if he will estimate expenditure for 1987-88.

Mr. Ancram [*pursuant to his reply*, 23 February 1987, c. *57*]: The information requested is set out in the table. Estimates for 1987-88 are not yet available.

Housing Revenue Account: Local Authority Expenditure

Financial Year	Loan Charges £ million	Supervision & Management £ million	Repairs & Maintenance £ million	Loss of Rent £ million	Other Expenditure £ million	Total Expenditure £ million
1979-80	342·2	38·9	125·1	5·1	6·1	517·3
1980-81	400·1	51·3	146·4	5·9	11·6	615·3
1981-82	413·8	55·9	163·6	7·9	8·3	649·4
1982-83	416·0	57·3	177·9	10·7	7·9	669·8
1983-84	399·0	61·4	186·5	12·1	7·3	666·4
1984-85	414·1	66·6	197·0	12·4	8·0	698·2
1985-86	431·4	70·4	183·9	14·2	8·9	708·8
1986-87[1]	439·2	76·9	189·7	11·4	8·7	725·9

[1] Estimates: CIPFA Rating Review

Mr. Maxton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide the percentage of sales of public sector dwellings since 1980 which have been *(a)* two-apartment dwellings, *(b)* three-apartment dwellings, *(c)* four-apartment dwellings, *(d)* five-apartment dwellings and *(e)* six or more apartment dwellings; and if he will provide this information for (i) local authorities, (ii) new towns and (iii) the Scottish Special Housing Association.

Mr. Ancram [*pursuant to his reply*, 23 February 1987, c. *57*]: The information requested is set out in the table.

Proportions of public sector dwellings sold since 1 January 1980 with given numbers of apartments.

Number of Apartments	Proportion of Sales (per cent.) Local Authority	New Town	SSHA	Total Public Sector
1 or 2	1·1	0·9	0·6	1·03
3	44·8	22·2	26·2	39·33
4	49·2	61·8	56·3	51·78
5	4·8	12·7	14·8	7·15
6 or more	0·1	2·4	2·2	0·70

Mr. Maxton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide the percentage of sales of public sector dwellings since 1980 which have been *(a)* cottage type dwellings, *(b)* four in a block type dwellings, *(c)* lowrise flats and *(d)* highrise flats; if he will express the sales of each type of dwellings as a percentage of the stock of each type of dwelling; and if he will provide this information for (i) local authorities, (ii) new towns and (iii) the Scottish Special Housing Association.

Mr. Ancram [*pursuant to his reply*, 23 February 1987, c. *57*]: The information is not available in the form requested. The classification of dwelling type has changed

during the period and the figures show the common elements that can be drawn from the series. A corresponding classification of stock is not available.

Proportion of public sector dwellings sold (per cent.) since 1 January 1980

Dwelling Type	Local Authority	New Town	SSHA	Public Sector
House:				
Detached, semi-detached or terraced	85·9	88·9	96·4	87·7
Flat or maisonette:				
with private access	4·3	0·1	1·4	3·3
with communal access	9·7	9·7	2·2	8·7
with lift access	0·2	1·2	0·0	0·3

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Management Education

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what steps he takes to ensure that there are sufficient postgraduate management education places in the United Kingdom to meet demand therefor;

(2) when he expects to receive the report of the two working parties on management education in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Walden: My right hon. Friend is advised by the University Grants Committee in relation to provision for management education in universities and by the National Advisory Body for Public Sector Higher Education in relation to the polytechnics and colleges. Reports relevant to this matter are expected shortly from Professor Handy who was commissioned by the National Economic Development Office and the Manpower Services Commission and whose work is expected to be published at a conference on 29 April; and in the late spring or early summer from a Confederation of British Industry/British Institute of Management study partly sponsored by the Department of Trade and Industry and my Department.

London Business School

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received on the funding of the London Business School.

Mr. Walden: My right hon. Friend has received four letters about the University Grants Committee's basic distribution of recurrent grant to the school in 1987-88 and provisional indications for 1988-89 and 1989-90.

Nursery Education

Mr. Straw asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish a table in the *Official Report* giving the number of children attending nursery schools and nursery classes of primary schools, at the latest date and for each of the preceding five years, broken down for each local authority.

Mr. Dunn: The total numbers of children under five years of age attending maintained nursery schools and nursery classes in primary schools in each local education authority in England in January 1986 and in the preceding five years are as follows.

Number of children under five attending nursery schools and nursery classes in primary schools.[1]

	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
Barking	917	1,130	1,152	1,339	1,263	1,395
Barnet	1,777	1,867	2,170	2,229	2,245	2,202
Bexley	512	509	595	592	597	610
Brent	1,984	2,145	2,222	2,277	2,276	2,304
Bromley	101	124	116	120	132	97
Croydon	494	525	548	608	615	617
Ealing	1,907	2,422	2,583	2,762	2,737	2,749
Enfield	1,269	1,338	1,376	1,372	1,394	1,381
Haringey	1,914	2,000	2,202	2,209	2,221	2,180
Harrow	750	804	809	809	809	795
Havering	234	230	234	236	233	224
Hillingdon	2,190	2,314	2,356	2,586	2,616	2,618
Hounslow	1,604	3,116	3,368	3,221	3,821	3,734
Kingston-upon-Thames	865	900	919	916	940	929
Merton	1,411	1,473	1,566	1,619	1,679	1,494
Newham	2,916	3,260	3,564	3,634	3,851	3,964
Redbridge	437	415	451	463	452	450
Richmond-upon-Thames	511	519	588	594	567	566
Sutton	531	609	634	624	669	685
Waltham Forest	2,108	2,239	2,253	2,287	2,336	2,245
Inner London	18,304	19,263	20,148	20,779	21,155	21,919
Birmingham	6,690	7,076	7,286	7,746	8,101	8,710
Coventry	1,801	1,711	1,820	1,901	1,810	1,918
Dudley	1,589	1,782	1,920	1,951	2,166	2,208
Sandwell	2,597	2,696	2,955	3,088	3,173	3,404
Solihull	1,156	1,191	1,201	1,206	1,203	1,253
Walsall	3,268	3,534	3,934	3,941	3,880	3,920
Wolverhampton	3,252	3,330	3,463	3,753	3,755	3,677
Knowsley	1,024	1,255	1,344	1,444	1,659	1,736
Liverpool	4,744	5,102	5,598	5,630	5,804	6,119
St. Helens	875	926	975	954	1,116	1,383
Sefton	1,768	1,901	1,955	2,019	2,023	1,993
Wirral	1,380	1,537	1,492	1,552	1,520	1,534

	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
Bolton	2,074	2,149	2,258	2,415	2,484	2,685
Bury	662	711	768	832	784	783
Manchester	5,276	5,407	5,687	5,834	6,233	6,350
Oldham	1,318	1,425	1,542	1,779	1,795	1,916
Rochdale	1,648	1,677	1,714	1,749	1,747	1,669
Salford	2,046	2,332	2,710	2,894	3,020	3,007
Stockport	897	937	924	962	962	992
Tameside	1,795	1,933	2,096	2,240	2,218	2,224
Trafford	536	536	542	588	630	620
Wigan	1,496	1,708	1,814	1,925	1,985	1,972
Barnsley	2,623	2,604	2,701	2,722	2,757	2,788
Doncaster	2,760	2,904	2,847	2,964	2,956	2,999
Rotherham	2,404	2,412	2,652	2,706	2,789	2,706
Sheffield	3,761	4,142	4,341	4,434	4,663	4,593
Bradford	3,565	3,697	3,901	4,238	4,495	4,507
Calderdale	1,072	1,116	1,295	1,350	1,370	1,401
Kirklees	2,522	2,955	3,072	3,340	3,954	3,919
Leeds	3,696	4,146	4,419	4,898	5,153	5,354
Wakefield	2,950	3,101	3,226	3,434	3,604	3,575
Gateshead	1,382	1,575	1,674	1,670	1,664	1,639
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	2,303	2,383	2,548	2,690	2,716	2,805
North Tyneside	1,894	1,972	2,132	2,259	2,466	2,407
South Tyneside	1,612	1,755	1,939	1,986	1,934	1,904
Sunderland	2,363	2,578	2,716	2,892	2,945	2,919
Avon	2,473	2,581	2,773	2,834	3,207	3,293
Bedfordshire	4,095	4,295	4,459	4,561	4,497	4,521
Berkshire	3,718	3,738	3,972	4,161	4,661	4,703
Buckinghamshire	1,920	1,919	1,980	1,998	1,975	2,091
Cambridgeshire	1,797	1,853	1,883	1,864	1,926	1,944
Cheshire	4,308	4,518	4,740	4,918	5,012	4,941
Cleveland	6,446	6,665	7,317	7,653	7,835	8,018
Cornwall[2]	1,214	1,238	1,329	1,362	1,399	1,359
Cumbria	1,870	1,957	2,037	2,251	2,245	2,233
Derbyshire	4,067	4,144	4,253	4,349	5,080	5,773
Devon	1,606	1,696	1,719	1,829	1,841	1,882
Dorset	584	585	598	647	761	805
Durham	4,390	4,828	5,100	5,426	5,521	5,536
East Sussex	881	899	910	950	1,008	956
Essex	1,706	1,787	1,943	1,994	2,064	2,144
Gloucestershire	—	—	—	—	—	—
Hampshire	1,671	1,718	1,777	1,793	1,782	1,859
Hereford and Worcester	800	799	797	964	941	997
Hertfordshire	6,940	7,198	7,556	7,654	7,650	7,577
Humberside	5,106	5,402	5,629	6,105	6,330	6,668
Isle of Wight	114	128	133	141	140	103
Kent	1,606	1,651	1,709	1,827	1,852	1,914
Lancashire	4,671	4,861	4,944	5,130	5,458	5,574
Leicestershire	4,387	4,796	5,007	5,100	5,067	5,163
Lincolnshire	921	961	965	1,009	1,019	1,006
Norfolk	772	728	824	799	825	863
North Yorkshire	2,230	2,397	2,490	2,773	2,652	2,631
Northamptonshire	1,188	1,229	1,630	1,796	2,178	2,326
Northumberland	1,102	1,149	1,270	1,443	1,560	1,698
Nottinghamshire	8,745	9,241	9,544	10,298	10,465	11,122
Oxfordshire	1,581	1,652	1,631	1,733	1,749	1,747
Shropshire	979	1,000	1,004	1,093	1,082	1,080
Somerset	137	88	84	68	77	81
Staffordshire	5,660	5,740	5,838	5,971	5,911	5,830
Suffolk	1,478	1,494	1,538	1,671	1,833	2,034
Surrey	2,565	2,599	2,624	2,630	2,643	2,635
Warwickshire	1,772	1,828	1,837	1,891	1,879	1,907
West Sussex	456	505	525	516	531	535
Wiltshire	99	136	141	137	138	184

[1] Full time and part-time pupils. Ages at end of December of previous year.
[2] Includes Isles of Scilly.
Gloucestershire LEA provides a limited amount of pre-school provision in "family centres", staffed by teachers and NNEB nurses, and in which parents assist. There are currently 9 of these and another 3 are due to be established in September.

Cornish Language

Mr. Harris asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what assessment he has made of the effect of a national curriculum on the ability of Cornish schools to teach the Cornish language.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Government believe that there should be room in the national curriculum for appropriate local variations in response to local needs, although the scope for these will necessarily be limited. The way in which such variations should apply is one of the matters

which will receive particular attention during the development of, and consultations on the national curriculum.

Capital Expenditure

Mr. Straw asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if, further to the statement by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn), on 2 February, *Official Report*, columns *788-92*, he will make a statement on the accuracy and completeness of the information given to his Department by Lancashire county council in respect of its application for education capital allocation for 1987-88.

Mr. Dunn: Lancashire's prescribed capital expenditure allocation for 1987-88 was made on the basis of information about its expenditure plans for that year. The information was supplied by the authority in the form requested by the Department. The authority itself is responsible for deciding the policies which determine the nature of its expenditure plans.

University Academic Staff (Pay)

Mr. Key asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on university academic staff pay.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I informed the House on 23 January at columns *745-46* that the Government were willing to make available to the universities additional resources amounting to £40 million in 1987-88, £56 million in 1988-89 and £71 million in 1989-90 if a settlement could be negotiated which would provide management with more flexibility to take account of the quality of lecturers' performance and recruitment and retention problems; and include a firm commitment to improved promotion, probation and performance appraisal arrangements.

The Government have accepted proposals put forward by the university employers and staff sides on this basis. The proposals provide for average pay increases amounting to 24 per cent.—16·6 per cent. backdated to 1 December 1986 and 7·4 per cent. from 1 March 1988.

The additional £40 million for 1987-88 will now be released. The £56 million for 1988-89 and the £71 million for 1989-90 will remain conditional on satisfactory progress with proposed arrangements for appraisal, probation and promotion.

I welcome this settlement. It will reward excellence, enable substantially higher salaries to be paid to a minority of outstanding professors, and help to counter the brain drain.

SOCIAL SERVICES

NHS (Staff)

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give details of National Health Service directly employed staff in Great Britain (whole-time equivalents) divided into the various staff groups, for each of the years from 1979 to 1986.

Mr. Newton: The figures are shown in the table.

Health Service Directly Employed Staff by Main Staff Group—Great Britain[1] as at 30 September

	Whole-time equivalents							
	1979	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*Provisional 1986*
Nursing and Midwifery[2,3]	437,600	453,200	478,400	485,000	485,500	486,000	490,800	492,300
Medical and Dental[4]	47,600	48,900	49,900	50,500	51,400	51,600	52,200	52,500
Professional and Technical[5]	72,100	74,200	77,900	80,300	82,100	86,800	88,800	90,300
Ancillary[5]	211,100	211,100	211,400	209,700	204,700	189,100	175,400	158,900
Administrative and Clerical	122,100	124,800	128,600	128,900	130,400	130,800	132,000	132,600
Maintenance	24,500	25,000	25,500	25,600	25,400	24,800	24,400	23,800
Works Professional	6,800	7,200	7,500	7,400	7,300	7,300	7,400	7,200
Ambulance (Including Officers)	20,200	20,900	21,400	21,600	21,700	21,400	21,600	22,600
Total Directly Employed Staff	942,000	965,200	1,000,600	1,009,000	1,008,500	997,900	992,600	980,700

Sources: DHSS Annual Censuses of Medical and Non-Medical Manpower; Welsh Office; Scottish Common Services Agency.

Notes:

[1] Includes staff at the Dental Estimates Board, Prescription Pricing Authority, Welsh Health Common Services Authority, London Post-Graduate Special Health Authorities and Family Practitioner Committee staff on health authority pay rolls. Figures are independently rounded to the nearest 100 whole-time equivalents.

[2] Includes agency staff.

[3] Not adjusted for reduction in nurses' working hours in 1980 (from 40 to 37·5 hours per week).

[4] Includes permanent paid, honorary and locum staff in hospitals and community health services, hospital practitioners and part-time medical/dental officers (clinical assistants).

[5] On 1.4.84 approximately 3,000 (wte) Operating Department Assistants were re-classified from the Ancillary to the Professional and Technical staff group. The figures have not been adjusted for this re-classification.

Disabled People

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations and complaints he has recently received about discrimination against disabled people; what his response has been; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Major: We have not received any complaints or representations recently about discrimination against disabled people.

Maternity Alliance

Mr. Nellist asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will meet a deputation from the Maternity

Alliance on Monday 6 April to discuss matters relating to the provision of maternity benefits and services; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lyell: We have had no request from the Maternity Alliance for a meeting to discuss maternity benefits, but will consider any such request should this be received.

NHS (Trade Unions)

Mr. Canavan asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what subjects were discussed at his last meeting with trade union representatives of employees in the National Health Service.

Mr. Newton: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him on 23 February at column *106*.

Elderly and Infirm Patients

Mr. Terry Lewis asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what safeguards exist to protect elderly or infirm patients who are summarily removed from general practitioners' panels whilst still in need of basic medical care;

(2) what guidance his Department issues on continuing the provision of general practitioner services to patients who have been removed from general practitioners' panels and who are *(a)* over the age of 65 years, *(b)* incontinent or *(c)* suffering from senile dementia.

Mr. Newton: Under the National Health Service a family doctor is not allowed to remove a person from his list without giving the local family practitioner committee (FPC) eight days notice of his decision. Where the person concerned is receiving frequent treatment from the doctor (that is, at intervals of less than eight days), the notice of removal cannot begin to run until the treatment is no longer needed.

When notifying a person that he is to be removed from a doctor's list, the FPC informs the person of his rights in the matter as described above. If there are difficulties in finding a new doctor, the FPC is expected to help. Indeed, the FPC is required to see that everyone who seeks the services of a family doctor does in fact obtain them and the FPC has the power to assign a person to a doctor if necessary. These arrangements apply to all persons irrespective of age or physical or mental condition.

Mr. Terry Lewis asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many patients *(a)* over the age of 65 years or *(b)* who are incontinent were removed from general practitioners' panels by general practitioners in each year since 1980 who had been registered with the same general practitioner for (i) five years, (ii) 10 years, (iii) 15 years or (iv) 20 years or more.

Mr. Newton: This information is not available centrally.

Organ Donor Cards

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what was the cost of production and distribution of organ donor cards for each of the years 1980 to 1986;

(2) what plans he has to increase the effective distribution of organ donor cards to the general public.

Mrs. Currie: Production and distribution costs of the organ donor card are part of the Department's total stationery costs and cannot easily be identified as a separate item, but the cost of producing 7½ million cards in 1986 was estimated as £34,000.

We are constantly seeking ways of bringing the cards to the attention of additional groups of people. They are already available from a range of places including doctors surgeries and chemists. Recent publicity campaigns have involved a number of national organisations, for example, Esso, Barclaycard, the National Union of Students and the Confederation of British Industry.

Nurses

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the progress made by the pay review body on nurses pay.

Mr. Newton: The review body for nursing staff, midwives, health visitors and professions allied to medicine is considering the evidence it has received from interested parties and will be submitting its report to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in due course.

Dietary Salt

Mr. Greg Knight asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what action he is taking to encourage a reduction of the intake of dietary salt in the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Currie: Under the Health Education Council's endorsement scheme for bread which came into effect last year, the major bread manufacturers have reduced the salt content of their product by 12·5 per cent. In addition, steps are in hand to reduce the salt content of processed foods following discussions between manufacturers and officials about implementing the report on diet and cardiovascular disease by the chief medical officer's committee on the medical aspects of food policy (COMA). The public are advised about dietary salt intake through various health educational publications.

Invalid Care Allowance

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many married women have claimed invalid care allowance; how many claims have been settled; and what is the average length of time taken to settle each claim.

Mr. Major: As at 27 February, some 106,000 claims to invalid care allowance had been received from married women of which about 53,000 had been decided. The average time taken to process a claim is currently 20 weeks. We are taking all practical steps to reduce this period.

Benefits

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the total number of people in receipt of unemployment benefit and supplementary benefit in the Greenock and Port Glasgow constituency at the latest available date.

Mr. Lyell: The available information is given in the tables:

At 14 August 1986	*Number of persons receiving*		
	UB only	*UB and SB*	*SB only*
Greenock UBO	1,539	250	3,541
Port Glasgow UBO	788	171	1,764

At 10 February 1987	Number of supplementary benefit cases in action
Greenock DHSS Office	12,139
Port Glasgow DHSS Office	5,385

Notes:
1. The DHSS office boundaries are not conterminous with those of the constituency.
2. The DHSS figures are of all supplementary benefit cases and include those whose benefit is paid through the UBOs.

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what would be the saving if no social security, housing, or welfare benefits other than child benefit were paid to any single person whose income was more than £65 per week and to couples married or otherwise whose income was more than £130 per week.

Mr. Major [*pursuant to his reply*, 2 March 1987, c. 496]: It is estimated that in 1985—the latest year for which figures are available—the total benefit saving in Great Britain would have been about £3·5 billion, all else being equal.

Supplementary Benefit

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what has been the total amount of supplementary benefit paid to Scottish claimants in each of the past seven years.

Mr. Lyell: The information is as follows:

Financial year	£ million (estimated)
1979-80	218
1980-81	286
1981-82	464
1982-83	599
1983-84	[1]570
[2]1984-85	639

Notes:
[1] Reduction from previous year because, with the introduction of housing benefit, most financial support for housing costs is now provided through that scheme.
[2] Latest available date.

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many of those claimants in receipt of supplementary benefit in each of *(a)* Littleborough and Saddleworth constituency, *(b)* Oldham metropolitan borough council, and *(c)* Rochdale metropolitan borough council are families with children, and young single people under the age of 25 years; and what information he has for these categories and for each area separately regarding additional requirements which are included in their supplementary benefit assessment, by type and average amount of additional requirements.

Mr. Lyell: I regret that this information is not available.

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the number of people in *(a)* the north-west, *(b)* Greater Manchester county, *(c)* Oldham, *(d)* Rochdale and *(e)* for each of his Department's offices covering Littleborough and Saddleworth constituency, currently in receipt of supplementary benefit; how many of the claimants are retirement pensioners; how many are unemployed persons; and what were the corresponding figures for May 1979.

Mr. Lyell: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Electors

Sir David Price asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the electoral quota for parliamentary constituencies in England for 1987; and if he will list in the *Official Report* the number of electors in each Hampshire parliamentary constituency in descending order of size and show in each case the percentage deviation from the electoral quota.

Mrs. Currie: The information requested for 1987 will not be available until the end of April. A table showing the number of electors in each constituency in relation to the electoral quota will be placed in the Library at that time.

Child Line

Sir David Price asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will make a grant to the charity, Child Line, to assist it to meet the cost of its free link line telephone service and to enable Child Line to raise its level of response to callers.

Mr. Newton: My right hon. Friend announced on 30 October last year that £50,000 was being made available to help launch the Child Line project. No further grant application has been received.

Pensions

Mr. Janner asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will provide a breakdown of the £3 billion public expenditure estimate for the cost of the establishment of a common minimum pension age of 60 years for both men and women.

Mr. Major: The estimated net public expenditure cost of about £3 billion for introducing a common minimum pension age of 60 is broken down in the table into its main components. These are broad estimates only.

	£ million
Estimated costs[1]	
Retirement pension	+ 4,200
Loss of national insurance contribution income and tax revenue	+ 600
Housing benefit	+ 50
Estimated savings[1]	
Supplementary benefit	− 650
Other benefits[2]	− 1,000
Net estimated cost	+ 3,200

[1] Estimates are based on 1985-86 benefit, tax and contribution levels.
[2] Unemployment benefit, sickness benefit, invalidity benefit, job release allowance.

Mr. Janner asked the Secretary of State for Social Services which pension schemes for which he is responsible *(a)* do and *(b)* do not pay a widower's pension.

Mr. Major: My right hon. Friend is directly responsible for the national insurance scheme and the National Health

superannuation scheme. In the national insurance scheme, widowers' pensions are not paid, although in some circumstances a widower may use his late wife's national insurance record to enhance or establish his own entitlement to a retirement pension. In the NHS superannuation scheme, a widower's pension may be payable where a female member has nominated her husband for this cover because he is financially dependent on her and is prevented by ill-health from earning his own living.

The Social Security Act 1986 requires that from April 1988 widowers whose wives were members of contracted-out occupational pension schemes shall receive a guaranteed minimum pension on broadly the same conditions as national insurance widows' benefits are available. This provision will affect the NHS superannuation scheme, and in the light of this minimum requirement, consideration is being given to a wider extension of widowers' benefit in respect of service from April 1988.

Mr. Janner asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many pensioners' households are currently in receipt of supplementary allowances; and how many he estimates are entitled to supplementary allowance but do not claim.

Mr. Lyell: People over pension age are entitled to claim supplementary pension. In February 1986 there were 1·68 million pensioners claiming supplementary pension, of whom 1·54 million were householders. The latest available figure for take-up of supplementary pensions is for 1983, and I refer the hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Thorne), the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) and the hon. Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Clay) on 30 October 1986 at columns *231-234*.

Body Appliances

Mr. Wainwright asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to publish the terms on which contractors to the National Health Service will supply body appliances.

Mrs. Currie: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Housing Benefit

Ms. Clare Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will provide a list of each change made to the structure of the housing benefit scheme, other than traditional uprating changes, from March 1983 onwards, giving details of the effect of each change on public expenditure; if he will, for each change that has reduced the scope of the standard housing benefit scheme, provide estimates showing (1) the total number of households with decreased entitlement, (2) the total number of households losing entitlements, (3) a breakdown of the numbers of households with losses falling within appropriate ranges; and if he will provide a breakdown of the above figures between rent and rate assistance and between pensioner, working and other households.

Mr. Lyell: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

NHS (Expenditure)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will state both the level and the percentage change each year since 1979 in total National Health Service gross revenue expenditure based on the National Health Service pay and prices index, and after deduction each year of an appropriate demographic element to take account of the numbers of elderly people and the cost of medical technology; and, in separate columns, how large these latter two elements were for each of these years.

Mr. Newton: The information requested in the first part of the question is as follows:

NHS Revenue England (gross)—Percentage increase deflated by movements in NHS pay and prices

	Cash (£ million)	*Percentage*
1978-79	6,053	
1979-80	7,223	−0·2
1980-81	9,402	+2·3
1981-82	10,488	+2·0
1982-83	11,477	+1·5
1983-84	12,169	+0·8
1984-85	13,027	+0·9
1985-86	13,740	−0·1

Calculations for demographic pressure and medical advance are not relevant to National Health Service expenditure as a whole. The information in respect of hospital and community health services expenditure was given to the hon. Member in my reply to him on 23 February at column *133*.

NHS (Pilfering)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what estimate is available to him of the extent of pilfering of National Health Service equipment or property each year.

Mrs. Currie: The annual accounts of health authorities incorporate a statement of losses which includes a category "for losses of equipment and property in stores and in use due to theft, fraud or arson, etc." A consolidated statement for England appears within the statutory summarised accounts of health authorities which are published annually as a House of Commons paper (for 1984-85—the latest year published as Paper No. 411 of 1985-86).

The summarised accounts of health authorities record equipment and property losses of £1,434,511 due to theft, fraud or arson, etc. in 1985-86.

Sickle Cell Disease

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what resource he is at present allocating for research screening and counselling for sickle cell disease and thalassaemia and in which hospitals this work is being done.

Mrs. Currie: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Self-employed (National Insurance)

Ms. Clare Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many individuals have paid self-employed national insurance contributions in each year since 1979.

Mr. Major: The information is as follows:

Persons paying Class 2 (self-employed) National Insurance Contributions, United Kingdom

Year	*(thousands)*
1979-80	1,608
1980-81	1,661
1981-82	1,697
1982-83	1,766
1983-84	1,845

Notes:

1. Final figures are not available for later years. The Government Actuary has estimated that currently about 2 million people in the United Kingdom are paying self-employed national insurance contributions.

2. Self-employed people with profits above the lower profits limit are liable to pay class 4 contributions in addition to class 2. Precise information on the numbers involved is not available but it is estimated that between 1¼ and 1½ million people are currently liable to pay class 4 contributions.

Haemophiliacs

Ms. Clare Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many haemophiliacs there are in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Newton: The returns submitted to the National Haemophilia Centre Directors register at 31 December 1985 showed that there was a total of 7,808 haemophiliacs in the United Kingdom. Only some of those patients registered require treatment with blood products.

Ms. Clare Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many haemophiliacs are AIDS antibody positive as a result of receiving contaminated factor 8 in each region of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Newton: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras on 25 November 1986 at columns *199-200*. These are the most recent figures available for haemophiliacs who have been found to be HIV antibody positive. A regional breakdown of these figures is not held centrally.

Ms. Clare Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the most recent date of receipt of contaminated factor 8 by a haemophiliac subsequently found to be AIDS antibody positive.

Mr. Newton: Information about individual haemophiliacs is not held centrally.

Ms. Clare Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what help, counselling and support is provided to haemophiliacs who are AIDS anti-body positive as a result of receiving contaminated factor 8.

Mr. Newton: Health authorities provide haemophilia care through a network of haemophilia centres. Six of these centres are designated haemophilia reference centres (HRC). The centres provide medical care and counselling support for haemophiliacs and their families.

A range of social security benefits is also available to those haemophiliacs who, like others, may suffer illness, unemployment or loss of earnings as a result of infection with HIV.

For 1987-88 an additional £44,000 has been allocated to each HRC specifically for AIDS counselling. A provision of £16,000 has also been made to the west midlands health authority for counselling at the Birmingham haemophilia centre.

Ambulance Service

Mr. Spearing asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will tabulate in the *Official Report* the patient journeys made by the London ambulance service, non-emergency provision for each of the quarters in 1986, as set out and in the categories in his written answer of 6 November 1986, *Official Report*, column *599-600*, showing for each figure for the fourth quarter and annual totals, respectively, the percentage increase or decrease on the equivalent figures for 1984.

Mrs. Currie [*pursuant to her reply*, 12 February 1987, c. *361*]: The information requested is given in the tables.

Patient journeys 1984-86
Non emergency service ('000's patient journeys)

	North west division			*North east division*			*South west division*			*South east division*			*Direct service total*			*In-direct service*	*Total LAS*
Year and quarter	*W*	*Non W*	*Total*	*W*	*Non W*	*Total*	*W*	*Non W*	*Total*	*W*	*Non W*	*Total*	*W*	*Non W*	*Total*		
1984																	
1st	85	44	129	90	65	155	76	44	120	76	61	137	327	214	541	54	595
2nd	82	41	123	84	60	144	73	45	118	68	58	126	307	204	511	52	563
3rd	80	41	121	83	58	141	72	46	118	68	57	125	303	202	505	52	557
4th	76	42	118	82	57	139	72	45	117	69	56	125	299	200	499	54	553
Total	323	168	491	339	240	579	293	180	473	281	232	513	1,236	820	2,056	212	2,268
1985																	
1st	73	43	116	82	57	139	70	46	116	70	54	124	295	200	495	58	553
2nd	73	39	112	83	56	139	70	45	115	70	56	126	296	196	492	62	554
3rd	73	40	113	79	57	136	67	46	113	70	55	125	289	198	487	69	556
4th	71	42	113	79	55	134	66	46	112	69	53	122	285	196	481	63	544
Total	290	164	454	323	225	548	273	183	456	279	218	497	1,165	790	1,955	252	2,207
1986																	
1st	57	39	96	72	51	123	55	46	101	60	50	110	244	186	430	69	499
2nd	39	36	75	65	49	114	40	42	82	33	53	86	177	180	357	92	449
3rd	39	38	77	62	50	112	40	41	81	32	58	90	173	187	360	94	454
4th	41	39	80	61	54	115	39	44	83	33	54	87	174	191	365	91	456
Total	176	152	328	260	204	464	174	173	347	158	215	373	768	744	1,512	346	1,858

Year and quarter	North west division W	North west division Non W	North west division Total	North east division W	North east division Non W	North east division Total	South west division W	South west division Non W	South west division Total	South east division W	South east division Non W	South east division Total	Direct service total W	Direct service total Non W	Direct service total Total	Indirect service	Total LAS
± Percentage on year ending 1984	−45·5	−9·5	−33·2	−23·3	−15·0	−19·9	−40·6	−3·9	−26·6	−43·8	−7·3	−27·3	−37·9	−9·3	−26·5	+63·2	−18·1
± Percentage on 4th quarter 1984	−46·1	−7·1	−32·2	−25·6	−5·3	−17·3	−45·8	−2·2	−29·1	−52·2	−3·6	−30·4	−41·8	−4·5	−26·9	+68·5	−17·5

Patient mileage statistics 1984-1986 non-emergency service (000's miles)

Year Quarter	North West Mileage	North East Mileage	South West Mileage	South East Mileage	Total direct Mileage	Indirect service Mileage	Total all services Mileage
1984							
1st	550	551	457	554	2,112	345	2,457
2nd	537	518	451	511	2,017	355	2,372
3rd	521	506	454	502	1,983	338	2,321
4th	515	510	468	512	1,985	374	2,359
Total	2,123	2,085	1,810	2,079	8,097	1,412	9,509
1985							
1st	495	507	443	522	1,967	379	2,346
2nd	490	499	436	515	1,940	433	2,373
3rd	489	481	414	496	1,880	493	2,373
4th	498	472	407	497	1,874	470	2,344
Total	1,972	1,959	1,700	2,030	7,661	1,775	9,436
1986							
1st	426	444	372	453	1,695	501	2,196
2nd	353	403	323	366	1,445	596	2,041
3rd	380	401	319	384	1,484	593	2,077
4th	388	422	336	369	1,515	588	2,103
Total	1,547	1,670	1,350	1,572	6,139	2,278	8,417
Percentage ± on year ending 1984	−27·1	−19·9	−25·4	−24·4	−24·2	+61·3	−11·5
Percentage ± on 4th quarter 1984	−24·7	−17·3	−25·0	+27·9	−23·7	+57·2	−10·9

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Lakes (Radioactivity)

Mr. Wigley asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what alarm level he has set in relation to radioactivity in fish in lakes in England.

Mr. Gummer: Levels of radioactivity in freshwater fish in English lakes liable to be affected by artificial radioactivity continue to be kept under careful surveillance. On the evidence available to date, the Government sees no need to seek to restrict the consumption of such fish.

Food Labelling

Mr. Greg Knight asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will forthwith take steps to require the percentage by weight of saturated and polysaturated fats to be printed on all wrappers or containers in which they are sold.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Proposals for regulations to require labelling of the fat content in most foods, including fats and oils sold as such, have been circulated widely. Comments on these have given rise to a number of practical problems which are still being examined. Consultations at official level with the EC Commission are also continuing.

EC (Food Distribution)

Mr. Frank Field asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if, pursuant to his answer of 25 February, *Official Report*, column *260*, he *(a)* has now or *(b)* plans to have available in the future any breakdown of the distribution of European Community butter and beef; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: I shall reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Retail Prices

Mr. Colin Shepherd asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will set out in the *Official Report* a table showing in terms of 1985 prices the retail prices in 1974, 1979 and 1987 of a small white loaf, one pint of milk, 250 grammes of butter, a quarter chicken piece, a dozen size 3 eggs, ¼lb tea or tea bag equivalent and 250 grammes of minced beef.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The table provides the information requested based on prices collected for the construction of the retail prices index. Where prices of

items to the precise specification are not collected, or are not available on a consistent basis, prices of comparable items have been substituted.

Average Retail Prices of Certain Foods in the United Kingdom in terms of 1985 prices[1]

	1974 Annual Average pence	*1979 Annual Average* pence	*1987 January* pence
Small white loaf (400g)	32·3	33·2	34·1
Milk (pint)	16·5	24·0	23·7
Butter (250g)	44·8	66·4	49·7
Fresh/chilled chicken (lb)	102·8	102·4	74·7
Eggs, size 4 (dozen)	122·8	93·5	87·0
Tea (125 g)	36·8	42·6	39·7
Brisket (250 g)	92·5	89·9	81·3
Minced beef (250 g)	n/a	n/a	62·6

Notes:

[1] Average prices have been adjusted to 1985 prices using the RPI all items index.

[1] Where unit prices have changed over the period an equivalent price has been calculated.

[2] Prices of quarter chicken pieces and of size 3 eggs are not currently collected and prices for minced beef have been collected only since January 1980.

EC (Cereals)

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what is the total quantity of grain produced in each of the European Economic Community countries in 1986 and also the total amount of co-responsibility levy paid by each member state in pound sterling;

(2) what is the definition of a small farmer which will be used in establishing who will receive part of the 120 million ecu/£75 million in cereal co-responsibility refunds; how much of this total will be received by British small farmers and when; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what was the average ex farm price of wheat received by *(a)* British farmers, *(b)* French farmers, *(c)* German farmers and *(d)* the EEC generally in 1979, 1984, 1985 and 1986, in pound sterling.

Mr. Gummer: I shall reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Drugs

7. **Mr. Harvey** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he proposes to take to seek to reduce the incidence of crime connected with *(a)* heroin and *(b)* cocaine.

Mr. Mellor: The ministerial group which I chair will continue to give the highest priority to reducing drug-related crime. Since the group was set up in 1984, police and customs drug enforcement resources have been substantially increased and their intelligence capability improved. We shall ensure that these resources are used to best effect and monitor the use of new powers conferred by the Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986 to trace, freeze and confiscate the assets of traffickers. This year we shall further develop our anti-drug education and information campaign, launch a £2 million scheme for drug-related teacher training, and continue the expansion of treatment services.

Mr. Conway asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the establishment of drugs wings in the regional crime squads.

Mr. Mellor: Fourteen dedicated drugs wings have already been added to regional crime squads in England and Wales, and three more will be in operation by April 1987. Two hundred and twenty one additional police officers have been provided to man the drugs wings, whose task is to concentrate on catching major drug traffickers. In London, the Metropolitan police central drug squad fulfils a similar role, and it has been provided with 37 additional officers. These measures represent a major strengthening of the police effort against drug traffickers.

Police Questioning (Tape Recordings)

10. **Mr. Baldry** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what evaluations have been undertaken by the police and his Department of the impact of tape recording of police questioning of suspects.

Mr. Hurd: Field trials to test tape recording equipment and procedures were held in five police force areas between 1984 and 1986. They were continuously monitored and evaluated by the Home Office and a national tape recording field trial steering committee, which included representatives of the judiciary, legal profession and police. A preliminary report was published in November 1984; a follow-up report will be published soon. We will continue to evaluate the effects of tape recording with all interested parties as it becomes widespread.

50. **Mr. Ashby** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has about the plans of police forces in England and Wales to introduce tape recording of interviews with suspects.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Government plan that tape recording of interviews with suspects should become standard police practice by 1991. Within that period, the individual force plans for introducing tape recording are an operational matter for each chief officer. Some 34 forces have been allocated grant aid to introduce tape recording during the current financial year.

Rape

12. **Ms. Clare Short** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will provide resources to enable the introduction of victim examination suites for rape victims throughout the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The establishment of suites for police examination of rape victims is eligible for grant aid to the police under established procedures. The decision whether examination suites are the best option for his area is an operational matter for each chief officer. Home Office circular 69/86, issued to the police in October last year, recommends that rape victims should be examined in conditions offering privacy and dignity, but this may be achieved by other means such as using acommodation in local hospitals.

35. **Mr. Gerald Howarth** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases of rape have come before the courts in each of the last three years; and what has been the average length of sentence in those cases where there was a conviction.

Mr. Mellor: The readily available information on offences of rape is published annually in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales", supplementary tables volumes 1 and 2, under offence classification 19; for proceedings and sentences at magistrates' courts and the Crown court in tables S1.1(A) and S2.1(A); and for the distributiion of the lengths of prison sentences imposed in table S2.4. The figures for rape include some offences other than under section 1 of the Sexual Offences Act 1956, including offences of aiding and abetting and attempted rape.

61. **Mr. Beith** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what support is he proposing for the provision of facilities at police stations for victims of rape.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Home Office guidance to police forces, in circular 69/86 issued in October last year, is that wherever practicable rape victims should be examined away from police stations to provide greater privacy. Adaptations to or building of accommodation for examining rape victims by the police are eligible for grant aid under the normal established procedures.

Life Sentences

13. **Mr. Holt** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners are currently serving life sentences for murder; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: On 30 November 1986, the latest date for which figures are readily available, 1,775 inmates were serving life sentences for murder in prison department establishments in England and Wales. This figure includes persons ordered to be detained during Her Majesty's pleasure or sentenced to youth custody for life.

AIDS

14. **Mr. Cohen** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking to stop the spread of AIDS in prisons.

Mr. Mellor: Although we are not aware of any case of transmission of HIV infection in prison, high priority is being given to preventive measures. The prison department's strategy includes medical inquiry and examination at the reception stage, counselling of individual prisoners, educational measures directed at all prisoners, and precautionary regime restrictions for prisoners identified as HIV antibody positive. The restrictions applied in a particular case are a matter for the medical officer.

Prison Kitchens (Inspections)

15. **Mr. Ashley** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to invite environmental health officers to inspect Her Majesty's prison kitchens.

Mr. Mellor: No. The prison service has its own arrangements for the inspection of prison kitchens, which are subject to validation checks by environmental health officers employed by the Department of Health and Social Security. These arrangements do not preclude calling upon local authority environmental health officers for advice if a need is indicated.

Unsolved Crimes

16. **Mr. Eastham** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will state the proportion of crimes in each of the years 1978 to 1985 which were not cleared up.

Mr. Hurd: The percentage of crime cleared up by the police is published each year in the Command Paper "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales". The clear-up rate for 1985 was 35 per cent.

21. **Mr. Blair** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total number of crimes since 1 April 1979 which have not been cleared up.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The estimated number of notifiable offences which were recorded by the police in England and Wales in the period 1979 to 1985 but not cleared up is about 13 million.

Official Secrets Act

17. **Mr. Kirkwood** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received about reform of section 2 of the Official Secrets Act.

Mr. Hurd: This year I have received seven letters from right hon. and hon. Members forwarding representations from constituents, and one letter from a member of the public.

Independent Broadcasting Authority

18. **Mr. Heathcoat-Amory** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has recently met the chairman of the Independent Broadcasting Authority to discuss the future funding of Channel 4.

Mr. Hurd: I met the chairman and members of the Independent Broadcasting Authority on 7 January and discussed several matters with them, including the recommendations of the Peacock committee on the future funding of Channel 4.

Crime Prevention

19. **Mr. Patrick Thompson** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made by his Department in stimulating private sector interest in crime prevention initiatives.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Private sector involvement in crime prevention has substantially increased following the crime prevention seminars held at 10 Downing street last year.

New standards for car security and for security in newly-built houses are important examples of the increased attention which the private sector is giving to crime prevention.

The organisations representing the private sector are also involving themselves more in crime prevention work. They are, for example, participating actively in the working groups of the Home Office standing conference on crime prevention; the Association of British Chambers of Commerce has launched an initiative to promote its members' involvement in crime prevention work; I recently met representatives of the Confederation of British Industry to discuss a programme of crime prevention work involving its members.

Hanson Trust has seconded a member of staff to the Home Office as consultant on private sector involvement in crime prevention.

24. **Mr. Peter Bruinvels** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will detail what lighting initiatives in the field of crime prevention he has taken; and what sums of money are involved.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Home Office was involved in the preparation of the National House-Building Council guidance note for builders which includes advice on street lighting for estates and welcomed the British Standards Institute guide for architects and planners which includes advice on domestic lighting as a crime prevention measure.

27. **Mrs. Virginia Bottomley** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what responses he has had to his proposals on crime prevention.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: There has been a generally favourable and encouraging response to our crime prevention strategy. A good example of the general public's response has been the establishment of well over 18,000 neighbourhood watch schemes. Many local authorities are increasingly incorporating crime prevention measures in their activities using Government funding where appropriate. Other Government Departments have adopted crime prevention programmes. The private sector is making an increasing contribution to a range of crime prevention activity at national and local levels.

Hampshire Constabulary

20. **Mr. Hunter** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will further increase the establishment of the Hampshire constabulary.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: It is the responsibility of the Hampshire police authority to determine the establishment of the force, subject to my right hon. Friend's approval. One hundred and fifty-one additional police posts have been approved for the force since May 1979, bringing the authorised establishment up to 3,105. The last application by the police authority was met in full by the approval, in August 1986, of 21 additional police posts.

Remand Centres

22. **Mr. Pike** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received regarding the conditions of remand centres.

Mr. Mellor: We recently received representations from the hon. Member for Warrington, North (Mr. Hoyle) about population pressures at Risley; and hon. Members will be aware of the debate which took place in another place on Wednesday of last week on prison conditions generally, in which the Minister of State summarised the Government's programme for tackling the problem of overcrowding.

Lay Visitor Schemes

23. **Mr. Gwilym Jones** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many lay visitor schemes are presently in operation or planned; and what guidance has been issued by his Department to guide their work.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand that lay visitor schemes are operating or planned in 32 police forces. We warmly welcome this progress. Guidelines on lay visitor schemes were circulated to police authorities and police forces with a Home Office circular which was issued on 26 February 1986.

Fraud

25. **Mr. Clelland** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons were convicted of offences of fraud in each of the years 1979 to 1985.

Mr. Mellor: The information is published annually in "Criminal Statistics: England and Wales, 1985", (Cmnd. 10), table 5.16, copies of which are in the Library.

Criminal Appeal Act

26. **Mr. Hind** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received to amend the Criminal Appeal Act 1968 in relation to appeals by the prosecution against sentences for criminal offences; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: Some members of the public have written to suggest a prosecution right of appeal; but we think it better to adhere to our proposal in clause 29 of the Criminal Justice Bill.

Home Watch Scheme

28. **Mr. Silvester** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his current assessment of the extent and success of the home watch scheme.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: There are now nearly 3,000 home watch schemes in the Greater Manchester police force area. Virtually all of these schemes were set up during 1986 and it is therefore too early to assess their contribution towards reducing crime. However, they provide a very clear indication that members of the public in the area want to be involved in action against crime.

Prisoners (NHS Treatment)

29. **Mr. Hardy** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking to ensure that prisoners are adequately advised on discharge of the action that should be taken to enable them to receive National Health Service treatment.

Mr. Mellor: The advice given to a prisoner in such circumstances is a matter for the clinical judgment of the medical officer.

Supervised Bail

30. **Mr. Alex Carlile** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any proposals for the provision of supervised bail.

Mr. Mellor: Not at present. Any proposals for supervision to be provided by the probation service would raise questions of resources and priorities, but we will keep the possibility in mind.

Burglary and Vandalism

31. **Dr. McDonald** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to reduce the incidence of burglary and vandalism in Thurrock.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Our whole range of guidance and advice on good crime prevention practice applies to burglary and vandalism in Thurrock. We have issued

guidance to local authority chief executives and chief officers of police on local crime prevention practice, including anti-vandalism campaigns. The majority of domestic burglaries are opportunist crimes which would be less likely to occur if householders ensured that their premises were properly secured. Even relatively simple, low-cost precautions will deter the opportunist.

Theft

33. **Mr. Maclennan** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his latest estimate of the incidence of theft from private property; and how this compares with the position in 1983.

Mr. Mellor: Statistics of notifiable offences recorded by the police do not always identify where the theft took place. Separate figures are available for burglary in a dwelling, burglary in other building, theft in a dwelling and theft from shops. The detailed analysis by type of offence is published annually in the Command Paper "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales" (tables 2.10 and 2.12 of the issue for 1985, Cm. 10).

Prison Facilities (Women)

34. **Mrs. Renée Short** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what improvements are planned by the prison department in facilities for pregnant women and mothers.

Mr. Mellor: The policy on mothers and babies in prison is currently under review, in consultation with the Department of Health and Social Security, to take account of developments in childcare practice to the extent that it is practicable to do so within prison. A research project being carried out by the University of Sussex on behalf of the Department into the physical and psychological development of babies in prison mother and baby units will provide an independent evaluation of present policy and practice and we will give careful consideration to its findings.

Television Violence

36. **Mr. Lord** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he plans to take in the light of recent evidence on the connection between violence on television and violence in the streets, in relation to the broadcasting authorities screening less violence; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: We are confident from our contacts with them that the broadcasting authorities are aware of public concern on this subject and keep both their policies, and the operation of the policies, under review in the light of research evidence.

Immigration

37. **Mr. John Townend** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the immigration figures from the Indian subcontinent for the last three calendar years; and what estimates there are for the current year.

Mr. Waddington: As published in table 1 of Home Office statistical bulletin 38/86, the numbers of nationals of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh accepted for settlement in the United Kingdom in the years 1984 and 1985 and in the nine months ending September 1986 were 14,840, 17,510 and 11,390, respectively. The annual total for 1986 will be published later this month in the next statistical bulletin in this series. It is not our practice to publish estimates of future levels of acceptances for settlement because of the number of varying and unpredictable factors which affect the figures.

40. **Sir John Farr** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total number of cases of illegal immigration into the United Kingdom known to him in the latest available 12-month period.

Mr. Waddington: Information on persons dealt with as illegal entrants is published quarterly in the Home Office statistical bulletins on the control of immigration statistics. Action was commenced against 1,436 persons as illegal entrants in the 12 months ending September 1986 (table 13 of issue 38/86). Figures for the whole of 1986 will be published later this month.

47. **Mr. Teddy Taylor** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy towards the right of entry to the United Kingdom of nationals of other countries who have established the right of settlement in other European Economic Community countries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: Non-EC nationals settled in other EC countries are accorded the same rights of entry to the United Kingdom as those settled in countries outside the EC. They acquire no right to preferential treatment as regards entry to the United Kingdom simply because they have a right of settlement elsewhere in the Community.

Thames Valley Police Force

39. **Mr. Andrew MacKay** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a further statement on police manning levels in the Thames Valley force.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Four hundred and seventy additional police posts have been approved for the Thames Valley police since May 1979. These include 150 posts which my right hon. Friend approved in October, bringing the authorised establishment of the force up to 3,467 with effect from 1 April. We will look again at the force's needs when it has recruited up to its new establishment.

Football Matches

41. **Mr. Fallon** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the average non-recoverable policing costs of *(a)* first, *(b)* second, *(c)* third and *(d)* fourth division Football League matches last season.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The information is not collected centrally and could not be obtained without disproportionate cost.

"The Secret Society"

42. **Mr. James Lamond** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many letters he has received on the subject of the proposed British Broadcasting Corporation series, "The Secret Society."

Mr. Mellor: Three.

Prisoners (Distance from Home)

43. **Mr. Wigley** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will review policy towards the location of prisoners in relation to distance from their homes.

Mr. Mellor: While home address is one of the factors taken into account when allocating prisoners to establishments, due weight must be given to their security category, likely conduct, suitability for particular kinds of accommodation and medical and training needs and to the availability of places in particular establishments.

Police (Devon and Cornwall)

44. **Mr. Speller** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if he has had any applications for an increase in police manpower in Devon; if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Devon and Cornwall as to the priority given to the bobby on the beat; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Devon and Cornwall police authority applied in June 1986 for a phased increase of 137 police posts, and informed us in September that it was prepared to fund 17 of them in the latter part of this financial year (1986-87), and 53 in 1987-88. An increase of 17 police posts was approved in December 1986, meeting in full the authority's application for 1986-87. We are now considering the application for 1987-88 and hope to announce the outcome shortly.

It is the responsibility of the chief constable to decide how best to deploy the available manpower. It is the policy of chief officers to deploy as many officers as possible on patrol, and I understand that the chief constable of Devon and Cornwall will allocate most of any further increases in police manpower which may be approved to patrol duties.

45. **Mr. McLoughlin** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the progress of trials for the tape recording of police interviews with suspects.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The two-year field trials, which were held in five police force areas to test equipment and procedures, ended last year. The Government have announced their intention that tape recording of interviews with suspects in police stations should become standard police practice by 1991. So far 34 police forces have been given grant aid to introduce tape recording in their areas.

Cost of Crime

46. **Mr. Chris Smith** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether his Department conducts any research into the total economic cost of crime; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr. Atkinson) on 18 December 1986 at columns 1340-41.

Crime Statistics

48. **Mr. Michie** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will state the total number of crimes committed in England and Wales since 1 April 1979.

Mr. Mellor: Quarterly numbers of notifiable offences recorded by the police are published in Home Office statistical bulletins, copies of which are in the Library: annual figures are published in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales", (chapter 2 of Cm. 10 for 1985).

54. **Mr. Boyes** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will state the number of crimes per 100,000 population in England and Wales in 1978 and 1985.

Mr. Mellor: Police in England and Wales recorded 5,215 offences per 100,000 population in 1978, compared with 7,258 per 100,000 population in 1985. These figures are published in the Command Paper "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales" (table 2.2 of the issue for 1985, Cm 10).

58. **Mr. Barron** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will state the total number of crimes in the nine months ended 31 March 1979 and in the first nine months of 1986.

Mr. Mellor: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 2 March to a question from the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) at column 469.

Prisons Inspectorate

49. **Mr. Terry Lewis** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the annual report of the Prisons Inspectorate for 1986.

Mr. Mellor: The report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons for 1986 has not yet been received. His most recent annual report is that for 1985, which was published on 5 February. My right hon. Friend issued a statement at that time and a copy is in the Library.

Neighbourhood Watch Schemes

51. **Mr. Watts** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the cost of operating the neighbourhood watch schemes in the Thames Valley police authority area.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from Thames Valley police that the 160 neighbourhood watch schemes in the force area operate at minimal cost to police. The precise costs could not be separated out from other policing activity.

Police Areas

52. **Sir John Biggs-Davison** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has received any representations in relation to the inclusion of parts of the Epping Forest district of the county of Essex in the Metropolitan police district.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have received no such representations.

Prison Population

53. **Mr. Knox** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were in prison at the most recent count.

Mr. Mellor: The total prison population in England and Wales on 27 February was 48,588, plus 62 Immigration Act detainees held on a temporary basis in Foston hall.

Sexual Offences

55. **Mr. Galley** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received seeking legislation to modify the scope of sentences for sexual offences; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: We have received a number of recent representations about penalties for sexual offences but we have no present plans to change the existing penalty structure. Sentencing in individual cases is entirely a matter for the courts.

Community Radio

56. **Mr. Freud** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he is yet in a position to make a statement on the future of community radio.

Mr. Mellor: The Government's views on the possible development of community radio are set out in "Radio: Choices and Opportunities" (Cm 92), which was published on 25 February.

Crime (Greater Manchester)

57. **Mr. Litherland** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to reduce the incidence of crime in Greater Manchester.

Mr. Hurd: The chief constable of Greater Manchester has set the stimulation of community involvement in crime prevention as a force objective. The establishment of the Greater Manchester police is 6,943, an increase of 208 since 1979. The strength on 31 January 1987 was 6,747, an increase of 307 since 1979. I understand that the police authority envisages that the force will reach full establishment during the 1987-88 financial year.

Since the beginning of 1986, nearly 3,000 home watch schemes have been established in the Greater Manchester police area, an encouraging indication that the public are prepared to take an active role in helping to prevent crime.

Nine community programme crime prevention initiative projects have been established in the Greater Manchester area and a total of 633 places have been authorised. Those projects are undertaking a range of useful crime prevention activities including property marking, the fitting of home security equipment for the elderly and disadvantaged, crime analysis and developing and supporting home watch schemes.

One of the five local crime prevention initiatives has been established in Bolton. The Bolton project is examining the means by which crime and the fear of crime can be reduced by preventive measures tailored specifically to meet local needs and concerns. Developments arising from the project have so far been encouraging, particularly those initiatives relating to property marking and the replacement of gas and electricity pre-payment cash meters.

Crimes Against Children

59. **Mr. Jim Callaghan** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will state, in respect of each year since 1978, the number of crimes known to his Department to have been committed against children.

Mr. Mellor: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) on 18 December 1986 at columns 638-42.

Birmingham Pub Bombings

60. **Mr. Clay** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the terms of reference given by him to the Devon and Cornwall police in connection with the case of six men convicted of the Birmingham pub bombings.

Mr. Mellor: I refer the hon. Member to the reply which my right hon. Friend gave on 2 February to a question from the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short), at column 476.

Fresh Start

62. **Mr. Spencer** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the most recent progress of the fresh start proposals for the prison service.

Mr. Mellor: I refer my hon. and learned Friend to the reply given earlier to a question from the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox).

Amusement Arcades

63. **Mr. Lawler** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received concerning the admission of under 16-year-olds to amusement arcades.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have received a number of letters from Members of Parliament, local authorities, members of the public and others expressing concern at the admission of under 16-year-olds to amusement arcades and forwarding press reports on this subject. In addition, I recently met a delegation from the amusement arcade action group. We keep the law under review and are considering at present whether we should initiate research into the extent to which under-16s use amusement arcades and the implications of this for the young people concerned.

Police Expenditure

64. **Mr. Raynsford** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average police expenditure for each crime cleared up *(a)* in the Metropolitan police area and *(b)* in England and Wales, in 1978 and in 1986, expressed (i) in money terms and (ii) in constant 1985 prices.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The information requested in not available.

Postal Votes

32. **Mr. Adley** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received concerning the new postal vote application forms published by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have received a number of suggestions for ways in which the new absent voting forms could be improved. The forms must contain the

nformation required by the Representation of the People Regulations 1986, which were approved by both Houses. We shall consider carefully any further comments on the forms and review them in the light of experience. If my hon. Friend has a particular problem in mind, perhaps he would write to me.

Greater Manchester Police Authority

Mr. Arnold asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has received any further requests from the Greater Manchester police authority for an increase in the establishment of that police force.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Hardy asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many crimes were committed in South Yorkshire in 1979 and in 1986; and, of these, how many were crimes of violence against the person, of criminal damage and of thefts from dwellings in both these years.

Mr. Mellor: Numbers of notifiable offences recorded in police force areas in 1979 are published in table 32 of the Command Paper "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales" for that year, and for subsequent years in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales, Supplementary Tables", (table S.3.1 of volume 3 of the issue for 1985). Information for 1986 is not yet available.

Blyth Valley (Electoral Arrangements)

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he intends to review his decision not to implement the recommendations of the Local Government Boundary Commission in respect of electoral arrangements for Blyth Valley district council in time for the local elections of 7 May to take place on the proposed revised boundaries.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No. As I explained in reply to a question by the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Meadowcroft) on 17 February (*Official Report*, c. *558-9*), because of the administrative difficulty entailed in considering reports submitted by the commissions for England and Wales and preparing orders, it will not be possible to make an order in respect of Blyth Valley in time for the local elections in May. I am writing to the hon. Member.

Thomas Maguire (Detention)

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the representations he received concerning the recent detention of Thomas Maguire at Liverpool.

Mr. Hurd: I received representations from the hon. Member for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden), from Mrs. Christine Crawley, Member of the European Parliament for Birmingham, East, and from the hon. Member himself. Inquiries about Mr. Maguire's detention were also made by the West Midlands Prevention of Terrorism Act Research and Welfare Association.

Horserace Totalisator Board

Mr. Haselhurst asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department by what authority the Horserace Totalisator Board is participating in satellite information services; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Under the authority of section 15(1)*(d)* of the Betting, Gaming and Lotteries Act 1963, which permits the board to take such action as is incidential to, or conducive to the attainment of the purposes of, any of its functions.

Mr. Colin Wallace

Mr. Alex Carlile asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if, in the light of new evidence now available, he will refer to the Court of Appeal the conviction in March 1981 of Colin Wallace for the manslaughter of Jonathan Lewis; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: I am not aware of any new evidence which would justify my right hon. Friend referring the case to the Court of Appeal. Over the past three years, numerous representations by and on behalf of Mr. Wallace have been considered, but none has provided grounds for such a reference.

Immigration

Mr. Stuart Holland asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were detained for how many hours per day in the annexe of the Harmondsworth detention centre; what exercise and recreation are available to persons detained in the annexe; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: Since the Harmondsworth detention centre annexe opened on 10 November 1986, its average nightly occupancy has been 28·4 up to and including the night of 3 March 1987. Facilities include grassed and hard-standing exercise areas, a television/video room and table tennis room. The annexe is a separate self-contained unit run on similar lines to the main Harmondsworth detention centre which is on the same site.

Police (Complaints)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if, pursuant to his answer of 26 February, *Official Report*, columns *348-9*, on civil actions against police officers, he will give details of the nature of the complaints, the names of the complainant and the numbers of officers, and their ranks, involved in each of the 10 cases referred to in his answer.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I shall reply as soon as possible.

Police (Wrongful Acts)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if, pursuant to his answer of 26 February, *Official Report*, column *348*, he will give details of those 52 cases settled out of court referred to in that answer.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the information is as follows:

	£
Assault	236,000
Assault	10,000
Personal Injury	10,000
Assault Malicious Prosecution	6,500
False Imprisonment Malicious Prosecution	5,000
False Imprisonment Malicious Prosecution Assault	5,000
False Imprisonment Damage to Property	4,834
Unlawful Imprisonment Malicious Prosecution	4,500
False Imprisonment	3,000
Assault	2,750
Return of Property	2,525 2,005
Assault False Imprisonment Malicious Prosecution	2,500
False Imprisonment Malicious Prosecution	2,500
Assault False Imprisonment Malicious Prosecution	2,000 434
Assault False Imprisonment Malicious Prosecution	1,505
Assault	1,505
Assault False Imprisonment	1,400
Unlawful Imprisonment Malicious Prosecution	1,300
Assault False Imprisonment Malicious Prosecution	1,300
False Imprisonment Damage to Goods	1,250 1,000 500
False Imprisonment Malicious Prosecution	1,020
Assault	1,005
False Imprisonment	1,005 1,005
Negligence Damage to Property Trespass	1,005
Assault	1,000
Unlawful Imprisonment Negligence Trespass	1,000
False Imprisonment Malicious Prosecution	1,000
False Imprisonment	1,000
Assault Malicious Prosecution	850
False Imprisonment	800
Assault False Imprisonment Malicious Prosecution	800
Property Dispute	793·50
Unlawful Imprisonment	700
Return of Vehicle	600
Unlawful Imprisonment	550
Assault False Imprisonment Malicious Prosecution	550
Assault False Imprisonment Trespass	505 255
False Imprisonment Conversion	500
False Imprisonment	500
False Imprisonment Assault Trespass	500 500
False Imprisonment	500
False Imprisonment	500
False Imprisonment	500
Unlawful Imprisonment	400
Malicious Prosecution False Imprisonment	350
Assault False Imprisonment	255
False Imprisonment Assault	250
Return of Property	201
False Imprisonment	200
Wrongful Retention of Motor Vehicle	175
Assault	150
Malicious Prosecution False Imprisonment	100
Total	330,332·50

Wheel Clamping

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many vehicles were clamped in

each of the past five years; where most clamping has occurred; what plans he has to extend the areas in which clamping is carried out; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The number of vehicles clamped by the Metropolitan police since operations began on 15 May 1983 is as follows:

	Number
1983[1]	26,808
1984	44,101
1985	34,810
1986	26,028
1987[2]	14,665

[1] From 15 May.
[2] To 15 February.

The designation of areas in which wheelclamps may be used is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport. Since wheelclamping operations began they have been conducted in the area originally designated (parts of the London boroughs of Camden, Kensington and Chelsea, and Westminster). The designated area was extended by the Immobilisation of Vehicles Illegally Parked (London Boroughs of Camden, Kensington and Chelsea, and Westminster and the City of London) Order 1986 (S.I. 1225) and from 2 March this year the Metropolitan police began progressively to extend their area of wheelclamping operations with the intention of covering the whole of the extended designated area by the end of the year. The City of London police commenced wheelclamping operations on 20 October 1986 and had clamped 232 vehicles by 31 December. A further 270 vehicles had been clamped up to 13 February 1987.

Television Licences

Mr. Colin Shepherd asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the cost of the television licence for the years 1974, 1979 and 1987 in terms of 1985 prices.

Mr. Mellor: The information requested is as follows:

	Television licence fees as at 31 March		*Television licence fees at 1985 prices*[1]	
	Monochrome £	*Colour* £	*Monochrome* £	*Colour* £
1974	7	12	26	44
1979	10	25	18	44
1987	18	58	[2]16	[2]53

[1] Calculated by reference to changes in the retail price index—rounded to the nearest £.
[2] Estimate.

Nazi War Criminals

Mr. Torney asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his meeting on 2 March with the Simon Wiesenthal's organisation regarding the presence in the United Kingdom of alleged Nazi war criminals; and what action he proposes to take in the light of his meeting.

Mr. Hurd: I had a valuable meeting with representatives of the Simon Wiesenthal centre who explained the background to their recent submission of the names of 17 alleged war criminals and invited us to establish special machinery to investigate these allegations. I explained that our courts have no jurisdiction over the alleged offences and that we have no extradition arrangement with the Soviet Union, where the alleged offences took place. I urged the centre to provide information to substantiate their allegations, as the case for any change in the law would depend on the weight of evidence brought forward. Meanwhile we are continuing our inquiries into the documentary material cited by the centre; the whereabouts of those named by the centre; and the statements which they made following their entry into the country and when applying for British citizenship.

Departmental Computers

Dr. Hampson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department to which firms his Department has awarded contracts for computer hardware for each year since 1984; and what was the value of each contract.

Mr. Hurd [*pursuant to his reply*, 25 February 1987, column *253*]: The total number of contracts completed in 1985-86 was 286. Three hundred and seventy six contracts have been placed in 1986-87 to date. Orders in excess of £10,000 have been placed with the following companies:

AIT Corporation
Apricot
Artificial Intelligence
Bell Technical Services
Brainstorm Computers
British Olivetti
British Telecom
Burroughs (now known as "Unisys")
Cambridge Instruments
Camtech
Concurrent Computer Corporation
Cyfas Systems
Dacoll
Databasix
Data General
Digital
Doric Computer Systems
Ferranti
Giffin Factors
Harris Systems
Hewlett Packard
Honeywell
IBM
ICL
JSB
KCS
Knight
Kode
Leasco
Lexisystem
MBS
Meiko
NCR
Newbury Data
Perdix
Perkin Elmer
Picdar
Prime
Racal Norsk
Silicon City
Simnetts
Sound Techniques
Software Sciences
Thorn EMI
Vector International
Vistec Business systems
Wang

Dr. Hampson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his Department has spent on *(a)* computer hardware and *(b)* computer software for each year since 1984; and what is the projected expenditure for 1987.

Mr. Hurd [*pursuant to his reply*, 25 February 1987, c. 253]: Home Office expenditure on computer hardware and software since 1984 by calendar year has been as follows:

	1985-86 (outturn) £ million	*1986-87[1] (outturn) £ million*
Hardware	2·7	3·6
Software	0·4	0·3
TOTAL	3·1	[illegible]

[1] Estimate.

The breakdown between hardware and software expenditure is approximate since in some cases expenditure on software is not recorded separately. The hardware figures include some projects where hardware and software has been bought as a complete system and some maintenance expenditure where maintenance service has been purchased as part of the initial procurement.

Planned expenditure for 1987-88 on hardware and software is in total just over £8 million.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 6 March 1987

WALES

Private Medical Care

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list by district health authority and by local authority *(a)* the number of people placed by them in privately run drug/alcohol abuse assessment and care units on a day care basis, *(b)* the number of people placed by them in drug/alcohol abuse assessment and care centres as a residential patient and *(c)* the average length of stay for patients placed in residential care in drug/alcohol abuse assessment and care units for each year since 1979.

Mr. Mark Robinson: This information is not available centrally.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list by district health authority and by local health authority *(a)* the number of people placed by them in private psychiatric units on a day care basis, *(b)* the number of people placed by them in private psychiatric units on a residential basis and *(c)* the average length of stay for each patient placed in private psychiatric units for each year since 1979.

Mr. Mark Robinson: Information on the number of people placed in private psychiatric units on a day care basis and lengths of stay in any category is not available centrally.

Since 1979, health authorities in Wales have placed two patients in private psychiatric units on a residential basis.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list by district health authority the amount spent on placing people in *(a)* private psychiatric units and *(b)* private drug/alcohol abuse and assessment units for each year since 1979.

Mr. Mark Robinson: The annual accounts of health authorities show their expenditure on all contractual arrangements for patient care in total only. The detailed information requested is not collected centrally.

A494 (Queensferry)

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate is available to him of the cost of constructing the outer link, the local link or adding an extra lane in each direction on the present A494 where it crosses the river Dee at Queensferry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: At present no firm estimate is available of the cost of adding an extra lane in each direction to the A494 where it crosses the Dee. The construction of outer and local links would be for Clwyd county council, as local highway authority, to consider.

PRIME MINISTER

Ethnic Monitoring

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Prime Minister if she will list the numbers of entrants to her office from the ethnic minorities in the years 1985-86 and 1986-87; if she will also list the monitoring procedures used to ascertain the percentage of the work force represented by ethnic minorities and their patterns of promotion; and what are her methods of recruitment of minorities into the Civil Service.

The Prime Minister: The ethnic origins of new entrants to the Civil Service have been surveyed since October 1985. The latest available information for the period up to September 1986 for entrants to the Cabinet Office, which includes my office as well as those of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and my right hon. Friend the Lord Privy Seal, is as follows:

	Number
Total new entrants to Cabinet Office in period 1 October 1985 to 30 September 1986	180
Ethnic origins	
White	100
Black/Asian	10
Not stated	70

(Numbers rounded to the nearest five to preserve confidentiality)

A phased programme of departmental surveys of the ethnic origin of non-industrial civil servants by means of voluntary self-classification is being conducted. The majority of non-industrial staff in the Cabinet Office have been included in the regionally phased programme of ethnic surveys covering the areas of London, the south east and East Anglia. Consideration is being given to ways of using the data on the ethnic origin of staff in post to monitor promotion.

All Departmental recruitment is conducted on the basis of fair and open competition and selection is on merit. I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Privy Council Office, on 20 February 1987 *Official Report*, c. *881-82* reporting the arrangements being made to encourage people from the ethnic minorities to apply to the Civil Service.

Cable and Wireless

Mr. Michael Marshall asked the Prime Minister what response Her Majesty's Government have received to their representations to the Japanese Government seeking a full and fair opportunity for Cable and Wireless to participate in a consortium to operate the second international telecommunications service in Japan; what information she has about the progress of Cable and Wireless in this matter; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The Government have been following closely the bid by Cable and Wireless to be involved through the International Digital Communications Planning Inc. (IDC) consortium, in the provision of alternative international telecommunications facilities in Japan and has made representations on behalf of Cable and Wireless.

I understand that discussions are still in progress in Japan and that no final decision has been taken. I believe that this is an opportunity both for Japan to show that its

market is becoming more open and to create an outstanding example of Anglo-Japanese industrial co-operation in high technology.

Rural Enterprise and Development

Mr. Colvin asked the Prime Minister when Her Majesty's Government intend to publish the comprehensive set of documents on agriculture and rural enterprise and development.

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Northern Ireland, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Scotland will be publishing on Tuesday a series of documents entitled "Farming and Rural Enterprise". These will explain the Government's policies for farming and for rural enterprise and development as well as providing information on a wide range of assistance available for businesses in rural areas.

Copies of the folder of documents will be available on Tuesday from the Vote Office.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Correspondence

Mr. Mudd asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will arrange for a reply to be sent to the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne in response to a letter passed to his hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Mrs. Rumbold) on 3 December 1986, from Mr. F. H. McWilliams, of 17 South park, Redruth, Cornwall.

Mrs Rumbold: I replied to my hon. Friend today.

Hearing Damage

Mr. Speed asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what research is being sponsored through the various research bodies into possible damage to the hearing of young people caused by excessive noise from loudspeakers and earphones.

Mr. Walden: I shall reply as soon as possible.

Student Grants

Mr. Clay asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will amend the Education (Mandatory Awards) Regulations to ensure that in future all part-time university students receive grants from their local education authorities for their fees on the same basis as full-time students; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Walden: The possibility of financial assistance for part-time students pursuing degree studies will be considered as part of the student support review.

Local Education Authority Provision

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what reports made by district inspectors of Her Majesty's Inspectorate contain assessments of the appropriateness of provision by each local education authority; whether such reports contain any breakdown or analysis of provision; if he will place copies of all such reports for the last year in the Library; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: Each year, my right hon. Friend publishes a report by Her Majesty's Inspectorate on the effects of local authority expenditure policies on education provision in England. The reports are based on evidence from Her Majesty's inspectors' routine and centrally programmed visits to schools and colleges in the previous autumn, together with returns made by district inspectors for each of the 97 local education authorities in England, except for the Isles of Scilly. The district inspector returns consist of statistical and financial information provided by each LEA about overall levels of expenditure and the distribution of resources in the authority; the district inspector's broad assessment of the appropriateness of that provision in each case; and of the impact of any changes. The information collected, while giving some indication of current issues and trends, and providing a reasonable picture of the general position in schools and further and higher education, does not allow judgments to be made about the quality of education in individual LEAs. Statistics for the district inspectors' returns are requested from, and provided by, LEAs in confidence. My right hon. Friend does not propose to place copies in the Library.

Expenditure (Eligibility for Grants)

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science, pursuant to the reply to the hon. Member for Yeovil on 3 March concerning expenditure eligible for grants, what grants for 1987-88 have been approved on such a cash-limited basis; what approximate proportion of such approved grant expenditure is likely to be spent on teachers' pay and allowances; what account has been taken of proposed increases in teachers' pay; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Secretary of State has informed local education authorities that he will pay grant of up to £114 million on expenditure of up to £200 million within the new LEA training grants scheme; and grant of up to £64 million on expenditure of up to £92 million within the education support grant programme. The proportions of expenditure estimated to consist of teachers' pay are 70 per cent. for LEA training grant, and 20 per cent. for ESG. The limits on this expenditure are cash figures, within which teacher pay increases will have to be accommodated.

Capital Allocations

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science, further to his reply to the hon. Member for Yeovil on 20 February, *Official Report*, column *838*, concerning the formula used in determining capital allocations; what considerations were material in his not agreeing to place copies of the current formula in the Library; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: The reply of 20 February, *Official Report*, column *838* explained the basis of the formula in words rather than algebraically, in the interests of general intelligibility. A copy of the formula expressed in algebraic terms has now been placed in the Library.

Dental Schools

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement about

support for dental schools in the United Kingdom; if he will list those that have been visited by the University Grants Committee during the past six months; what resources each dental school has been allocated as a result of the University Grants Committee's recommendations; how many students are currently in each; and how much additional capital expenditure is to be made available for each school.

Mr. Walden: Provision for dental schools in Great Britain is not separately identified in the University Grants Committee's recurrent grant allocations for their parent universities. The latest allocations were issued on 10 February 1987, a copy is in the Library. No dental school has been visited by the University Grants Committee itself during the past six months, but three in London — United Medical and Dental Schools, King's College Dental School and University College Dental School — have been visited by the committee's dental review working party set up to consider the future organisation of national provision for dental education, and to advise on rationalisation.

The Department does not hold information on total student numbers in the form requested. The full-time equivalent student load in clinical dentistry for each university in Great Britain with a dental school in 1984-85 was as follows:

	Undergraduate	*Postgraduate*
Birmingham	254	6
Bristol	149	4
Leeds	184	11
Liverpool	214	8
London	914	219
Manchester	205	23
Newcastle	263	2
Sheffield	145	6
Wales	153	18
Dundee	124	—
Edinburgh	138	4
Aberdeen	221	13

The following new capital projects in dental schools have been approved by the University Grants Committee:

	£ million
Edinburgh Academic accommodation in new hospital	0·27
Sheffield Extension to dental school	2·07

The latter project is subject to the outcome of the dental review.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Vietnamese Refugees

Mr. Leigh asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he is prepared to accept a further offtake of Vietnamese refugees in the current year for resettlement in the United Kingdom; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: We hope to make an announcement shortly.

Magistrates' Courts

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has on access to magistrates' courts for disabled Justices of the Peace.

Mr. Mellor: This information is not held centrally at present. Arrangements are in hand to collect information from magistrates' courts which will include the number of registered disabled magistrates; the nature of their disabilities; details of any difficulties they may face in gaining access to court buildings and moving within them; and whether any special provisions have been made to make access and movement easier. It is planned to have this information compiled by the end of June this year.

Summer Time

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has as to what economic benefits will accrue to the United Kingdom if the Council of Ministers adopts European Economic Community Commission proposals for harmonising the dates of summer time.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The present directive does not expire until 31 December 1988. The Commission has yet to put forward any proposals for harmonising the dates for the end of summer time beyond this.

Police (Sussex)

Mr. Michael Marshall asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to make an announcement regarding police manpower levels for West and East Sussex, including Gatwick airport.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend is considering applications from the Sussex police authority for increases in the authorised establishment of the force, and hopes to announce the outcome shortly.

Fire Safety

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent consultations he has had with the Fire Brigades Union about fire safety of upholstered furniture.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council, on which the Fire Brigade Union is represented, discussed the fire safety of upholstered furniture most recently at its meeting on 25 November 1986, chaired by my noble Friend the Earl of Caithness. My noble Friend also corresponded with the Fire Brigades Union earlier this year about representation on a working party on the flammability of upholstered furniture set up by my hon. and learned Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

Highbury Magistrates' Court (Women Prisoners)

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many women prisoners were accommodated in the cells at Highbury magistrates' court on the nights of 3 and 4 March.

Mr. Mellor: I am advised by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the number of female

prisoners held in the cells at Highbury corner magistrates' court was nil on the night of 3-4 March and 18 on that of 4-5 March.

Police Manpower (Dorset)

Mr. David Atkinson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to increase police manpower in Dorset; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: It is the responsibility of the Dorset police authority to determine the authorised establishment of the force, subject to my right hon. Friend's approval. Sixty-two additional police posts have been approved for the force since May 1979, bringing the authorised establishment up to 1,226. We are now considering an application for a further increase and hope to announce the outcome shortly.

Immigration

Mr. Raison asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide a breakdown of the immigration status on arrival in the United Kingdom of all those *(a)* granted refugee status or asylum and *(b)* refused it over the latest available 12-month period.

Mr. Waddington: I shall reply as soon as possible.

Rape

Ms. Richardson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many men have been prosecuted for rape in each of the last five years in England; how many men have been convicted in each of these years; of these, how many have not been sent to prison; and how many have been sentenced to terms of imprisonment of less than three years, between three and five years, between five and 10 years and over 10 years respectively; and what orders were made in respect of those convicted but not sent to prison;

(2) how many men have been prosecuted for rape in each of the last five years in Wales ; how many men have been convicted in each of these years; of these, how many have not been sent to prison; and how many have been sentenced to terms of imprisonment of less than three years, between three and five years, between five and 10 years and over 10 years respectively; and what orders were made in respect of those convicted but not sent to prison.

Mr. Mellor [*pursuant to his reply*, 23 February 1987, c. *35*]: The information requested for 1985 which may be incomplete is given in the tables. Comparable data for earlier years could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Information on offences of rape in England and Wales as a whole is published annually in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales, supplementary tables, volumes 1 and 2"—in tables S1.1(A), S2.1(A), S2.3, S2.4 and S2.5, under offence classification 19. The figures for rape include aiding and abetting and attempted rape and some offences not under section 1 of the Sexual Offences Act 1956.

Table 1

Males proceeded against and found guilty at all courts for offences of rape[1] and attempted rape by type of sentence—England and Wales 1985

	Proceeded against	*Found guilty*	*Sentenced to*	
			Immediate custody	*Otherwise dealt with*
England	785	398	376	22
Wales	41	28	25	3
England and Wales	826	426	401	25

[1] Includes offences under s.127, 128 of the Mental Health Act 1959.

Table 2

Males sentenced to immediate custody at all courts for rape [1] and attempted rape by type and length of sentence—England and Wales 1985

	Sentence length				*Total*
	Up to 3 years	*Over 3 years up to 5 years*	*Over 5 years up to 10 years*	*Over 10 years*	
England					
Unsuspended imprisonment	92	95	51	15	253
Partly suspended imprisonment	4	—	—	—	4
Youth custody	45	39	21	1	106
Detention centre order	3	—	—	—	3
Detained under s.53 CYPA 1933	7	2	1	—	10
Total	151	136	73	16	376
Wales					
Unsuspended imprisonment	4	8	3	—	15
Partly suspended imprisonment	3	—	—	—	3
Youth custody	3	3	1	—	7
Detention centre order	—	—	—	—	—
Detained under s.53 CYPA 1933	—	—	—	—	—
Total	10	11	4	—	25

	Sentence length				Total
	Up to 3 years	Over 3 years up to 5 years	Over 5 years up to 10 years	Over 10 years	
England and Wales					
Unsuspended imprisonment	96	103	54	15	268
Partly suspended imprisonment	7	—	—	—	7
Youth custody	48	42	22	1	113
Detention centre order	3	—	—	—	3
Detained under s.53 CYPA 1933	7	2	1	—	10
Total	161	147	77	16	401

[1] Includes offences under s.127, 128 of the Mental Health Act 1959.

Table 3

Males found guilty of rape[1] and attempted rape not sentenced to immediate custody by type of disposal

England and Wales 1985

	England	Wales	England and Wales
Hospital order under s.37(1) Mental Health Act 1983	4	—	4
Restriction order under ss.37 and 41 Mental Health Act 1983	5	—	5
Probation order	2	—	2
Supervision order	3	—	3
Fine	—	1	1
Community service order	1	—	1
Attendance centre order	—	2	2
Care order	1	—	1
Fully suspended sentence	6	—	6
Total	22	3	25

[1] Includes offences under s. 127, 128 of the Mental Health Act 1959.

ENERGY

Energy Efficiency Year

Dr. Michael Clark asked the Secretary of State for Energy how much was spent by his Department on energy saving promotion during Energy Efficiency Year.

Mr. David Hunt: Energy Efficiency Year in 1986 marked an important stage in the continuing campaign of the energy efficiency office. Its aim was further to concentrate efforts in attaining the £7 billion energy savings available to the nation as a whole and to intensify the effect of all the initiatives undertaken.

A major target was to create a campaign that would be picked up and reinforced by the promotional efforts of the energy supply and energy efficiency industries. In this it was an outstanding success.

1986 covered two financial years. Estimated figures for the four quarters give a total of £11·8 million spent on energy efficiency advertising and other informational, promotional and marketing activity by my Department.

Electricity Connections

Mr. Beith asked the Secretary of State for Energy what is his latest estimate of the number of occupied dwellings in each parliamentary constituency in England, Scotland and Wales not connected to the public electricity supply.

Mr. Goodlad: I regret that these numbers are not available.

National Grid

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Energy what estimate he makes of the percentage of power to the national grid to be provided through the cross-Channel link for 1987.

Mr. Goodlad: My Department does not make such estimates.

EMPLOYMENT

Adult Training Scheme

Ms. Clare Short asked the Paymaster General if he will provide details of the numbers in the adult training scheme and a breakdown of the type, duration and cost per place of the training in which they are engaged.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I will reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

St. Helens, North

Mr. John Evans asked the Paymaster General if he will give *(a)* the number of people in receipt of unemployment benefits in St. Helens, North, *(b)* the number of people who have been unemployed for over 12 months in St. Helens, North and *(c)* the number of people in each of the employment and training schemes in the St. Helens, North constituency, at the latest available date.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: On 8 January 1987 the number of unemployed claimants in the St. Helens, North parliamentary constituency was 6,792, of whom 3,282 had been unemployed for more than 12 months.

It is not possible to give precise numbers of people in the employment, training and enterprise measures run by my Department and the Manpower Services Commission in the St. Helens, North constituency because of the various bases on which local information is collected. The numbers of people participating in these measures in the St. Helens area at the latest available date were given in a reply to the hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) on 26 February 1987 at column *337*.

TVEI (Grants)

Mr. Ashdown asked the Paymaster General (1) what technical and vocational education initiative extension grants have been approved for each local education authority; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what technical and vocational education initiative grants have been made to each local education authority in 1986-87; when the pilot scheme started in each

authority; whether in each case he has received an evaluation report of the pilot scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: I will reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Male Unemployment

Ms Clare Short asked the Paymaster General if he will provide the best available evidence of the growth in part-time male unemployment from 1979 to 1983 and 1983 to 1986-87; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The information requested is not available. People with part-time jobs are not separately identified in the monthly unemployment count.

THE ARTS

Royal Opera House

Dr. Michael Clark asked the Minister for the Arts if, pursuant to his reply of 16 February, *Official Report* column 653, he will place a copy of the Royal Opera House's development land trust deed 1981 and the memorandum of agreement 1985 in the Library.

Mr. Luce: I am happy to do so today, with the assent of the Royal Opera House and the Arts Council.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Government Data Network

Mr. Cohen asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what financial, technological and service improvements attachment of the Customs and Excise computer systems to the Government data network will bring to his Department.

Mr. Brooke: The economies of scale in the development, implementation and running of a GDN are expected to save Customs money, compared with the cost of using public services or developing a network of its own. If proceeded with, the network would enable Customs data processing to be distributed between several sites. It would simplify the handling of data collected from traders and make it more available to Customs and Excise officials to use in their work.

Privatisation

Mr. Wainwright asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide information showing, for each stock market flotation since 1979 of former publicly owned bodies *(a)* the date of flotation, *(b)* the number of shares offered for sale, *(c)* the offer price per share, giving, where appropriate, details of partly paid prices, *(d)* the number of shares allocated to applicants investing an initial instalment of (i) £1,000 and (ii) £5,000, *(e)* the opening stock market price per share for sales, *(f)* the total cost of the publicity campaign, *(g)* the total amount of fees paid, *(h)* administrative costs borne by the Exchequer, *(i)* an estimate of revenue forgone as a result of any special dealing arrangements, *(j)* in the case of British Gas and British Telecom an estimate of the total value of special customer bill reductions for shareholders, *(k)* an estimate of the total value of bonus share arrangements and *(l)* details of any Exchequer expenditure not already shown.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The information requested at *(a)*, *(c)*, *(d)* and *(g)* is given in the table. I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) on 2 March (*Official Report*, column *522*) for the information requested at *(b)* and *(e)*. For information about pre-sale publicity costs, I refer the hon. Member to my answer to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) on 7 November (*Official Report*, column *628*), the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy to my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples) on 12 December (*Official Report*, column *244*) and that given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport to my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo) on 18 February (*Official Report*, column *628*).

No separate records of the administrative costs to the Exchequer of each privatisation are available: these are borne within the budgets of the relevant Government Department. No revenue was forgone as a result of special dealing arrangements for privatisation shares. The current estimated total value of special customer bill reductions for shareholders is £99 million for British Gas and £19·5 million for British Telecom. Bonus share arrangements were available on four privatisations, and the value of the shares at the offer price retained to meet this commitment was £107 million for British Telecom, £144 million for British Gas and £22 million for British Airways; final figures will depend on the number of eligible shareholders at the end of the qualifying periods. The value of Britoil bonus shares distributed in 1986 was £3 million.

Privatisation	*Date of flotation*[1]	*Offer price per share (pence)*	*Number of shares*[2] *purchased for initial instalment cost of:* (i) £1,000	(ii) £5,000	*Total costs to Her Majesty's Government of financial and legal advice and other services, excluding VAT and stamp duty* £ thousands
1. British Aerospace	20 February 1981	150	666	n/a[3]	4,970
2. Cable and Wireless	6 November 1981	168	595	2,976	5,778
3. Amersham International	25 February 1982	142	704	3,521	1,826
4. Britoil	23 November 1982	215 (instalments of 100 on application and 115)	1,000	5,000	10,994
5. Associated British Ports	16 February 1983	112	875	4,400	

Privatisation	Date of flotation[1]	Offer price per share (pence)	Number of shares[2] purchased for initial instalment cost of: (i) £1,000	(ii) £5,000	Total costs to Her Majesty's Government of financial and legal advice and other services, excluding VAT and stamp duty £ thousands
6. Enterprise Oil	2 July 1984	186 (instalments of 100 on application and 85)	1,000	n/a[3]	9,068
7. Jaguar	9 August 1984	165	600	3,030	[4]—
8. British Telecom	3 December 1984	130 (5o on application and two later instalments of 40)	n/a[3]	n/a[3]	[5]165,037
9. British Gas	8 December 1986	135 (50 on application and later instalments of 45 and 40)	2,000	n/a[3]	[6]154,000
10. British Airways	11 February 1987	125 (instalments of 65 on application and 60)	n/a[3]	n/a[3]	[6] 28,500

[1] First day of dealings on Stock Exchange.
[2] Since applications were accepted only for certain round numbers of shares it would not have been possible to apply for exactly £1,000 or £5,000 of shares. for the purposes of this table, however, it is assumed that such applications could have been made.
[3] Maximum allocation (value of first instalment) was less than £1,000 or £5,000.
[4] The sale of Jaguar plc was conducted by BL plc who appointed advisers. Details of the appointments and the total cost are a matter for the Company. Only one firm was appointed to advise the Government; it is not the practice to disclose fees paid to individual firms.
[5] Includes estimates for expenses up to 1988-89.
[6] Estimated figure for 1986-87.

Premium Bonds

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people have been paid premium bond prizes incorrectly; and how many people have not received prizes who should have, for each of the last five years.

Mr. Ian Stewart: It is not possible to say how many people have been paid premium bond prizes incorrectly, since such errors will generally come to light only when revealed by a third party. Any such cases as arise are very few in number and confined to very small prizes. Errors might arise when a bond holder changed address or died without the bonds and stock office being informed. Mistakes are always corrected when discovered. Details of unclaimed prizes are set out in the answer given to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) on 17 February 1987 at columns *424-25*.

Personal Equity Plans

Mr. Wrigglesworth asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many new people have invested in personal equity plans in each week since the scheme's inception.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Latest available figures indicate that during January more than 15,000 people per week invested in personal equity plans.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Blair asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 1986, *Official Report*, column *742* on the consultation document "VAT Input Tax: Origin and Scope of the Right to Deduct", if he will set out the main items and/or categories given to make up the estimate of £300 million tax recovered in 1987-88.

Mr. Brooke: I regret that I can add little to the answer that I gave the hon. Member on 3 February at column *537*: it is not possible to make any reliable apportionment of additional revenue yield between the main categories in schedule 6 of the Value Added Tax Act 1983 other than to say that groups 1, 2 and 5 (land, insurance and finance) are likely to be those most affected. An estimate of the further subdivision of this apportionment, to identify the revenue yield arising from the individual items which go to make up the various groups, would be even less reliable.

SCOTLAND

Orkney and Shetland (Ministerial Visit)

Mr. Wallace asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he has any plans to visit Orkney or Shetland in the next six months.

Mr. Rifkind: I am currently considering the possibility of visiting Orkney and Shetland in the near future.

Ferry Service (Orkney)

Mr. Wallace asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he has completed his study of proposals for the provision of a new ferry service for the north isles of Orkney; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: Proposals for development of the ferry services in the outer north isles of Orkney are still under consideration, but a decision on the proposals will be reached shortly.

Housing

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects the figures to be available as to how many homes were completed for local authorities and housing associations in Scotland in the year 1986.

Mr. Ancram: A provisional figure for the numbers of new dwellings completed during 1986 by each agency should be available by the end of March.

Dee Corporation

Mr. Allan Stewart asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the employment implications for Scotland of the recent reorganisations announced by the Dee Corporation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Rifkind: I will reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Fish Quotas

Mr. Maclennan asked the Secretary of State for the Scotland when, and for what reason, haddock quotas for non-producers' organisations vessels in the 40 to 60 ft class were cut from 30 tonnes per month to 45 tonnes over two months; what is the monthly quota for producers' organisations vessels; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacKay: The management arrangements for this year's North sea haddock fishery were reviewed by fisheries departments at meetings with industry representatives on 9 January and 20 February.

At the January meeting it was agreed that, for fishing vessels not in membership of producers' organisations operating sectoral quotas, a flat-rate vessel quota should apply for the month of February. This was subsequently set at 30 tonnes.

At the February meeting, fisheries departments accepted a proposal by the industry representatives that for March and April a system of differential quota limits should be introduced, based on vessel length categories and notional crew numbers. These revised arrangements have resulted in quota limits for the two-month period ranging from 30 tonnes for the smallest vessels to 90 tonnes for the largest.

It is for the producers' organisations to determine the quotas applicable to their members' vessels.

The objectives of the fisheries departments' management arrangements are to achieve the overall reduction required in this year's North sea haddock catch, compared with 1986, to take account of the decrease in the total allowable catch, and to secure a 12 months haddock fishery for the non-sectoral vessels.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Residual Current Circuit Breakers

Mr. Richard Page asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to make the use of residual current circuit breakers mandatory in England and Wales.

Mr. Howard: I have no plans at present to make use of residual circuit breakers mandatory in England and Wales.

The wiring rules for buildings prepared by the Institution of Electrical Engineers now include a provision for these devices to be fitted in circumstances where sockets are primarily used for DIY tools and garden equipment. The installation industry follow these rules very widely throughout the United Kingdom.

A working group has been set up for the promotion of both the portable and single socket type of residual current devices and user awareness is being promoted by organisations such as the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents and consumer groups.

Amateur Radio Transmitter (Interference)

Mr. Wilkinson asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) whether, in the light of the further reports of continued interference to the radio, television and telephone reception of the residents of Tudor Close, Eastcote, Middlesex, from a nearby amateur radio transmitter, he will use his powers to withdraw the licence of this transmitter; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will make a statement on his Department's latest assessment of the level of interference to television, radio and telephone reception in Tudor Close, Eastcote, Middlesex from a local amateur transmitter about which he has received complaints;

(3) whether, in the light of the alleged violations reported to him of the licence variation conditions of the amateur radio transmitter in the neighbourhood of Tudor Close, Eastcote, Middlesex, he will now use his powers to close down this transmitter; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher: Further to my reply of 27 October (*Official Report*, column *55*), I am advised that regrettably complaints of interference have since been received at a time when the amateur's station was closed down. In the light of the information before us the amateur has been advised that consideration is being given to revoking his licence. We are now awaiting representations from the amateur's legal adviser. I will write to my hon. Friend when a decision has been taken.

Fireworks

Miss Fookes asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give the firework injury statistics for 1986.

Mr. Howard: According to reports from hospitals in England, Wales and Scotland, 846 people required treatment for injuries caused by fireworks during a four-week period in October and November 1986. The figures for 1986 and the preceding five years are as follows:

Firework injuries in Great Britain
Four week period in October to November

Year	*1986*	*1985*	*1984*	*1983*	*1982*	*1981*
Total	*846*	*968*	*778*	*833*	*626*	*681*
Place of accident						
1. Family or private party	286	255	231	311	189	231
2. Semi-public party (eg scouts, cricket club)	72	76	65	84	53	58

Year	1986	1985	1984	1983	1982	1981
Total	846	968	778	833	626	681
3. Large public display	119	117	108	111	88	101
4. Casual incident in street etc.	299	435	298	257	220	229
5. Other place	52	64	59	54	61	46
6. Indoors	18	21	17	16	15	16
Type of firework						
1. Banger	161	241	175	184	147	167
2. Rocket	159	197	115	107	71	102
3. Roman candle, coloured fire etc.	88	90	103	114	84	107
4. Home-made or extracted powder	14	27	21	15	35	26
5. Other proprietary fireworks	118	73	74	78	82	64
6. Sparklers	80	67	65	95	40	48
7. Unspecified type	226	273	225	240	167	167
Severity of injury						
1. Fatal injury	—	—	1	—	—	—
2. Detained more than one night	48	53	55	61	33	24
3. Sufficient to cause absence from work or equivalent	160	231	161	147	67	62
4. Minor injury	582	632	506	592	489	531
5. Unspecified injury	56	52	55	33	37	64
Eye injuries (included in 2-5)	291	341	295	293	241	261
Age group of injured persons						
Over 20	235	214	180	215	139	132
16-20	145	161	109	108	73	89
13-15	207	271	208	173	149	173
Under 13	259	322	281	337	265	287

Financial Services Act

Dame Judith Hart asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will take steps to extend from 28 February the deadline for comments by small businesses on the Securities and Investments Board rules governing FIMBRA under the Financial Services Act which were published on 12 February; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: No. The proposed rules submitted to my right hon. Friend on 10 February by the Securities and Investments Board reflected the results of consultation on earlier drafts published by the board and therefore I do not believe that it is necessary to extend the deadline for comments. All comments made before the deadline to the Department about the proposed rules will be fully considered in deciding whether to recommend to Parliament the transfer to the board of powers under the Financial Services Act 1986.

Copyright (South Korea)

Mr. Absc asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations he has made to the Government of South Korea for the retrospective protection to be given to United States copyright work by South Korea to be extended to United Kingdom works; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: I most recently emphasised the need for the United Kingdom to receive equality of treatment with the United States of America on intellectual property rights when I met the Korean Vice-Minister for Trade and Industry last October; my right hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Information Technology will take up this issue during his forthcoming visit to Korea.

The EC is also maintaining pressure on the Korean Government to apply retrospective protection multilaterally without discrimination in favour of the United States of America.

Rover Group

Mr. Bendall asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a further statement on financial support for the restructuring of Rover Group's commercial vehicles business.

Mr. Channon: I told the House on 19 February *Official Report* column *1059-60* that the Government intended to provide up to £750 million to write off the accumulated debts from Leyland Bus and Leyland Trucks left in Rover Group and the restructuring costs resulting from their sale. These costs can now be assessed with greater precision and are calculated to be £680 million. My right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury is accordingly today laying before the House a Supplementary Estimate (class V, Vote 11-Vehicle Industry) for that amount.

Shipbuilding

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will estimate the projected number of jobs in the shipbuilding industry from 1987 to 1990.

Mr. Giles Shaw [*pursuant to his reply*, 5 March 1987, column *654*]: In January this year, employment in merchant shipbuilding in Great Britain was some 9,200. There is no reliable basis on which to forecast the position in future years.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Discography of the Neck

Mr. Spencer asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the hospitals in England able to carry out discography of the neck.

Mrs. Currie: This information is not held centrally. I understand, however, that this facility is available at both the Leicester royal infirmary and Leicester general hospitals.

Free Milk and Vitamins

Ms. Richardson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the number of awards of free milk and vitamins which were made in 1985 to *(a)* pregnant women, *(b)* nursing mothers and *(c)* children under school age, showing for each group whether the grounds for the award were in receipt of supplementary benefit, family income supplement or low income; and if he will publish his estimate of the numbers of awards expected to be made to each group after changes in the Social Security Act to be introduced in April 1988.

Mr. Major: The table gives the information requested for pregnant women and for children under school age in Great Britain at December 1984, the latest date for which figures are available.

Thousands

	Supplementary benefit	*Low incomes*	*FIS*
Pregnant women	40	10	10
Children under school age	720	70	130
Total	760	80	140

Rounded to nearest 10,000.

From April 1988, the low income scheme for welfare foods will end. Families receiving family credit, expected to be significantly higher than those receiving FIS, will not be entitled to free milk but the children's rates will be set at a higher level to give extra cash help instead. We do not expect significant variation in the numbers in these categories who will become entitled to income support.

Nursing mothers are entitled to vitamins and their babies are entitled to free milk; the latter are included in the figure given in the above table for "children under school age". We estimate that about 3,000 nursing mothers, other than those whose vitamin tokens are issued when they are pregnant and which carry on after the baby is born, receive their vitamins at present. After April 1988, vitamins will be available free through health clinics.

Residential Homes

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has any plans to change the amounts of capital disregarded when elderly people enter *(a)* private residential homes, assisted by his Department's board and lodging payments or otherwise and *(b)* residential homes owned by local authorities.

Mr. Major: The present rules are that residents in private and voluntary homes can claim supplementary benefit if their capital assets are not more than £3,000. When income support is introduced in 1988 new rules will apply. The capital cut-off point will increase from £3,000 to £6,000 but with a tariff income assumed of £1 for every band of £250 between £3,000 to £6,000. The joint central and local government working party on supplementary benefit and residential care, which is considering means of harmonising financial support for people in residential care homes, is also considering the future arrangements for financial assessement. Its report is expected at Easter.

Births

Mr. Michie asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many births there were in Sheffield, Heeley, in the last year for which figures are available.

Mrs. Currie: During 1985 there were 237 live births to mothers living in the Heeley ward of the Sheffield metropolitan district.

Private Medical Care

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list by district health authority and by local authority *(a)* the number of people placed by them in private psychiatric units on a day care basis, *(b)* the number of people placed by them in private psychiatric units as residential patients and *(c)* the average length of stay for each patient placed in residential care in private psychiatric units for each year since 1979.

Mrs. Currie: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list by district health authority and by local health authority *(a)* the number of people placed by them in privately run drug/alcohol abuse assessement and care units on a day care basis, *(b)* the number of people placed by them in private drug/alcohol abuse assessment and care units as residential patients and *(c)* the average length of stay for each patient placed in residential care in drug/alcohol abuse assessment and care units for each year since 1979.

Mrs. Currie: I am sorry that I cannot give the hon. Member the information that he seeks. It is not held centrally.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list by district health authority and by local health authority the amount spent on placing people in *(a)* private psychiatric units and *(b)* private drug/alcohol abuse assessment and care units for each year since 1979.

Mrs. Currie: The information requested is not available centrally.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list *(a)* the private psychiatric units and *(b)* the private drug/alcohol assessment and care units used by district health authorities and local authorities for each year since 1979.

Mrs. Currie: I am sorry that I cannot give the hon. Member the information that he seeks in precisely the form requested. The information available centrally is given in the table.

Non-NHS institutions providing mental illness treatment under contractual arangements with NHS health authorities, 1985

St. John of God hospital, Richmond, North Yorkshire
The Retreat, York YO1
St. Andrew's hospital, Northampton NN1
Royal Air Force hospital, Ely, Cambridgeshire
Sydney house, Lydd, Kent
Kneesworth house psychiatric hospital, Royston, Herts
Arbours Association crisis centre, London N8

Ticehurst house hospital, Wadhurst, East Sussex
King Edward VII hospital, Midhurst, West Sussex
Care Concern (Well street), Corwen, Clwyd
Highcliffe nursing Home, Christchurch, Dorset
Allendale nursing home, Poole, Dorset
Brooklyn nursing home, Bournemouth, Dorset
Cromer Lodge nursing home, Bournemouth, Dorset
Ascot nursing home, Ascot, Berkshire
Spyway adolescent and young people unit, Swanage, Dorset
Langham House nursing home, Rutland, Leicestershire
Cheadle royal hospital, Cheadle, Cheshire

Cancer Screening

Mr. Spearing asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what additional funds he expects to be allocated to the Newham district health authority in respect of his programme for cancer screening.

Mrs. Currie: Funds will be provided for a national breast cancer screening service to be established in England over the next three years on the basis of centres each serving a population of approximately half a million. It is for regional health authorities to decide in which districts the centres should be located and how the special allocations provided to establish them should be deployed. In 1987-88 each region will receive an allocation of about one third of a million pounds to cover the capital and revenue costs of establishing its first centre. Similar provision will be made for the remaining centres in the following two years.

Supplementary Benefit

Mr. John Evans asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give the number of people in receipt of supplementary benefits in St. Helens, North at the latest available date.

Mr. Lyell: St. Helens, North constituency is covered by the Department's local offices at St. Helens and Warrington but their boundaries are not conterminous with those of the constituency. The number of people receiving supplementary benefit from those offices on 10 February 1987—the latest available figure—was 38,454.

Source: 100 per cent. count of cases in action.

Nuclear Installations (Cancer)

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what immediate action he intends to take following the publication of the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys report on incidents of leukaemia, lymphatic cancer and other cancers in areas around nuclear establishments; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: The lengthy and detailed report published by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys provides a large volume of statistics which require careful interpretation. The report's authors indicate that the number of relatively high results is similar for the areas of interest and for their controls. The authors also conclude that certain findings may warrant further consideration, including checks on the validity of the results and consideration of the need for field studies. The report is being referred to the independent committee on medical aspects of radiation in the environment, which will in due course advise on the report's findings and the need for further investigations.

AIDS

Mr. Cormack asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has about the risks of contracting AIDS from hairdressing implements; and what guidance has been given to hairdressers on these matters.

Mr. Newton: We are not aware of any case in which HIV infection has been transmitted through hairdressing implements. However, high standards of hygiene are needed wherever there is a possibility, however remote, that sharp instruments such as razors or scissors could accidentally draw blood from one person and transfer it and innoculate it into another person. The Department and the public health laboratory service are preparing guidance for hairdressers on this.

Personal Pensions

Mr. McCrindle asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) when he expects to be able to publish details of the charges that institutions can make when providing personal pensions; and if he will make a statement;

(2) when he expects to be able to publish details of the information which must be provided to employees interested in taking a personal pension; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Major: We shall make an announcement as soon as possible.

Community Programme

Ms. Clare Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will provide full details of how he arrived at the estimate that allowing participants on the community programme to claim unemployment benefit would cost £2 million per week.

Mr. Major: It is impossible to be precise about the benefit cost of allowing people working part time in the community programme to receive unemployment benefit for the days on which they do not work and in my statement on 3 March I referred to expenditure of "around £2 million a week". The actual cost would depend upon the numbers of part timers who had underlying title to UB, had exhausted entitlement, were able to requalify by virtue of the CP work, would in fact be available for work on the days in question and indeed on whether people would choose to claim for these days, bearing in mind that in most cases part-time earnings would be considerably higher than benefit entitlement before joining the scheme. Information is not available on many of these points. £2 million is an approximate mid-point between best and worst assumptions.

Board and Lodging Regulations

Mr. Sumberg asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what action he proposes to take following the judgment of the Court of Appeal, announced on 5 March, in respect of board and lodging regulations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Major: The Court of Appeal gave judgment in three cases affecting supplementary benefit claimants in board and lodging, including homes.

The court has dismissed the two appeals brought against the Secretary of State by the London borough of

Camden and an individual claimant respectively. In those cases, the court unanimously upheld the validity of the regulations which governed payments of supplementary benefit to people in residential care and nursing homes during the period from April 1985 to July 1986, and to ordinary boarders during the period from November 1985 to July 1986.

In the third case, the Secretary of State himself was the appellant. The court has confirmed that in respect of the period December 1984 to April 1985 decisions on amounts of benefit to be paid should have been made solely by the independent statutory adjudication authorities. The limits promulgated by the Secretary of State had been made under powers which were insufficient for the purpose.

We accept the judgment. Action will be taken to identify cases affected by the judgment and arrears of benefit, where appropriate, including any increase in transitional protection dating from April 1985, will be paid.

Injuries (Animal Attacks)

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services, pursuant to the reply by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) on 26 November, *Official Report*, column *295*, whether he will give a breakdown of the figures provided in tables (1) and (2) by the type of animal which inflicted the injuries on the people concerned; and if he will also give the figures as to the total injuries caused to people by each category of animal; and what advice his Department gives on attacks by animals.

Mrs. Currie [*pursuant to her reply*, 4 March 1987, c. *623-4*]: Exact figures on injuries by specific animal or category of animal are not available. However, table 1 shows for the three countries combined an estimation of the number of hospitals discharges and deaths resulting from injury caused by those categories of animals which may be identified separately. The number of accidental deaths caused by specified animals is shown in table 2.

Table 1
Estimate of number of hospital discharges and deaths due to injury by specified animals. England, Scotland and Northern Ireland 1980-84.

Type of animal injury	*Year*				
	1980	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*
Dog Bite	1,070	1,080	1,520	1,180	940
Hornet, wasp and bee sting	340	280	140	350	400
Other injury caused by animal	1,960	1,680	1,800	1,250	1,260

Note:
Figures may not add to previous totals because of rounding.

TABLE 2
Number of deaths with underlying cause of death as accident caused by animals (ICD(9) E905 excluding E905.7, E906) Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland 1981 to 1985

Area of usual residence/Animal	*Year*				
	1981	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*
Scotland					
Bull	2	1	—	—	—
Dog	—	1	—	—	—
Horse	—	—	1	—	—
England					
Bee (sting)	2	1	2	1	1
Bull	—	—	3	3	1
Cat	—	—	—	—	1
Cow	—	1	—	1	1
Dog	1	2	1	—	9
Elephant	—	—	—	1	—
Goat	—	—	—	1	—
Horse	3	1	3	3	5
Pony	—	—	—	1	1
Ram	1	1	—	1	—
Sheep	—	1	—	—	—
Wasp (sting)	2	—	3	2	—
Unspecified animal	1	1	—	—	—
Unspecified insect	1	1	1	—	1
Wales					
Bee (sting)	—	1	—	—	—
Dog	—	—	1	—	—
Horse	—	—	1	3	—
Pig	—	1	—	—	—
Unspecified insect	—	—	—	—	1
Northern Ireland					
Bull	—	—	1	—	—
Bullock	—	—	1	—	1
Cow	—	—	1	—	—
Ram	—	—	—	1	—
Wasp (sting)	—	—	—	—	1

ENVIRONMENT

Homeless Families

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his reply of Friday 16 January, *Official Report*, column *331*, what is his estimate of the comparative public sector costs of housing homeless families who are in receipt of supplementary benefit by *(a)* providing them with temporary accommodation under the 1988 housing corporation programme involving mixed public and private sector funding, *(b)* providing them with dwellings acquired from the private sector and improved for letting under secure tenancies and *(c)* providing them with bed and breakfast accommodation.

Mr. Tracey: The estimated public sector costs in the first year of providing accommodation of the kinds specified, on various assumptions and on as comparable a basis as possible, are shown in table 1. The table provides separate information for both London and non-metropolitan districts because mixed funding projects are expected in practice to be heavily concentrated on the London area. The figures are based on the latest statistics available and up-rated to 1987-88.

Table 1

	London	Non-metropolitan districts
	£	£
Housing corporation mixed funding[1]	7,600	4,300
Local authority acquisition[1]	8,500	4,800
Bed and Breakfast[2]	12,400	6,100

[1] Includes interest on capital, management and maintenance, and an allowance for furnishing. Any single payments made in respect of furnishing to households in receipt of supplementary benefit would not be additional. Any housing benefit paid to householders would also not be additional. The figures should be reduced to the extent that some households are paying rent from their own resources.

[2] Based on average gross expenditure per household year as reported by authorities to the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy. The comparable net figures (net of board and lodging payments made to authorities by or on behalf of households in receipt of supplementary benefit and net of any reasonable charges required by authorities of other households) would be £9,500 for London and £4,000 for non-metropolitan districts.

The social security benefits that will be applicable to households of various composition from 6 April 1987 are shown in table 2.

Table 2

Social security benefits available to households of various composition in various kinds of accommodation

	Rented accommodation	*Bed and breakfast*
Single person	£30·40 (£38·65 if on long-term rate) plus eligible amount of actual rent and rates.	Amount of actual charge (plus an allowance for those meals which are not included in the charge) up to limit varying from £45 to £70 depending on location, plus personal expenses allowance of £10 (£11·15 if on long-term rate.)
Couple without children	£49·35 (£61·85 if on long-term rate) plus eligible amount of actual rent and rates.	As for a single person for each partner.
Single parent with one dependent child	£38·65 plus eligible amount of actual rent and rates and age-related allowance for each child:	As for a single person, plus *(a)* age-related, extension to limit, and *(b)* personal expenses allowance, for each child:
age under 11	£10·40.	*(a)* £15·60; *(b)* £3·35.
age 11 or more	£15·60—£24·35.	*(a)* adult single rate; *(b)* £5·15—£10.
Couple with two dependent children	As for a childless couple, plus age-related allowances for each child as above	Twice the amount for a single person with one dependent child.

It should be noted that the public expenditure implications of transferring homeless households from one kind of accommodation to another would depend inter alia on the level of social security benefits applying to them and to any replacement households in both their previous and their new accommodation. As indicated in my hon. Friend's reply of 16 January, a distinction also needs to be made between permanent and temporary accommodation. Where capital works are involved there would be an increase in public expenditure prior to transfer.

Local Government Employees

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give figures for the years 1982-83, 1983-84, 1984-85 and 1985-86 for the average overall cost of a local government employee; and if he will break down the average cost into pay, national insurance, superannuation, and other costs, such as office space, heating, lighting, car allowance, travel allowance, etc.

Mr. Chope: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Health on Tuesday 3 March 1987.

Basildon New Town

Mr. Proctor asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has made of the income other than rent income, which will be available to the Basildon district council following transfer of current housing assets of the Commission for New Towns in Basildon to the council; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: No decision has been taken to transfer any Commission for the New Towns housing at Basildon to the district council. If, following consultation with the tenants and others, the council were to take over some or all of the new town housing, under the transfer scheme procedure provided for in part III of the New Towns Act 1981, it would receive, in addition to the rent income, an increased level of housing subsidy. The exact amount of the increase would have to be settled in discussion with the council before any decision was taken to direct the preparation of a transfer scheme.

Mr. Proctor asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the future of the Commission for New Towns housing assets in Basildon.

Mr. John Patten: No decision has been taken about the future ownership of the new town housing at Basildon,

and none will be made until tenants and others have been consulted. I want there to be a choice between transfer to the council and disposal of the houses to alternative landlords.

Mr. Proctor asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the rent income per year from the houses and flats owned by the Commission for New Towns in Basildon; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: The estimated rent income due to the Commission for the new Towns in 1986-87 in respect of the houses and flats which it owns in Basildon is £15,371,000. This disregards voids arrears and rent rebates.

Mr. Proctor asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what number of dwellings are currently owned by the Commission for New Towns in Basildon; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: The total number of dwellings for rent owned by the Commission for the New Towns in Basildon was 14,907 on 31 December 1986, the latest date for which figures are available.

Privately Owned Flats

Mr. Raynsford asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when the Government intend to introduce the Bill to extend the rights of people living in privately owned flats in England and Wales announced in Her Majesty's Gracious Speech.

Mr. Tracey: The Landlord and Tenant (No. 2) Bill was introduced on 5 March 1987.

"Faith in the City"

Mr. Simon Hughes asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what further action he has taken in the light of the report "Faith in the City" on matters which are the responsibility of his Department subsequent to the action referred to in his reply to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey dated 9 December 1986 at c.95.

Mr. John Patten [*pursuant to his reply*, 5 March 1987]: I had a useful meeting on 10 December 1986 with the bishop of Willesden and other members of the group which is following up the work of the archbishop's commission on urban priority areas. Among other things we discussed the importance of making it easier for people to find rented accommodation. Following the meeting, I provided the group with details of the assured tenancies scheme and amended rules on shorthold and fair rent tenancies, together with information about the new programme run by the Housing Corporation designed to use private money supplemented by 30 per cent. Government grant to provide more rented accommodation, which should provide about £15 million worth of schemes for shared housing for young people moving jobs in London and the south.

My officials are also continuing to discuss with members of the follow-up group questions relating to the methodology of identifying urban areas of need.

Mobile Homes (Insulation)

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take steps to enable owners of mobile homes to qualify for insulation grants; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten [*pursuant to his reply*, 5 March 1987]: Mobile homes can qualify for a grant under the homes insulation scheme 1984 provided that they are dwellings for the purposes of part XV of the Housing Act 1985, they have a roof space, and meet all the other requirements of the scheme.

TRANSPORT

Newbury Bypass

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many acres will be needed to build the proposed western bypass around Newbury.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Detailed land requirements will not be known until the compulsory purchase stage. Our current estimate is that approximately 260 acres for construction of the proposed bypass and approximately 60 acres for landscaping purposes would be needed.

M20 Motorway

Mr. Speed asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he now expects to publish the inspector's report and announce his decision following the latest inquiry into the Hallingbourne to Ashford section of the M20 motorway.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I hope to make an announcement and publish the report this summer.

Under-Sea Cables (Danger to Fishing Vessels)

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with British Telecom about the potential risk to fishing boats from British Telecom cables laid on the sea bed in the Irish sea; what assessment he has made as to the possibility of these cables fouling fishing nets; what checks are applied to the physical dimension of such cables before permission is given for them to be laid; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: My Department is well aware of the risks involved. These underwater cables are clearly marked on navigation charts. Various notices have been issued over the years, warning fishermen not to fish near cable runs and advising them, if their gear snags cables, to cut the gear free rather than haul the cable up. British Telecom is also aware of the risks to fishing vessels and keeps in close touch with the fishing industry through MAFF and DAFS regarding the routeing of cables and every effort is made to lay cables away from known fishing grounds. They issue charts/maps to fishermen free of charge showing the location of cables; if gear has to be cut they are prepared to pay just compensation. The laying of cables is undertaken under the provisions of the international convention for the protection of submarine telegraph cables 1884 and permission to do so is not a matter for my hon. Friend.

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received about the

potential hazard to fishing boats of the British Telecom cable running 20 miles east of the Isle of Man in the Irish sea; what information he has about the material of which the cable is constructed, its diameter and its coating; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: It is assumed that the cable referred to is the one running between Douglas, Isle of Man and Colwyn Bay on the mainland. No direct representations have been received but passing references to this British Telecom cable have been made in correspondence; it is clearly marked on admiralty chart D1826. I understand that British Telecom is increasingly burying cables in order to minimise interference with fishing activities. I am told that it is constructed of a central copper wire surrounded by polythene, a copper sheet and a helical layer of steel armouring wires. There are 12 such wires, each of 0·296 inches diameter and the whole assembly is coated with tar and jute to an overall diameter of 1·73 inches.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Ethnic Monitoring

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the numbers of entrants to his Department from the ethnic minorities in the years 1985-86 and 1986-87; if he will also list the monitoring procedures used to ascertain the percentage of the work force represented by ethnic minorities and their patterns of promotion; and what are his methods of recruitment of minorities into the Department.

Mr. Eggar: Voluntary ethnic monitoring of new entrants has been carried out since 1 October 1985 in the development wing of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and since 1 April 1986 in the diplomatic wing. The latest available information is as follows:

New entrants to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office development wing in period 1 October 1985 to 30 September 1986

	Number
TOTAL	88
Ethnic origins	
White	33
Black/Asian	4
Not stated[1]	51

[1] Did not respond to survey questionnaire.

New entrants to Foreign and Commonwealth Office diplomatic wing in period 1 April 1986 to 28 February 1987

	Number
TOTAL	433
Ethnic origins	
White	187
Black/Asian	8
Not stated[1]	238

[1] Did not respond to survey questionnaire.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is participating in a survey of the ethnic origin of non-industrial civil servants by means of voluntary self-classification. Consideration is being given to ways of using the data on the ethnic origin of staff in post to monitor promotion.

All Departmental recruitment is conducted on the basis of fair and open competition and selection is on merit. I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to her by my hon. Friend the Minister with responsibility for the Civil Service on 20 February 1987 at column *880* reporting the arrangements being made to encourage people from the ethnic minorities to apply to the Civil Service. Similar arrangements are being made by the diplomatic service.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Butter

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will state the retail price of butter for each year since 1970, in actual prices and in constant prices and also showing 1970 as 100.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The information requested is given in the table. The figures are based on average prices, published by the Department of Employment, which are used in the compilation of the retail price index (RPI):

Average retail prices of butter in the United Kingdom

	Actual price		*Average prices at constant (1970) prices*[1]	
	p/250 grammes[2]	*Index 1970=100*	*p/250 grammes*[2]	*Index 1970=100*
1970	10·0	100	10·0	100
1971	13·6	136	12·4	124
1972	15·1	150	12·9	129
1973	12·7	127	9·9	99
1974	13·2	132	8·9	89
1975	16·8	168	9·1	91
1976	24·3	243	11·3	113
1977	29·9	299	12·0	120
1978	33·4	334	12·4	124
1979	39·8	398	13·0	130
1980	43·3	433	12·0	120
1981	46·1	460	11·4	114
1982	49·8	498	11·4	114
1983	49·9	499	10·9	109
1984	51·0	510	10·6	106
1985	52·5	525	10·3	103
1986	52·5	525	9·9	99

[1] Average prices deflated by the RPI All-items index.
[2] Prices converted to 250 grammes equivalent. Prior to 1980 prices were collected in terms of p/lb.

Intervention Food Stores

Mr. Clay asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his reply of Monday 2 March, *Official Report*, column *526*, if he will give details of the precise location of European Economic Community intervention food stores in *(a)* Sunderland, *(b)* Gateshead, *(c)* Newcastle-upon-Tyne, *(d)* North Tyneside and *(e)* South Tyneside.

Mr. Gummer: I will reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Sheep

Mr. Maclennan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps Her Majesty's Government are taking to ensure a greater degree of access to the French non-pedigree and pure breed markets for United Kingdom sheep producers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

DEFENCE

Air Defence Systems

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about future provision for close ground/sea to air defence systems and expected in service dates for all three services.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The future close air defence of the fleet will be provided by the close in weapon systems Phalanx which is already in service with the Royal Navy, and Goalkeeper, which will enter service shortly; and by the Seawolf missile system, including the vertically launched version due in service in the early 1990s. Regarding future provision for land-based air defence systems, we have placed major orders with British industry over the last year for Starstreak close air defence systems and improved Rapier area air defence systems. These will enter service in the early and mid-1990s, respectively. All these systems will provide major enhancements to our air defence capabilities.

Western Isles (Horizon Radar)

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for installation of over-the-horizon radar in the Western Isles.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I have nothing to add to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) on 8 December 1986 at column *87*.

Service Men (Medals)

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will institute a special medal for service men who were taken prisoner during the second world war or during the Korean war.

Mr. Freeman: Ex-prisoners of war are already eligible for certain medals—for example, the 1939-45 star, the Korea medal and the United Nations medal Korea—and there are no plans to institute a special medal.

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received about the decision not to award the French-German star to service men taken prisoner within the perimeter defence at Dunkirk in 1940; and what reply he has given.

Mr. Freeman: Several letters on this subject have been received, including one from my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Mr. Watts). A copy of my reply has been placed in the Library.

Tactical Missile Wing

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) on what date RAF Molesworth will achieve initial operational capability;

(2) on what date the 303rd Tactical Missile Wing is due to be activated; on what date it will achieve initial operational capability; how many personnel of the 303rd Tactical Missile Wing are currently in the United Kingdom; how many personnel of the wing will be in the United Kingdom when it achieves fully operational capability; and whether he has any plans for the use of Alconbury for the 303rd Tactical Missile Wing.

Mr. Stanley: The 303rd Tactical Missile Wing was activated for administrative purposes on 12 December 1986. At present there are some 250 USAF personnel of the 303rd Tactical Missile Wing at RAF Molesworth. This will increase to some 750 USAF personnel by the time the wing becomes fully operational during 1988. RAF Alconbury provides administrative support for RAF Molesworth. As far as initial operation capability is concerned, I have nothing to add to the reply that I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) on 15 April 1986 at column *375*.

Defence Contracts

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Defence if, pursuant to the answer of 27 February, *Official Report*, column 459, he will state what is Her Majesty's Government's policy towards permitting United States officials to visit United Kingdom firms to inspect their books for compliance with United States laws, in relation to defence contracts; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answers that I gave to the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Meadowcroft) on 2 March 1987 at column *528*.

C-5 Galaxy Transport

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Defence what cargo was carried by the C-5 Galaxy Transport which arrived at Alconbury on 26 February; what is its purpose; and how many previous such deliveries have been made to Alconbury.

Mr. Stanley: For security reasons it is not our practice to give details of military aircraft movements or of cargoes being carried.

Firearms (Accidental Discharge)

Sir George Young asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many incidents were recorded in each of the last three years, in Northern Ireland, in which military personnel accidentally discharged firearms.

Mr. Stanley: The number of negligent discharges of weapons involving military personnel in Northern Ireland is as follows:

Year	*Number*
1984	104
1985	101
1986	85
1987[1]	16

[1] To 28 February

The vast majority of these incidents occurred when soldiers were clearing their weapons on returning to base following a patrol. Clearance of weapons takes place under supervision in a designated area within the base.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 111**

SESSION 1986–87

23rd February—6th March 1987

SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc, between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

Oral and Written Parliamentary Questions are indexed under subject headings and the names of Members asking and Ministers replying to them. Questions are not listed under the names of Departments replying. Departmental listings can be arrived at indirectly by looking under the names of the Minister(s) of that Department. There are, however, the headings 'Northern Ireland', 'Scotland', and 'Wales' under which one can find not only most Questions answered by the Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Office, Welsh Office but also Questions about these areas of the United Kingdom which are answered by other Departments. Ministerial statements are indexed under subject headings, under 'Ministerial statements' and the names of Ministers making them and Members speaking on them. General debates are indexed under broad subject headings and under the names of all Members and Ministers taking part. Debates on legislation (Bills, Orders, Regulations etc.) are indexed under the name of the Bill, Statutory Instrument etc, under subject headings and under the names of those taking part.

Rulings and Statements by Mr Speaker and his deputies are brought together under the heading Speakers rulings and statements.

Other contributions by Mr Speaker and his deputies appear under the heading Speaker.

Opposition Day Debates, Estimates Day Debates and Standing Order No. 10 applications are listed under those respective headings and under subject headings too.

The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates etc* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions*.

Abbreviations

Bills 1R = first reading, 2R = second reading, Money res = money resolution, Com = Committee stage, Rep = Report stage, 3R = third reading, amendt/amendts = amendment/amendments, * = matter taken formally, without debate.

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